

AAREnews

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

From the President

Educational research and complexity reduction

Noel Gough
President



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AARE@AERA

Like many of my AARE colleagues, much of the month of March 2008 was consumed by preparations for, and eventually participation in, the Annual Meeting of AERA in New York City. AARE sponsored a well-attended and well-received symposium, *Building Research Capacity Under Surveillance: Issues and Effects of 'Measuring' Quality and Impact*, featuring the following presenters and papers:

- **Where to for Quality Education Research Without Impact, as Defined by the Research Quality Framework?**
Jan Wright, University of Wollongong
(coauthored with Trevor Gale, Monash University)
- **Percolated or Espresso? The Ways in which Education Research Influences Policy Development in Australia.**
Louise Watson, University of Canberra
- **Sustainability of Research Community: Support Structures and Early Career Researchers.**
Joanne Orlando, University of Western Sydney
- **Capacity-building and the Social Organisation of Trust.**
Annette Gough, RMIT University
(coauthored with Noel Gough, La Trobe University)
- **The Knowledge Economy? An Invitation to Hesitation.**
Jane Kenway, Monash University
(coauthored with Elizabeth Bullen and Johannah Fahey, Monash University)

Our discussants were Elizabeth (Bettie) St. Pierre, University of Georgia and John Willinsky, Stanford University. I'm going to quote from Bettie's remarks at some length because I think they speak to, and exemplify, some of the dispositions that we in Australia might also find generative in responding to policy environments that, if not downright hostile, constrain our work. For example, Bettie asks if policy makers could live up to the standards they expect of researchers:

Our politicians continue not to pay attention to the very evidence that they insist we produce to tell them what works in schools. Holding educators accountable for all that ails schools, policy-makers insist on 'highly qualified' everyone teachers, principals, students, parents. Where are the highly qualified policy makers? What were the qualifications of those who wrote the Research Quality Framework that Jan, Trevor, and Louise discussed? Why don't we substitute the word 'policy' for 'research' in those RQF indicators and decide whether the policy makers have generated policy that 'has produced an outstanding social, economic, environmental and/or cultural benefit for the wider community?' Where's the high quality policy that's made that kind of impact?

In [the USA], our Director of the Institute of Education Sciences 'sciences,' mind you said in a 2003 AERA presidential invited session that what we need is less theory and more of what works and, further, that postmodern methods, in particular, won't tell us what works. I wonder where the 'science' is in a declaration that rejects theory particularly postmodernism, about which I suspect [he] knows little [and] that reduces science to finding out what works? Where's the 'highly qualified' in that statement, which, of course, became federal policy? How is it possible to think a rejection of theory, much less say it in public? How can this keep happening? And what can we do?

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Continued Pg 2 ►

From the President continued...

Bettie also reflected on her participation in the kinds of capacity-building initiatives that preoccupy many of us who hold research leadership positions in Australian universities, with particular reference to how we support the next generation(s) of researchers:

I confess that, just this year, I volunteered to spearhead a new initiative in my own college called 'Building Research Capacity.' I saw this particular freight train coming down the tracks to Georgia and decided I'd like to have a say in structuring and, of course, deconstructing, whatever it ends up being. I decided I was particularly qualified because I have good friends in Australia whom I can email in the middle of the night and beg for help in rethinking what Patti Lather calls our 'stuck places'. So far, there's been a tremendous interest in my college in faculty and students coming together to think and talk about the thinking and doing of research all kinds of research. Believe me, the politics and ethics of our helping each other think across seemingly incommensurable epistemological divides is as daunting as it is exciting. Those of us who've written for years about being 'open to the Other' are having to practice what we've preached.

One of our very first conversations was how to help our new faculty members survive in the current research environment. The contracts they signed when they were hired, unlike mine of 15 years ago, *require* that they get external funding, so they're obliged to jump right into the morass of scientifically based research, often leaving behind theoretical frameworks, like postmodernism or even interpretivism, with which they live their lives. I read Joanne's paper and emailed it immediately to almost everyone in our college, and we'll be using it as a basis for our next meeting on how to support early career researchers.

