Transforming a university: The scholarship of teaching and learning in practice

Angela Brew and Judyth Sachs
Editors

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Preface

The integration of research and teaching is a key challenge in a research-intensive university. We aspire to ensure that a distinctive feature of students’ educational experience at the University of Sydney is research-enhanced teaching. In this context, we provide students with an opportunity to experience an intellectual environment that focuses on research in the content of courses, in the development of inquiry based learning, and by the engagement of staff and students in research into university learning and teaching. It is through this engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning that academic teachers are able to develop an evidence-based approach to curriculum development.

This volume attests to the commitment of the University and its staff to the scholarship of teaching, and illustrates how such scholarship enhances the teaching and learning process. The contributors are key researchers in teaching and learning across the faculties of the University of Sydney. The book is designed to showcase research on teaching and learning within the University and to demonstrate how this research is translated into changes in teaching practice.

The collected works illustrate research to develop a better understanding of students’ conceptions and experiences in relation to specific curricula challenges, as well as describing a range of innovative strategies to increase students’ preparedness to undertake study in their chosen field. Some of the chapters in this volume demonstrate the ways in which research and inquiry into aspects of teaching and student learning is being integrated in an iterative way into curriculum design and development.

The work presented here has been subjected to international peer review. Uniquely, the book demonstrates a wide spread of practice in the scholarship of teaching and learning from within one single institution. We hope that it will demonstrate how teaching scholarship is being used to enhance students’ learning and that it will make an important contribution to intellectual discussions and debates about the scholarship of teaching and learning worldwide.

Don Nutbeam
Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor
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About the book
At the time of commissioning this book, Judyth Sachs was Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) at Sydney. By the time of its publication she had taken up the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor, Provost at Macquarie University. The idea for the book was to further intellectual discussion and debate about the scholarship of teaching and learning by showcasing research and scholarship on teaching and learning practice in the University of Sydney and demonstrating how such work had contributed to the improvement of teaching and student learning practice.

We wanted to produce a scholarly book that would demonstrate quality research on teaching at the University of Sydney. To this end, each chapter was blind refereed by two academics from a panel of internationally recognised scholars. We wish to express our appreciation to the following people who acted as referees and provided high quality feedback:

Dr. Gerlese Åkerlind, Australian National University, Australia
Professor Moya Andrews, Indiana University, USA
Dr. Stephen Bostock, Keele University, United Kingdom
Ms. Alison Bunker, Edith Cowan University, Australia
Ms. Denise Chalmers, Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Australia
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Professor David McConnell, Lancaster University, United Kingdom
Dr. Jo McKenzie, University of Technology Sydney, Australia
Professor Joy Mighty, Queen's University, Canada
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Ms. Margot Pearson, Australian National University, Australia
Professor Albert Pilot, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
Dr. Dan Pratt, University of British Columbia, Canada
Dr. Jane Robertson, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
Referees were asked to provide feedback and to rate the chapters according to whether:

- the issues/questions/problems that led to the investigation were clear
- the courses/subjects/departments which were the contexts for the research were clearly specified
- the relevant research literature was discussed and analysed
- it was clear what methodological and/or theoretical approaches informed the work
- the way the researchers went about the investigation was clear
- whether the results of the investigation were well explained
- the chapter discussed how the research findings were used in improving teaching and learning
- the chapter made a contribution to knowledge in the field of higher education teaching and learning

We would also like to acknowledge the support and help of colleagues in the Institute for Teaching and Learning; in particular, Professor Michael Jackson (Acting Director from 2005-6) and the current Director, Professor Keith Trigwell. We are grateful to Professor Don Nutbeam for agreeing to provide the preface and to Alana Clarke for efficient administration of the submissions and refereeing process. Thanks also to Susan Murray-Smith and Joshua Fry at Sydney University Press.