CHANGING UNIVERSITY LEARNING & TEACHING

Edited by:
Jeanne McConachie, Michael Singh,
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and Geoff Danaher
CHANGING UNIVERSITY
LEARNING AND TEACHING

Engaging and Mobilising Leadership,
Quality and Technology

Editors

Jeanne McConachie, Michael Singh,
Patrick Alan Danaher, Fons Nouwens
and Geoff Danaher

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Preface

John Rickard

The field of scholarship related to university learning and teaching is increasingly important, reflected in the growing influence of institutions such as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and the Higher Education Academy in the United Kingdom, as well as in the enhanced breadth and depth of the scholarship of learning and teaching, with a number of specialised academic journals and research centres. *Changing University Learning and Teaching: Engaging and Mobilising Leadership, Quality and Technology* seeks to contribute original and significant research to this field of scholarship.

As such, the book brings together chapters from scholars operating in many different academic contexts who share a commitment to optimising the learning outcomes of students. The chapters elucidate the challenges confronting the university sector within an increasingly globalised education marketplace, where the need to engage culturally diverse and geographically dispersed students in effective and authentic learning practices has never been greater. In particular, the book considers the role of leadership, quality and technology in transforming learning and teaching within contemporary universities.

*Changing University Learning and Teaching* therefore takes up the challenge posed by contemporary higher education’s location in a contested terrain. Universities have been variously constructed as bastions of privilege, repositories of cultural heritage, generators of innovation, vehicles of socioeconomic mobility and disseminators of counternarratives and sociocultural inequities. Those engaged in university learning and teaching must contend with these and other large questions about the purposes and impacts of higher education.

One crucial dimension of that challenge is the concern that the changes evident in university learning and teaching are too piecemeal, responsive and small-scale to be effective and sustainable. This concern fuels a charge that universities—like other educational systems—often fail to develop and adopt wide-scale improvement and reform, and that outmoded and even marginalising policies and practices are remarkably resistant to wholesale renovation.
The contributing authors take up this dimension of the challenge confronting contemporary higher education by focusing on three key elements of efforts to change university learning and teaching more sustainably and systematically. Leadership, quality and technology serve as three foci within the book that provide particular insights into the problems and possibilities facing learning and teaching practices in today’s universities.

The leadership—quality—technology-prism is inextricably linked to the delivery of effective and authentic learning practices, but we must look through that prism from the perspective of the student first, and that can occur only after we have developed a true and authentic appreciation and understanding of the context of the student’s behaviour. If we want truly to transform learning and teaching within contemporary universities, we need to learn more about the ‘whole’ learner, the person, and to interact with students so that we understand their stories—their circumstances, their goals. Through this interaction (learning from them) we can lead and inspire, guide and support, and stimulate and empower culturally diverse and geographically dispersed students—whatever their stages in life or backgrounds—to learn and follow their own aspirations.
Foreword

Roger Murphy

Universities have been referred to in the past as institutions which are strongly committed to researching nearly everything—except their own practices. This rather unkind characterisation does of course contain a grain of truth, in the sense that research into the teaching and learning that go on in higher education institutions has not been nearly as prevalent or as strong as it should have been for quite a considerable period of time.

This book represents a positive contribution to building a firmer body of scholarship in relation to the vitally important area of teaching and learning in higher education. As the title of the book implies, this is an area of great change, which demands time, reflection, scholarship, empirical research and the application of creative, thoughtful and insightful minds. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of the higher education sector will know how dramatically the context is changing, and anyone with an interest in teaching and learning in universities will know about the challenges involved in getting practices to change to adapt to contemporary requirements and assumptions.

There are of course still people who hold on to the view that teaching in higher education simply involves very intelligent lecturers standing in front of lecture theatres full of eager young undergraduates transmitting essential knowledge to them preparing them for privileged and successful lives. Anyone holding such a view may not see the need for a book like this, although if they could be persuaded to read it maybe their views might start to change.

This book addresses a wide range of issues relating to the teaching of a diverse range of subjects, in a diverse range of settings, to a diverse range of students. It takes the reader into very many contested terrains, and addresses key issues relating to leadership, quality and technology—all of which are of course complex areas demanding scholarly consideration. It is authored by a diverse group of academics, mostly working in Australian institutions, although several draw on their experiences of working in other international settings. Although the focus is on teaching students within Australian universities, there is a strong emphasis on the internationalisation of Australian higher education, and frequent references are made for example to the need to consider and address the needs of Asian students, who in increasing numbers are enrolling for their higher education within Australia. This international
focus increases even further the relevance and applicability of the book for readers in other parts of the world.

No one really knows where higher education is heading in terms of a journey away from the old fashioned lecture theatre based transmission model of learning. Today's young—and not so young—learners live in a world dominated by communication technologies, social networking and opportunities to be very mobile and flexible in the ways in which they learn about and interact with the world around them. There are significant signs of higher education starting to respond to this changing culture and context, and several chapters look at ways in which the new technologies can be harmonised to enrich university learning. The blending of such approaches with more conventional forms of learning is an exciting area for all academics to reflect upon. Also in a country the size of Australia such trends interact with critical social issues relating to opening up access to higher education for those who find it difficult to relocate themselves to the big cities where higher education has generally been situated. Broadening access to higher education is one of many important themes which take this book well beyond a simple technical consideration of alternatives approaches to teaching within universities.