A summary version of Joanne's paper appears elsewhere in this issue. AARE Executive is responding to the needs of early career researchers that she identifies through, for example, the September workshop flagged by Jan Wright (also elsewhere in this issue). However, I would like to turn my attention to another significant issue for educational researchers that I see as being immanent in many of Bettie's remarks and which, as it happened, was the focus of another symposium in which I participated at AERA, namely, *the politics of complexity reduction*. This symposium, organised by Gert Biesta (University of Stirling, UK) and Deborah Osberg (University of Exeter, UK) was innovative in both format and content.

In format, the session was organised around 12 five-minute presentations. Although most contributors wrote full-length papers, they also produced a paper of a maximum of 2,000 words in which they focused on a particular aspect or intersection of complexity reduction in education. These short papers were available before the symposium via the Chaos and Complexity SIG's website. Each participant had 5 minutes (strictly enforced!) to highlight the main points of their paper. After this, groups of presenters (3 or 4 per group) invited the audience to engage in a more in-depth

discussion in smaller groups. This generated much more discussion than the traditional presentations + discussant + questions-from-the-floor format.

Complexity challenges the machine model of the world predicated on linear thinking, control and predictability and instead allows for an understanding of 'reality' which is open, recursive, organic and nonlinear and where limited control and a restricted ability to predict are the order of the day. This line of thinking is often used to highlight the fact that educational processes cannot be controlled, are characterised by a fundamental unpredictability, etc. Nevertheless, many educational practices show more predictability than might be expected. How is this achieved? Complexity suggests that the way to achieve predictability is through *complexity reduction*, that is, through limiting the number of possible variables and reducing the 'recursivity' of the system: trying to push the system from an open to a closed state and trying to reduce the impact of 'feedback loops.'

In this symposium we examined a variety of theoretical, historical, practical and political dimensions of complexity reduction in education. Where does complexity reduction occur in education? How can we make it visible? How is complexity reduction achieved (both at a 'practical' and a 'discursive' level)? To what extent can it be achieved? At what price? Who benefits from particular complexity reductions and who doesn't?

Quality imperialism as complexity reduction in higher education ... and ERA?

My contribution to the symposium on complexity reduction paper explores the politics of complexity reduction in contemporary global discourses of higher education through an analysis of the concept of 'quality' as a Deleuzian *mot d'ordre* ('order-word'). Specifically, I focus on the ordering functions of selected 'quality' discourses in a number of national higher education systems (including those of Australia, Hong Kong and South Africa) and the effects produced by national quality agencies 'trading' representations of quality across national, linguistic and cultural borders. I argue that such an analysis reveals a new form of *quality imperialism* produced by the recent tendency among national higher education systems to cede their authority and responsibility for determining quality in their own locations to a decentred and deterritorialising apparatus of rule constituted by supranational quality agencies and professionals (such as those affiliated with INQAAHE: the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). Through these means, the complexity of 'quality' in higher education internationally is reduced to that which a global cadre of quality professionals can audit.¹

It is not difficult to understand the late and unlamented RQF as yet another exercise in complexity reduction through which the number of possible variables that might conceivably constitute research 'quality' and 'impact' were limited to a *reductio ad absurdum* of their possible meanings. On 24 April 2008 the ARC launched the ERA pages on its websiteⁱⁱ which is presently populated by the following items:

- Release of the revised Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification
- Notice of a Consultation Paper on ERA that will be released shortly
- Downloadable files of recent presentations by the ARC CEO on the ERA initiative to the Australian Financial Review Higher Education Summit, a Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Research) Meeting and, somewhat ominously for educational researchers, the Thomson Scientific Australia Research Day
- FAQs (presented somewhat curiously as a downloadable pdf file rather than as a web page)
- A variety of media releases

Last but not least is a section on metrics that foreshadows consultation on 'the Research Outlet Rankings':

The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative will use a range of metrics and other proxies to support the evaluation of research excellence. One of these metrics is discipline-specific tiered outlet rankings.

Initial rankings of outlets for each discipline were undertaken by the four Learned Academies and a range of discipline peak bodies.

The ARC will consult on the draft outlet ranking lists with the sector during May, with the final lists to be used for the ERA evaluations in 2009. Outlet ranking lists for each discipline will be available on this website from May.

