Australasian Association for Institutional Research

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Monthly e-Newsletter – May 2008

What's in this edition?

EDITORIAL

I'm more or less on time this month, but with a shorter newsletter. There's been more happening than I'd planned for.

This edition sports items passed on to my three readers so we are beginning to get a bit more variety about what's listed in the newsletter. And just as well those folk were swinging the towel or this edition would have been even briefer than it is. Keep the suggestions coming in.

Subject to space and relevance to members, the newsletter can run job vacancies and items on upcoming events.

If I had scads of money, my travel plans would have two major entries. First, I'd just like to wander around the US following the Democratic and Republican primary seasons from state to state. Second, I'd like to go to a whole swag of science centres like Questacon and the Smithsonian – places where you (and the kids) can get their hands on science. Here's the latest I've added to my list, in Denmark: http://uk.danfossuniverse.com/ (Yeah, I know – it takes all kinds).

Contact me at: rob@ with sharpwords.com.au

AAIR FORUM 2008

19-21 November
Hyatt Hotel, Canberra

Hosted by ANU

The 2008 Forum website address is:
http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aair2008/index.php

Our 2008 theme is:
Enhancing Quality Research:
a Global Perspective

Call for abstracts closes on 4 July.

Registration information is being added to the website at present.

Partner universities along with ANU are University of Sydney, UWA, Monash and Curtin. We are grateful to Australian Corporate Software for sponsoring the Forum dinner.

If you'd like more information about the Forum please email Dave Marr Chair, AAIR 2008 Forum Organising Committee, at ANU:
dave.marr@anu.edu.au

AAIR Committee members

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AAIR website: http://www.aair.org.au/

IT IS WRITTEN

Write ways

The University of Richmond is a venerable, small and private liberal arts university in Virginia. Its Writing Centre has a fantastic website, just rolling in resources for student writers and teachers. Take your time. There's some good stuff here. New ways and old ways refreshed:
http://writing.richmond.edu/

A Sennett Inquiry

Richard Sennett, a scion of sociology, has written a new book – *The Craftsman*. I'm not quite finished, but I'm happy to recommend it. He places craft – making, thinking with the hands – alongside other intellectual endeavours, and celebrates it. He reckons that the distinctions between art and craft, making and thinking, are silly, overdone and overdue for correction. Try this from the Prologue:

'[The book] focuses on the intimate connection between hand and head. Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking: this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding. The relation between hand and head appears in domains seemingly as different as bricklaying, cooking, designing a playground, or playing the cello – but all these practices can misfire or fail to ripen. There is nothing inevitable about becoming skilled, just as there is nothing mindlessly mechanical about technique itself.'

The publisher's blurb is here:
http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780713998733,00.html

AIN'T IT THE TRUTH

For 2,500 years, we've been told that knowing is our species' destiny and it's calling. Now we can see for ourselves that knowledge isn't in our heads: It is between us. It emerges from public and social thought and it stays there, because social knowing, like the global conversations that give rise to it, is never finished.

David Weinberger, *Everything is miscellaneous: the power of the new digital disorder*, Time Books, 2007.

PLACES TO GO – THINGS TO DO

Skills Tasmania Conference
Hobart
26-27 May, 2008

Just a few weeks before this one takes off in the Wrest Point Conference Centre. The theme of the conference is *Business in the 21st Century – Growth through Skills and Innovation*.

You can wander from the Conference website for a tour around the website of Skills Tasmania which advises the Vandemonian Minister for Education on VET policy:
http://www.skills.tas.gov.au/skillstas/conference

Third International Plagiarism Conference
Northumbria University, Newcastle-on-Tyne, UK
23-25 June 2008

Appropriately, I quote the website which says the conference will examine 'the challenges facing institutions as they evolve solutions to the issue of ensuring authenticity in learners' work in a changing information environment. The conference will seek to consider best practice from secondary through to higher education. Key themes … consider ethical use of digital sources, approaches to engaging both learners and educators in the process of addressing plagiarism, addressing plagiarism in web 2.0 and emerging technologies.'

The conference theme is *Transforming practice for an authentic future*.

