



Monthly e-Newsletter – November 2008

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EDITORIAL

There's a never-ending bidding up of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required by anyone who plans to live in the real world – be it literacy or problem-solving. I have my own list. In priority order:

1. common decency
2. history
3. the getting and begetting of stories.

My best guess is that everything else flows from these, but I'm happy to enter into correspondence.

I came across a website that helps with number 2. The Center for History and New Media at George Mason University in Virginia maintains a terrific history website with lots of resources for learning and teaching, research and curation. Pop in and have a look:

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/>

I look forward to seeing AAIRies aplenty at the Annual Forum in Canberra later this month.

As always, feel free to contact me at: [rob@](mailto:rob@sharpwords.com.au) with sharpwords.com.au

**Writing and Editing Your Research
for Publication in Academic
Journals**

**Pre-Forum Workshop –
18 November**

Great Hall, University House, ANU

If you are wending your way to Canberra for the AAIR Forum, you might want to take the opportunity to attend the Pre-Forum Workshop.

There will be numerous opportunities to write about what you do in the next few years. The changes in prospect in HE and VET, in innovation and research, will put a premium on institutional research. Publishing is a good way to share the expertise around and to save everyone reinventing the wheel.

There's a run down on the workshop here: <http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aaair2008/downloads/Pre-forumworkshopInformation.pdf>

The presenter is A/Professor Catherine McLoughlin, Faculty of Education, ACU National, Canberra.

Cost is \$154.

AAIR Committee members

President: Ivan Skaines, University of Western Sydney
Immediate Past President: Wendy Marchment, Griffith University
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AAIR website: <http://www.aaair.org.au/>



19-21 November
Hyatt Hotel, Canberra

Enhancing Quality Research: a Global Perspective

PROGRAM

The program as at 24 October is available on the Forum website:
<http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aaair2008/program.php>.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Wednesday 19th

Senator the Hon Kim Carr
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research

Thursday 20th

Professor Tim Brown
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), La Trobe University
Measuring Research Performance in Different Disciplines

Friday 21st

Ms Leanne Harvey
General Manager of Research Excellence, ARC
Research Excellence – Assessment and Evaluation in the new ERA

The Forum is hosted by

◆ **Australian National University** ◆

Conference Sponsors:

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See you for canapés at Regatta Point

PLACES TO GO – THINGS TO DO

Heavy fundamentalisms: music, metal and politics

3-5 November 2008

Salzburg, Austria

Yeah, I know. It's over. But I thought you might like to read about it anyway. A conference on heavy metal music and its influence on culture, and held in Mozart's home town. Too good. Amongst the papers we missed were these:

- The sacred immersed in heavy metal
- Barbarians and literature: Viking metal and its links to Old Norse mythology
- How diverse should metal be? The case of Jewish metal.

I'm sorry I didn't get word to the headbangers amongst you sooner. You'll have to soothe your sorrows by breaking out your Black Sabbath vinyls.

Conference details are still at:

<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ci/mmp/mmp1/prog.html>

Charting new terrain: creating and maintaining a diversified tertiary education sector in Australia

27-28 November, 2008

The Langham Hotel, Melbourne

This is a timely offering from the LH Martin Institute, coming as it does in the midst of reform to the VET sector, in the wake of the Cutler Review and in advance of the Bradley Review's report in December.

The conference program sports a great line up of speakers, including John Dawkins in his latter-day guise as Chair of the AQF Council, Tom Karmel from the NCVER, and Professor Frans van Vught, President of the European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities.

So, you could nip back to work for three days after the AAIR Forum – just to keep the desk tidy – and then kick back into conference mode.

Program and registration details are here:

http://www.mihelm.unimelb.edu.au/chartingnewterrain/conf_docs/charting_new_terrain_brochure.pdf

Conference on College Composition & Communication: Annual Convention – Making Waves

March 11-14, 2009

San Francisco Hilton

I guess if you include the word 'conference' in your organisation's name you have to have a convention. Otherwise people would get confused. The Conference on College Composition and Communication is dedicated to removing confusion from students' writing.

The Convention is a big turn and there's a handy searchable program guide to help you find your way through the myriad of presentations which include papers on:

- Reading is believing: responding to student texts in digital spaces
- Articulation and expectation: revisiting the relationship between high school English & first-year composition through quantitative research
- The library as house of argument: teaching critical information literacy in first year writing
- A case study of high-stakes testing and timed essay writing: contested writing in academics.