Consultation on these rankings aims to ensure that each discipline-specific list only includes research outlets that are core to the discipline. Any research outlet listed in more than one discipline list needs to have an agreed quality ranking representing the overall quality of the journal.

The ARC expects formal submissions to be made via the relevant university research office or peak body.

This announcement not only raises many questions about how multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary work will fare in the ERA but also foreshadows forms of complexity reduction as savage as the RQF, if not more so. How confident can Australian educational researchers be about the inclusiveness of a discipline-specific list of tiered outlet rankings that only includes research outlets that are 'core to the discipline'?

NOTES

- ⁱ A short version of this paper can be downloaded from <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/chaplx-p/docs/Gough2008.pdf>
A longer version is also available at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/oent/Staff/gough_papers/Knowledge_Prod_Chapter_6.pdf
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.arc.gov.au/era/>

AARE Conference 2008

Mary Ryan
Conference Convenor 2008

Queensland University of Technology
Kelvin Grove campus, Brisbane

November 30 to December 4

KEY DATES

- 16 May
Closing date for abstracts for symposia, panels and papers. Closing date for full papers for refereeing.
- 11 July
Last date for notification of acceptance of abstracts.
- 15 August
Last day for notification of acceptance of abstracts.
- 31 August
Early-bird (discount) registration rate closes.
Presenter registrations close.
- 30 November
Early-bird (discount) registration rate closes.
Presenter registrations close.
- 1 December
Pre-conference workshops and Presidents' Reception.
Conference presentations commence.
- 2 December
Schools Research Showcase and Conference Dinner.

Now registration and paper submission can be made through the OCS conference management software. Some guidelines:

Go to www.aare.edu.au

- Click on the link, Conferences and Workshops
- Then click on Next Conference
- Click on Further Information
- Click on the words AARE 2008 Conference Open Conference System [OCS] Proposal Submissions
This will take you to AARE on OCS.
- Click on View Conference Details
- Click on the 4th link called Proposal Submission under Conference Information.
- You will be asked to logon here. If you are a nominated Track Director you must use the login name and password sent by the OCS machine. If you are a proposer you must create your own login name and password.

The process is straightforward from here!!!



Changing Climates: Education for Sustainable Futures

AARE 2008 Conference Brisbane

The Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC)



Chris Halse
AARE
Communications
Coordinator

On 31 March 2008, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released the 2008 *Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification* (ANZSRC) to replace the Australian Standard Research Classification (ASRC) and the RDC and SEO codes previously used for research reporting and grant applications. The new codes are for immediate implementation and reporting from 2009.

The ABS reports that ANZSRC was "developed to meet the dual needs for a comprehensive description of today's research environment, as well as the ability to compare R&D statistics internationally." ANZSRC was developed in collaboration with Statistics New Zealand and is aligned to the OECD's Frascati Manual and the 2006 Fields of Science and Technology classification.

There are three classifications in the ANZSRC:

1. Type of Activity (TOA): This classification allows R&D activity to be categorised according to the type of research effort, namely, pure basic research, strategic basic research, applied research and experimental development.
2. Fields of Research (FOR): This classification allows R&D activity to be categorised according to the **methodology** used in the R&D, rather than the activity of the unit performing the R&D or the purpose of the R&D. It includes the major fields of research investigated by national research institutions and organisations, and emerging areas of study.
3. Socio-economic Objective (SEO): This classification allows R&D to be categorised according to the **purpose** or **outcome** of the R&D as perceived by the researcher. It consists of discrete economic, social, technological or scientific domains for identifying the principal purposes of the R&D. The attributes applied to the design of the SEO classification includes a combination of processes, products, health, education and other social and environmental aspects.

ANZSRC is a very different model of research classification for Education.

Education is Division 13 and comprises four groups, each containing different sub-groups. The four key groups are:

- 1301 Education Systems
- 1302 Curriculum and Pedagogy
- 1303 Specialist Studies in Education
- 1399 Other Education

The significant change is the *exclusions* of key groups from Division 13. These are:

- Economics of education is now in Group 1402 Applied Economics.
- Education policy is now in Group 1605 Policy and Administration.
- Sociology of education is now in Group 1608 Sociology.
- Educational psychology is now in Group 1701 Psychology.
- Educational linguistics is now in Group 2004 Linguistics.
- History and philosophy of education is now in Group 2202 History and Philosophy of Specific Fields.