The website tells us that there will be 'High profile keynote speakers from the UK, USA and Australia'. The Aussie is Garry Allan, Director of Information Technology in the Faculty of Life Sciences at RMIT. Some of this information, I hasten to add, came from Garry Allan's RMIT web entry:
Garry Allan's Profile

Your source, and mine, is:
http://www.plagiarismconference.com/

As an aside, the venue is the City Campus East which is one of the UK's greenest buildings. Take the Flythrough:
http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/development/manorsflythru/?view=Standard

eResearch Australasia Conference
Melbourne
29 Sept-1 Oct 2008

The eResearch Conference, so saith the website, 'focuses on technological platforms that enhance researchers' ability to generate, collect, share, analyse, store and retrieve information'. Keynote speakers include Senator Kim Carr (whose Department is a sponsor of the event), Sayeed Choudry (Director of the Digital Knowledge Center, Johns Hopkins University), and John Wilbanks (Vice President of Science Commons).

The Conference will be held at the Sebel and Citigate Hotels in Albert Park, a gentle tram ride from the Melbourne CBD. The details are at: http://www.eresearch.edu.au/index.html

Australasian Higher Education Evaluation Forum
Melbourne
2-3 October 2008

The Centre for Higher Education Quality (CHEQ) at Monash Uni is holding the sixth Australasian Higher Education Evaluation Forum in Melbourne from 2-3 October 2008. The venue is the Novotel in Glen Waverley, just a decent hop, skip and jump from the Clayton campus. Well, a short taxi ride anyway.

The Forum theme is: *Evidence based decision making: scholarship and practice*. The theme aims to reflect how evaluation outcomes are used in universities to bring about purposeful change.

You are invited to submit proposals that address the conference theme. Proposals will be accepted as refereed and non-refereed papers. Closing date for submission of papers is 4 July 2008.

Of interest to AAIRies is the kind of areas the conference is open to:
- Evaluation and quality
- Feedback to students and public accountability
- Evaluation of teaching and learning including
  - traditional approaches of obtaining student feedback on teaching i.e. surveys using paper questionnaires
  - on-line evaluation of teaching
  - unit evaluations
  - trends in teaching evaluation, including directions for the future
  - assessment and feedback

- Postgraduate student feedback on research supervision
- International and national perspectives in evaluation
- Evaluation of support services
- The use of evaluation data for the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund
- Institutional and national benchmarking using evaluation data
- Institutional and national evaluation

Two options for further information:
- contact Associate Professor Sid Nair, Interim Director, CHEQ, on 03 9905 1544 or sid.nair@ with adm.monash.edu.au
- the Forum website: http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/cheq/AHEEF2008/index.html

Symposium on Tertiary Assessment and Higher Education Student Outcomes: Policy, Practice, and Research
17-19 November 2008
Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand

This is a way off so you've got time to organise the conference leave, submit an extract by 30 June, write the paper and, if you're coming from Oz, time to arrange the camper van tour around the North Island. The Symposium is at Rutherford House on Victoria Uni's Pipitea Campus: http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/maps/campus_pipitea.aspx

Amongst the questions the Symposium poses are:
- How do we know that students in tertiary and higher education are mastering the knowledge, skills and understandings critical to their future roles?
- How can tertiary teachers and university faculty design assessments that are both valid and practical?
- What kinds of tertiary assessment policies, guidelines, and practices support faculty and students?
- What are the latest developments in innovative assessments in higher education including peer and self assessment, assessing large classes, portfolio assessments, e-learning tools, and authentic assessments?
- How can assessments be designed so that they are culturally appropriate?

Here's the detail: http://www.victoria.ac.nz/education/SYMPOSIUM/index.aspx

FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES & BLOGGIES

STAR mentors from Murdoch

Russell Elsegood has run a mentoring program for 14 years which links Murdoch science students with primary and secondary school learners. Under the aegis of STAR (Science Technology Awareness Raising Program, or STAR), it's been a raging success. He explains it to us on the ABC's Science Show, demonstrates its value to all the students involved, and tells us that a few uni students decided on teaching as a good career after being involved. You can download it here:
http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/current/audioonly/ssw_20080503.mp3

NEWSLETTER NOTES

1. Getting in and getting on

In March Universities Australia released *Participation and equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*.