Convention details are here:

<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/conv>

NEWSLETTER NOTES

1. The Bill

You probably won't see this Bill on the telly, but you should read all about it. The Australian Curriculum Assessment And Reporting Authority Bill was treated to its Second Reading on 23 October. The Deputy PM did the honours. The Curriculum Authority has a wide range of responsibilities that converge on developing and administering a national school curriculum. That extends to things like implementing national assessment regimes, reporting on comparative school performance and supporting teachers by various means including producing resources and research.

The Hansard was in Proof at the time of writing this newsletter. The pdf is here and the speech is on pages 4-6:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/reps/dailys/dr231008.pdf>

2. The school makes a difference

Andrew Leigh and Hector Thompson from the Social Policy Division of the Australian Treasury have produced a paper entitled 'How much of the variation in literacy and numeracy can be explained by school performance?'

It's an interesting 16 pages, even if economic analysis is not your strong suit. Examining WA data on student performance, the paper ends with this conclusion: 'These results provide some evidence in favour of the proposition that socioeconomic status does not determine a school's destiny. Using the data available, there appears to be considerable variation between schools of a similar socioeconomic status. "Like schools" (on the socioeconomic dimension) do not invariably produce "like results".'

You can download the paper at:

http://www.treasury.gov.au/documents/1421/PDF/05_Variation_Literacy_Numeracy_explained_by_School_Performance.pdf

3. Assessing employability skills at school

Gabrielle Matters and David Curtis from ACER, at the behest of DEEWR, have produced 'A study into the assessment and reporting of employability skills of senior secondary students'. The report is another thread that strengthens the mesh between VET in schools, the VET sector more broadly, and industry. But there's lots of careful thinking in the report about assessment and reporting frameworks for employability skills that can be applied in HE or VET, or adapted, or used as a starting point for discussion.

Go thither:

<http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/A4FE9374-B961-4583-ACA7-EA33936F67C3/24104/FINALReport.pdf>

4. Qualified relationships

The UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority launched in September the UK's Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF). It's covers a lot of complex territory via a pretty smooth design – a step beyond the Australian Qualification Framework, the recalibration of which must be coming in the none too distant future.

I couldn't work out when implementation will commence, but it looks like next year.

Interesting features of the QCF include:

- making it possible for employers to have in-house training recognised within a national framework
- tracking learners' outcomes over time by introducing a Unique Learner Number
- smoothing the process of transferring credit including articulation to HE.

The website is here:

http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_19674.aspx

6. Supporting SMEs

The UK's Skills Secretary announced on 21 October a £350m package to support small businesses in choppy economic waters by helping them to build the skills of their workforces. The funding is targeted at things like skillset delivery and training needs analyses.

The press release is here – haven't had time to chase up more details, but if you follow up, let me know what you find:

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/environment/fullDetail.asp?ReleaseID=381864&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromDepartment=True>

7. NZ Skills Action Plan

I've been slow to get this, too. The NZ Skills Strategy Action Plan 2008 was released in July. The environment that the Action Plan responds to is similar to that in Oz – an ageing workforce, upskilling the existing workforce, the need to target training to emerging skills needs and skills shortages. The Plan supports a renewed emphasis on training quality and a shift to a demand-driven system. The Action Plan's cyberslot is here:

<http://www.skillsstrategy.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/NZ-Skills-Strategy-Action-Plan-2008.pdf>

8. Easy numbers

The NCVET has produced the *Pocket guide to Australian vocational education and training statistics*. Lots of snapshot numbers you can nonchalantly drop into conversation, like:

- There were 1.67 million students enrolled in the public VET system in 2007
- 2.6% if all VET students are enrolled in creative arts qualifications.

Swot up for your next dinner party here:

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/statistics/vet/pocketgd/pocket08/dc08128x.pdf>

9. University research in Canada

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada has produced 'Momentum: the 2008 report on university research and knowledge mobilization'. I dips me lid to them. It's a darned good piece of work. This is the second such report – the first was published in 2005. Its avowed purpose is to let the Canadian taxpayers know what value they get from their R&D investment in universities. It's also a useful primer on Canada's R&D financing and funding arrangements.

On a parochial note, Australia scores dozens of mentions on the way through. One mention is in relation to our struggle with measuring research quality or research outcomes, which I gather the Canadians are not rushing into.