A full copy of ANZSRC can be accessed through the ABS website:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1297.0Contents12008?opendocument&tabna> and via the ARC website <http://www.arc.gov.au/era/>

Our next issue of AARE NEWS will provide detailed critique of the ANZSRC and its implications for the future of Educational research. Letters to the Editor expressing your views positive, negative, witty, satirical are also welcome. Letters to the Editor will be forwarded to AARE Executive and considered for publication in AARE NEWS if space allows. The name/s of the author/s must be provided for letters to be considered for publication.

Changes to the Early Career Researcher award

Joanne Orlando (formerly Dwyer), ECR representative on AARE executive

I am very pleased to announce a fantastic change to the AARE Early Career Researcher award. In their efforts to support early career researchers in meaningful ways, AARE has now added a financial remuneration to the award. Beginning this year the recipient of the Early Career Researcher award will also enjoy free registration to an AARE conference. This is to be taken within two years of receiving the award.

I encourage all early career researchers to apply for this award. In brief its purpose is to develop early career researchers expertise as researchers and to encourage them to become active in the association. Application is based on the submission of a single-authored paper for review. This paper must be one that you are presenting at this year's annual conference. The full paper must be submitted by 30 October. More information about the Early Career Researcher award is available on the AARE website.

Australian Educational Researcher

Annette Patterson
Managing Editor, AER

The Editorial team at AER continues to receive a high number of submissions, averaging 68 papers per year over the past three years (2005-2007). This is a considerable increase in the volume of papers processed compared with the preceding three year period (2002-2004) when the journal averaged 33 papers per year. Papers published during 2007 included a range of international and Australian submissions with a number of high quality submissions received this year from Singapore and African countries.

More than 60 papers per year are reviewed by AER's hardworking team of reviewers and between 15 and 20 papers are finally accepted for publication each year. Rarely, if ever, do two reviewers recommend immediate publication. Researchers are invited to address reviewers' comments where appropriate and resubmit the paper, or alternatively, the paper is not accepted for publication. Some papers are not sent for review if two members of the Editorial Board are of the view that the paper would not be of interest to AER readers or the work is not of sufficient quality to go out to reviewers.

The editorial team aims to publish high quality papers by new researchers and established researchers that represent a range of theories, methodologies and topics of interest to AARE's membership. Reviewers are highly influential in maintaining the quality of the journal and in providing extensive mentoring for researchers through careful reading and detailed, productive comments. The work of this group is essential to the life of the journal and AER is fortunate to have a large team of conscientious reviewers. Reviewers' contributions are acknowledged each year in the April edition.

Members are aware that AER achieved Thompson Citation Index (ISI) listing in 2005. Since then the journal has experienced a modest but steady increase in impact factor.

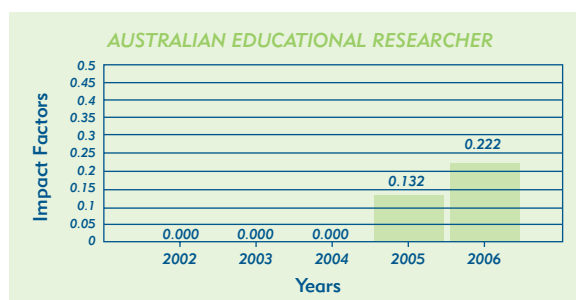


Fig 1 Thompson (ISI) Impact Factor Graph

The Thompson index will be increasingly important for education researchers and publishers as Australia moves toward quantitative measures of research productivity. Journals will continue to be measured by impact and ranked accordingly. Education researchers are increasingly aware of journal impact factors and journal tier rankings with citation reports now being a regular part of the education researcher's portfolio. Grant assessors look for impact indicators among the list of publications that constitute a researcher's track record.