I was happy to read this: 'While the available data based on postcodes prevails against fine-grained analysis, it appears that low SES participation in Australian higher education is an issue of access rather than success once enrolled. At aggregate level, socioeconomic status appears to explain little of the variation in higher education success and retention rates. Once enrolled, low SES people do almost as well as medium SES and high SES in terms of retention, success and completion. Low SES remote students and Indigenous students are an exception and particular attention needs to be given to both these groups.'

It's not really clear yet what works to make equity and access a reality. But there are plenty of starting points.

The report treats us in Chapter 7 to some comparisons of Australian performance with other nations.

Download it here:
http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/equity/0308_Particip_Equity_CSHE_Final_Report.pdf

2. Somewhere to sit for Australian Literature

A while ago, Julie Bishop promised us a new Chair in Australian Literature. Julia Gillard has delivered. The Chair sits at UWA. A very fine thing:
http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/GovernmentfundsnewChairinAustralianLiterature.htm

3. VET in Oz

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations released the Boston Consulting Group's report, *Skilling Australia's Workforce 2005-08 – Mid-Term Review*. There's a lot fascinating reading in this report, which leaves lots of room for imagining where policy could go. Take this, for example:

'While many TAFE institutes are now strong and commercially focused, their ability to expand into interstate markets is constrained by State arrangements restricting access to government funded training—indeed we believe the biggest short term boost to dynamism in the VET sector could come from reducing the barriers that hinder TAFE colleges from competing in interstate markets.'

And this:

'We believe the challenges facing the VET sector are more significant than those facing other sectors in the education market, such as schools and universities, due to the larger fluctuations in demand and more diverse student base. The large fluctuations in demand for particular types of VET reflect the delivery of very specific skill sets linked with particular industry segments, the health of which vary with the economic cycle.'

The review also includes some very interesting state by state performance information.

Read it all here:
http://www.isc.org.au/issuefiles/FinalReport.pdf

4. VET in Vic

The Victorian government has released *Securing our future economic prosperity: Discussion paper on skills reform, April 2008*. Like the South Aussie skills strategy mentioned in the last newsletter, the Victorians are looking at changes in VET funding arrangements that amount to a very big set of changes:
http://www.otte.vic.gov.au/library/public/postcomp/5010_Skills_Reform_web.pdf

5. Learning at a mature age

Of course, a lot of the action in VET is prompted by the need to rethink where the learners are and what they need. You might be interested in this report – *Pedagogical issues for training of mature-aged workers in manufacturing industry* – from Charles Sturt Uni's Centre for Research in Vocational Education and Training. It makes some commonsense observations about how this group of learners needs to be approached, supported and encouraged:
http://www.mskills.com.au/DownloadManager/downloads/Training%20of%20mature%20aged%20workers.pdf

6. Dancing with the REF

The final design of the UK's Research Excellence Framework drifted a 12 months into the future late last month. The Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills has indicated that all subjects will be assessed using metrics-based indicators, including bibliometrics. Originally there was to be a REF for the sciences announced first, and another for the rest announced later. But now it's metrics all round there's no need for a two-track development process, just a longer single track:
http://nds.coi.gov.uk/environment/fullDetail.asp?ReleaseID=365908&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromDepartment=False

7. Library as publisher

Pretty interesting paper from the American Association of Research Libraries. Released in March, *Research library publishing services: New options for university publishing* notes that libraries are increasingly filling the gaps left by traditional publishing outlets, including university presses:
http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/research-library-publishing-services.pdf

8. What do you mean, *Innovate*?!

I took umbrage at first. The email from a newsletter reader began, 'Thought I might alert you to *Innovate*'. But then I realised that she wasn't suggesting a lack of originality on my part. *Innovate* is a free, open access, bimonthly, peer-reviewed journal from the Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. No paper – just online. I am yet to explore but our reader reckons it's worth the boot leather:
http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=issue&id=24

9. If there's no paper, what should we call it?

More open access publishing, this time from Open Humanities Press. The Press is publishing online a number of open access journals in critical and cultural theory. I only mention it as yet another example of the way that open access is carpeting the academic landscape like wildflowers in a WA spring. Managing and measuring this blooming lot is something we're yet to get to grips with:
http://openhumanitiespress.org/