There are 152 pages to pick over right here:
http://www.aucc.ca/_pdf/english/publications/momentum-2008-low-res.pdf

10. China's ambassador to Oz at Sydney Uni

In early October China's Ambassador to Oz, Zhang Junsai, delivered a speech at the University of Sydney – I think at the China Education Centre, though I'm not certain about that. Let me quote in part:

... we should take measures to guarantee our quality of education to protect our students' interests. Especially in the last few years, while more and more Chinese students come to Australia, the accommodation capacity of a few Australian universities became overstretched. I hope it will be addressed properly. In addition, Australian educational institutions are welcomed to continue to run schools in China cooperatively with their Chinese counterparts.

Lots of pretty straightforward messages in there. The full text is on the embassy website:
<http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/sgjs/sghd/t517271.htm>

You might think there's less coverage of Australia in the Chinese press than there is in the US press. Never fear! The Ambassador's address is duly reported in the *People's Daily Online* edition at:
<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6520928.html>

11. Come right this way

The European Commission has launched the Study in Europe website. The idea is to make it easier for prospective international students, exchange students and study abroad students to get the information they need about HE in Europe. Still a bit clunky and texty:

<http://www.study-in-europe.org/index.cfm?objectid=D4A8D186-3FFF-AEA2-32B627E7DA291125&CFID=333488&CFTOKEN=28928225>

12. Going someplace else

In September the US Institute of International Education released a report titled 'Expanding Education Abroad at U.S. Community Colleges'. As community college students are woefully underrepresented in the US study abroad contingent, the report aims to identify ways to increase their numbers.

http://www.iie.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Research_and_Evaluation/Study_Abroad_White_Papers/StudyAbroad_WhitePaper3.pdf

13. According to plan

Earlier this year I mentioned that India's Eleventh Five Year Plan was being touted as an Education Plan. However, until recently I haven't been able to track down the detail on education. The scale is staggering. Though there's a lot of bureaucratic stuff I don't understand, and lots of programs are mentioned that I know nothing about, I still found it riveting.

Here's a good bit: 'Education will foster the spirit of liberty, freedom, patriotism, non-violence, tolerance, national unity and integration, cultural harmony, inquisitive reasoning, rationality, and scientific temper in young minds.'

And what about this for an aspirational sentence: 'Quality improvement in higher education will be brought about through restructuring academic programmes to ensure their relevance to modern market demands; domestic and global linkages with employers and external advisory resource support groups and tracer studies; greater emphasis on recruitment of adequate and good quality teachers; complete revamping of teaching/learning methods by shifting from traditional repetitive experiments to open-ended design-oriented work for encouraging invention and innovation; compulsory interactive seminar-tutorials, broadening the content of Science and engineering

programmes to strengthen fundamental concepts, improving learning opportunities and conditions by updating text books and learning material; and improving self-directed learning with modern aids and development of IT network.'

The Education Plan is here:

<http://www.education.nic.in/plan/XIPlandocument.pdf>

14. TWAS brillig

Just a birthday wish to the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World which is 25 this year:

<http://www.twas.org/>

15. Just when you thought it was safe to go into the ranks

I've more or less accepted that rankings are here to stay, for ill and for good. But there are aspects to rankings that verge on the very unusual. Here's one. The Institute for Higher Education Policy has decided we need a Ranking Systems Clearinghouse. It's your one stop shop on the whys and wherefores of rankings systems across the globe. If it takes your fancy:

<http://www.ihep.org/Research/rankingsystemsclearinghouse.cfm>

16. All-encompassing brevity

From October comes the 'OECD Policy Brief: Economic Survey of Australia, 2008'. This brief contains a lengthy section under the heading 'Which sectors of the education system are most in need of reform?' The answer seems to be early childhood education, school education, VET and HE. Maybe I missed a diplomatic nuance, but that looks like a reasonably comprehensive list of the whole education sector. Anyways, read on:

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/40/39/41411272.pdf>

17. Gone digital native

With limited time in the past few weeks I haven't explored in depth the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's site called 'Your Guide to Social e-Learning'. But I've had enough of a captain to know it's a terrific resource. I shall return. This is a site for teachers offering loads of advice, ideas and support for the journey into social e-learning technologies and techniques. It covers blogs, wikis, pods, virtual conferencing, social bookmarking and one or two other things besides. Here:

<http://socialelearning.flexiblelearning.net.au/index.htm>

18. Matching textbook cost and textbook use

The cost of textbooks has long been an upfront charge for students in all sectors, and in HE the charge can exceed the upfront fees for a VET qualification. Upfront fees for VET are on the way out for domestic students and the idea is floating around that HE students could add textbooks to their HECS. This might bring into relief the cost of textbooks and some focus to the not infrequent complaint of many students that the book cost \$60 or \$70 but was little used. Not an efficient use of resources, really.