AER has implemented a number of changes for 2008 including a move to APA style and the appointment of an Associate Editor, Associate Professor Cushla Kapitzke who will advise and assist the editorial and administrative team to move to online submission and review processes in 2009. AARE is currently trialling online submission and review of abstracts for the annual conference to be held in Brisbane November 30 – December 4. Cushla is playing a leading role in facilitating that process along with AARE's web manager, Mr Peter Jeffery and the hard working AARE office team. The trial of the Open Conference System (OCS) will provide an excellent guide to the viability of this system for AER.



Research higher degree supervisors are encouraged to play a major role in facilitating the publications of doctoral researchers and to co-author papers. The participation by supervisors in the publishing process results in papers of higher quality and provides important learning opportunities for doctoral researchers.

Building the overall capacity and productivity of education researchers is a goal of the association and the journal but AER also seeks to both influence and reflect the type of research that is valued by the broader education community. Research papers that advance educational knowledge through new data and theoretically informed analysis are prioritised ahead of papers that are more discursive or speculative. While the latter can be engaging and valuable, the field is in urgent need of data driven analyses that will inform reasoned policy development.

The first edition of the Australian Educational Researcher for 2008 has been posted to the AARE website. It includes the President's Address by Jan Wright (AARE conference, Fremantle, 2007) and the Radford Address delivered by Fazal Rizvi at the AARE conference, Adelaide, 2006.

April Edition: Vol 35 No 1

AARE Conference Presentations

Reframing quality and impact: the place of theory in education research

Jan Wright – President's Address, AARE Conference 2007

Epistemic Virtues and Cosmopolitan Learning

Fazal Rizvi – Radford Lecture, AARE Conference 2006

Refereed Papers

Individual Assignments and Academic Dishonesty

Exploring the Learning Conundrum

Valorie Leonard and Rolland LeBrasseur

A Phenomenographic Investigation of Teacher

Conceptions of Student Engagement in Learning

Lois Harris

Risk or Resilience? What Makes a Difference?

Helen J Boon

Teacher Efficacy: A Comparative Study of Hong Kong and Shanghai Primary In-Service Teachers

Hoi Yan Cheung

Teachers' Work: Beginning Teachers' Conceptions of Competence

Helen Huntly

Katrina Barker
Sub-editor AARE News



PROJECT TITLE

Employment details, experiences of support and induction, self-efficacies, and career aspirations for short-term contract vs. permanent beginning teachers in Victoria, 2007

INVESTIGATORS

Dr Helen Watt, Monash University,
helen.watt@education.monash.edu.au

Emma Richardson, RIC-EDU

Dr Paul Richardson,
Monash University

FUNDING

The Victorian Institute of Teachers

PROJECT SUMMARY

This report for the Victorian Institute of Teachers involved data collected in August of 2007 from 1,365 beginning teachers who attended the V.I.T. seminars for people engaged in the process of seeking full teacher registration in Victoria, representing a 74% response rate. The report establishes a comprehensive picture for a group of beginning teachers in Victoria in relation to their employment situations, perceived effectiveness of employer induction and support programs, profiles of their confidence and perceived effectiveness as teachers, and planned career trajectories.

The aim of the 'New Grants' feature is to profile research grants received by AARE members in the previous 12 months and to provide information that will enable researchers to connect with colleagues doing similar work, both nationally and internationally. Announcements about research funded under the National Competitive Grants Scheme (e.g. ARC) and other externally funded research grants are welcome. Contributions for 'New Grants' should include the title of the research project, a 150 word abstract, names of the Chief Investigators with an email address for the lead CI, and name of the funding body(ies). Accompanying .jpg pictures, if available, are welcome. Please direct queries about the 'New Grants' column and your submissions to Katrina Barker k.barker@uws.edu.au

PROJECT TITLE

The International Baccalaureate in Australian Schools: A sociological case study

INVESTIGATORS

Dr Catherine Doherty,
Queensland University of Technology,
c.doherty@qut.edu.au

Professor Allan Luke,
Queensland University of Technology

Dr Katie Weir,
Queensland University of Technology

Research Assistant

Mu Li

FUNDING

ARC Discovery Project, 2008-2010

PROJECT SUMMARY

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, an international certification for senior schooling, has recently emerged as a focal point in recent educational policy discussions in Australia. It is a highly regarded alternative to current State curricula and has been considered as a possible model for the proposed national curriculum (ACER, 2006).