Higher education has always been a contested area, and it needs to remain so if it is to fulfil its function within democratic societies. The spirit of this book is one of exploring different viewpoints, approaches and opinions, and as such it stresses the contested nature of many current debates within higher education. In this sense leadership and quality issues are also dealt with in a critical way, exploring how such concepts can be operationalised, critiqued and reformed.

Hopefully readers of this book will have some of their prior assumptions challenged. If that happens then it will have made a significant contribution to a long-term change process, which it regards as necessary.
Editors' Introduction

Jeanne McConachie, Michael Singh, Patrick Alan Danaher, Fons Nouwens and Geoff Danaher

Contemporary universities are located at the intersection of a host of competing pressures and priorities. Consequently they both initiate and respond to change in relation to many of their core activities, including learning and teaching. The question remains to what extent that change is effective and efficient and whether and how it benefits students and teachers alike. This book takes up the challenge of engaging with that question, specifically in relation to the three crucial domains of leadership, quality and technology.

The book is therefore directed foursquare at two intersecting elements of university learning and teaching, each focused on a different sense of the key term 'changing':

1. as an adjective, to map and understand the several ways in which learning and teaching in higher education are continuously adapting and mutating in response to multiple pressures and stimuli;
2. as a gerund, to record and interrogate the ongoing efforts by the contributing authors and many others to maximise the transformative potential of that learning and teaching.

As the first of the three domains identified above that constitute the book's structure, leadership is considered the means to conceptualise and oversee effective change to university learning and teaching; it can also be the site of resistance to such change. Leadership can be variously understood as collaboration, empowerment, management, strategy and vision. While the chapters in the book take up leadership in many different ways, the underpinning proposition is that transformative change is greatly facilitated by, and is generally dependent on, the exercise of engaged and engaging leadership.

Secondly, quality occupies an ambivalent space in relation to changing university learning and teaching. On the one hand, quality understood as one or more of excellence, fitness for purpose, value or worth evokes the kinds of attributes to which university learners and educators might wish to aspire. On the other hand, concerns about the managerialism and reductionism held by
some to characterise the impact, if not the intent, of the Australian Universities Quality Agency and equivalent bodies in other countries demonstrate the potential perils of a too narrowly envisioned approach to such change.

Thirdly, technology has always been associated with learning and teaching; its effective use has enhanced the implementation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Contemporary universities rely on increasingly prevalent and sophisticated technologies, not only to provide delivery in new modes (such as distance and online education) but also to underpin administrative and support structures (such as content and course management systems). Technology can help to change university learning and teaching in ways that are enabling and transformative or marginalising and restrictive, depending on the people who and the systems that design and implement it.

Separately and in combination, then, leadership, quality and technology constitute processes that can facilitate changing university learning and teaching in ways that make higher education more productive, relevant and potentially transformational. The chapters in the book explore multiple manifestations of engagements with and mobilisations of those processes, as well as several of the influences on and the effects of those engagements and mobilisations.

It is through these explorations that the book addresses three key questions that derive from a focus on changing university learning and teaching:

1. Which types and examples of leadership are most effective in which contexts in generating productive and sustainable change in university learning and teaching?
2. How can different notions of quality make possible new and more empowering forms of university learning and teaching?
3. In what ways does technology help and hinder innovation and transformation in university learning and teaching?

In addressing these questions, the book presents a set of accounts by Australian and international educational researchers of demonstrated strategies for engaging and mobilising leadership, quality and technology in and for changing university learning and teaching. While those accounts deploy a multiplicity of theoretical, methodological and empirical resources to frame and inform their respective analyses, they have in common a general commitment to enhancing, and at the same time an ongoing interrogation of, the scholarship of learning and teaching in higher education.

Changing University Learning and Teaching: Engaging and Mobilising Leadership, Quality and Technology was conceived in 2006, with the proposal being circulated widely to potential contributors. The editorial process was rigorous, with each chapter being scrutinised initially by one of the editors.
and revised by the author/s before being read by at least two anonymous external referees and subsequently revised again by the author/s. At each stage some chapters were rejected or authors decided not to proceed in the light of the feedback that they had received. The intention was to maximise editorial support while also ensuring the highest possible standard of evidence and argumentation and of contribution to knowledge.

On that basis, we have pleasure in introducing Changing University Learning and Teaching to you. We commend the efforts of everyone involved in writing, refereeing, editing, printing and publishing the book, and we anticipate its involvement in the broader project of enhancing students’ learning journeys and outcomes, of acknowledging the work of academics, administrators and other staff members and of enriching the scholarship of learning and teaching in contemporary universities.
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Changing University Learning and Teaching: Engaging and Mobilising Leadership, Quality and Technology contributes original and significant research to the field of university learning and teaching.

It does this by focusing on two intersecting elements of university learning and teaching, each directed at a different sense of the key term ‘changing’:

- as an adjective, to map and understand how learning and teaching in higher education are continuously adapting and mutating in response to multiple pressures and stimuli;
- as a gerund, to record and interrogate the ongoing efforts by the contributing authors and many others to maximise the transformative potential of that learning and teaching.

The book focuses on three key elements of efforts to change university learning and teaching more sustainably and systematically:

- leadership
- quality
- technology

Separately and in combination, leadership, quality and technology can facilitate changing university learning and teaching in ways that make higher education more productive, relevant and potentially transformative. This book explores multiple manifestations of engagements with and mobilisations of those processes and hoped for outcomes.