Why not strip down the textbook engine and see what other options there are? For example, ichapters, a division of Cengage, offers single chapters from some textbooks for a few dollars: <http://www.ichapters.com/market/index.html>

A bunch of Student Public Interest Research Groups in the US has run a campaign for a while now on textbook prices. The campaign website, Make Textbooks Affordable, has lots of news and ideas about how the textbook story is playing out in the US:

<http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.org/textbooks.asp?id2=14226>

19. Renovating the research training

The House of Reps Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation last month released its Interim Report of the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities. It's really a list of recommendations without explanatory text. I guess the Committee wants its voice heard in the fray that surrounds the Commonwealth government's consideration of the Cutler and CRC Reviews.

There's a lot of new money tied up in the 24 recommendations, but no dollar figures are offered. However, I'm not cavilling with the idea that PhD candidates are worthy of greater national investment. The Interim Report is here: http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/isi/research/interim_report/fullreport.pdf

As an aside, the Deputy PM delivered the Menzies Oration at Melbourne Uni on 6 November. She begins by praising the achievements of a group of PhD students at their graduation. Then comes a riff on education at large and the Bradley Review in particular. To check out what's on her mind: <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/AllReleases/2008/November/AddressToTheSirRobertMenziesOration2008.htm>

20. The very idea!

Chris Patten, Oxford's Chancellor, stepped into no-man's land on 30 September with a speech to the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference (an association for 250 of the UK's more exclusive independent schools – Eton et al). Patten spoke about what he regards as a century long failure to improve secondary education. Now, he says, government is expecting universities to solve the equity and access problems that secondary schools didn't get to grips with. Patten's speech is here: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/document.rm?id=678>

All this was taken badly by some with different views, like Brian Roper, VC at London Metropolitan University. The *Times HES* reporter wrote up part of Roper's response like this: 'Oxford and Cambridge universities should go private because government money is better spent on universities "that transform people's lives" rather than on "finishing schools" for the privileged.'

The *HES* article is here:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=403949>

If you are in Melbourne in the next few days you can take all this up with the ex-Governor of Hong Kong at these book promotion events. I assume he is dropping in on other Australian cities, too.

Readings Carlton bookstore on the 9th:

<http://www.readings.com.au/event/aiaa-chris-patten>

Reader's Feast event on the 11th – see page 4:

<http://www.readersfeast.com.au/>

21. Education for all

The Class of 2015 is an international effort focussed on ensuring that every child has access to the benefits of at least a basic education by 2015. This is doable if we want to do it. And for the life of me, I can't think of a reason why we wouldn't. Australia was one of the first countries to sign up. FIFA isn't a country yet, but it has signed up too: <http://www.educationforall2015.org/>

22. Espresso machine in Melbourne!

In my editorial last month I was enthusiastic about the book espresso machine. I said I wanted one in Melbourne. And by the end of October there were two of them in town at a reputed \$100k each. I hardly know my own strength. Here's the deal: <http://www.dadirect.com.au/Welcome/ebm.asp>

IT IS WRITTEN

We must teach our children to be "bitextual", or "multitextual", able to read and analyse texts flexibly in different ways, with more deliberate instruction at every stage of development on the inferential, demanding aspects of any text. Teaching children to uncover the invisible world that resides in written words needs to be both explicit and part of a dialogue between learner and teacher, if we are to promote the processes that lead to fully formed expert reading in our citizenry.

- Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the squid: the story and science of the reading brain*, Allen and Unwin, 2008.

FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES AND BLOGGIES

Apprenticeships and The National Interest

ABC's Radio National went along to a recent NCVER shindig and recorded a panel discussion titled 'Skilling Australia: our apprenticeships challenge'. The panel treated the audience to quite a bit more than a view on apprenticeships, like what employers really want from the training system. And the audience asked some curly questions, like how does the Productivity Places Program really work? The panellists were:

- Neil Gow, National Manager – Training Policy, Master Builders Australia
- Linda Heron, Heron Human Resources
- John Hart, CEO, Restaurant & Catering Australia
- Peter Tighe, Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union.

Peter Mares, presenter of The National Interest program, chaired the session:

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/nationalinterest/stories/2008/2378848.htm>

Round up of UK academic bloggers

A good article in the *Times HES* on 9 October surveyed the views of a number of academics who have taken to the blog as a way communicating with peers and the community at large. There's a handy list of academic blogs at the end of the article, which is titled 'By the blog: academics tread carefully':

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=403827>