10. Which brings me to…

The *Australasian Journal of Peer Learning* which is coming to us from the Universities of Wollongong and Melbourne. The first call for submissions is open until 1 July, and the journal will be launched at the National PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) Conference in late September:
http://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/pass/UOW042497.html

11. Influences in the ranks

The Higher Education Funding Council for England released last month a report that considered what influence university ranking tables had on university behaviour. It's called *Counting what is measured or measuring what counts? League tables and their impact on higher education institutions in England*. It looks at the impact of three UK rankings and two international rankings. The influence, the report says, is considerable, even if the rankings are a bit questionable, but they are here to stay so time for some policy work:
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_14/08_14.pdf

12. Hang on

I don't think I've mentioned this before. If I have, let's just call it an oldie but goodie worth a second look. About the middle of 2007 the UK's National Audit Office released *Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education*. I thought it was a smart thing for a national audit office to look at. It's a pretty smart report:
http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/0607616.pdf

There's a technical paper, too. But it had technical in the title so I've never looked at it. Let me know if I'm missing anything:
http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/0607616_international.pdf

13. What's a university for, anyway?

Dean Ward from Edith Cowan Uni forwarded me a link to *Engaging Higher Education in Societal Challenges of the 21st Century*. Dean notes that while it's an introspective look at US higher ed, there are useful thoughts in these nine pages that Australian unis could consider as they seek to differentiate themselves. Published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education: http://www.highereducation.org/reports/wegner/wegner.pdf

14. E-learning works

A little two-pager from the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee – *Tangible benefits of e-Learning: Does investment yield interest?* A riff on whether e-learning technologies are actually doing anything positive for learning. The news is positive. Especially good to read that e-learning ccontributes so well to formative assessment outcomes. The briefing paper has links at the bottom of page 2 to the full report and a set of case studies which I've not touched yet. The two page entrée is here: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/bptangiblebenefitsv1.pdf

15. Institutional Resourcing in Christchurch, Adelaide and Sydney

Melbourne Uni's Institute for Higher Education and Leadership Management is running Executive Seminars on Institutional Resourcing in:
- Christchurch – 14 May
- Adelaide – 19 and 20 May
- Sydney – 22 and 23 May.

The seminar is led by William Massey, Professor Emeritus of Education and Business Administration at Stanford University, and President of The Jackson Hole Higher Education Group, Inc.

The seminars focus on the strategic importance of planning and resource allocation. Most of us will have to catch up with the higher-ups to find out what went on – seminars are exclusively for 'senior executives with responsibility for resource management and allocation within tertiary institutions including Vice-Chancellors, Institute Directors, Chief Financial Officers, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Chief Operating Officers/Heads of Administration, and Deans. More here: http://www.mihelm.unimelb.edu.au/news/seminars.html

16. Rewarding great teachers

Performance-related pay and conditions for school teachers are part of policy, debate and industrial agreements in Australia. I found this January 2008 report quite illuminating – *Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education*. Published by the US think tank, Education Sector, it looks at various models for evaluating teaching performance and rewarding great teachers. While the practicalities in the report at all based in the US, there's plenty of thinking that's widely applicable.

The report takes a reasonable swipe at 'single salary schedules' and suggests that basing evaluation on test scores is less than half the answer. As the report notes: 'To get a fuller and fairer sense of teachers' performance, evaluations should focus on teachers' instruction—the way they plan, teach, test, manage, and motivate.' Observations that have as much to do with teaching beyond the school system as within it, I reckon. Just 34 pages and they're all here: http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/RushToJudgment_ES_Jan08.pdf

17. Space to learn

I'm afraid this is another report I can't tell you much about. It's on the desktop, but that's as far as I've got. You might remember that the Carrick Institute ran, in September 2007, a series of seminars and tours on designing learning spaces. The draft report from this exercise was released in early April and now sits on the website of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, which is the Carrick's new moniker. ALTC doesn't quite have the ring of 'the Carrick', does it? Anyway, here's the report: http://www.altc.edu.au/carrick/webdav/users/siteadmin/public/Consolidated%20Report%20P%20%20S%20Seminars%20without%20slides%20ref%20v%200%205.pdf

18. A natty timeline

This is a nice way to tell the world where your university came from: http://www.bennington.edu/timeline/index.html