This study will incorporate a comprehensive survey of the IB Diploma as a phenomenon in the Australian educational market, including mapping its uptake in schools, an analysis of its curriculum design, implementation issues, marketing strategies, family demographics and investigating classroom experiences of the IB Diploma in a variety of local ecologies across Australia. It will investigate the IB as a form of liberal arts education suited to globalising economies, transnational cultures and robust civic institutions; the extent to which its curriculum contributes to broader, more global views and identities on the part of students; and its implementation in a variety of Australian educational markets and policy contexts.

The research involves two phases firstly, an online survey of teachers, students and parents engaging with the IB in Australian schools, followed by four qualitative case studies of the IB Diploma implemented in diverse settings.

PROJECT TITLE

Realising Gifted Students' Potential: Elucidating psychosocial determinants and the impact of different educational settings on educational outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing

INVESTIGATORS

Professor Rhonda Craven,
University of Western Sydney,
r.craven@uws.edu.au

Dr Alex Yeung,
University of Western Sydney

Professor Ladd Wheeler,
Macquarie University

Partner Investigator

Professor Herb Marsh,
Oxford University

Post Doctoral Research Fellow

Marjorie Seaton,
University of Western Sydney

FUNDING

ARC Discovery Grant

PROJECT SUMMARY

There is an increasing emphasis worldwide on how to enable gifted students to realise their full potential most effectively. However, there is a surprising lack of evidence-based research elucidating drivers of life potential and the impact of different settings on educational outcomes for gifted students. Our research will improve Australia's capacity to educate gifted students. Capitalising on cutting-edge interdisciplinary research, and by utilising a powerful multicohort-multioccasion experimental design and state-of-the-art multi-level analyses, we will explicate: the psychosocial determinants of gifted students' educational outcomes; the characteristics of learners who benefit most from gifted education; and the impact of different settings on the educational outcomes and the psychosocial wellbeing of gifted students, in order to identify new solutions to fully realise gifted students' potential.

Postgraduate Report

Sarah Howard
AARE Postgraduate Student Member

AARE postgraduates are staring to talk!

Well, perhaps not talk but to communicate online! Over the last two months, postgraduates have started to utilise two new online resources, Facebook and Google Groups. Postgraduates can choose to participate in either groups (or both!) as a way to access information about AARE, the annual conference, scholarship opportunities, and general research support.

One of the topics raised through the Google Groups forum was the possibility of having "fireside chats" at the annual conference, similar to AERA. Topics for fireside chats could include, "Preparing Graduate Students to Bridge the Knowledge Gap between Education, Administration, Researchers and Practitioners," or "Oh, the Places You'll Go! Dissertation, Interview, to Job." We would love to have input from postgraduates on possible chat topics.

Postgraduates have also voiced concerns regarding research and travel funding. The high cost of attending the annual conference is familiar to everyone, but can be a particular strain for postgraduate students. Students do have access to the AARE Student Travel Award and to research support schemes from their universities. It is a goal of AARE to begin building stronger postgraduate association membership and conference attendance.

As additional incentive to attend the 2008 AARE Conference in Brisbane are pre-conference workshops for postgraduates and early career researchers! These workshops will be designed to help postgraduates "share skills and build research capacity." Keep an eye on the conference website, Facebook, or the Google Groups site for more information.

Finally, the more postgraduates participate in our on-line forums then the stronger the postgraduate voice will be in AARE. If you have not joined up, please do soon!

Facebook: AARE Postgraduates,
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=9124523830>

Google Groups: AARE-Postgraduates,
<http://groups.google.com.au/group/aare-postgraduates>

Or contact Sarah Howard,
s.howard@edfac.usyd.edu.au

AND REMEMBER: applications for Student Travel Awards to do to the 2008 AARE Conference are due June 30th!

Workshop on 'The utility of theory(ies) in educational research'

The AARE workshop on 'The utility of theory(ies) in educational research' will be held from 24-26 September at Charles Sturt University. The workshop is geared for early career researchers and higher degree research students, and has attracted an extraordinary amount of interest.

The registration and payment form will soon be available on the AARE website, and an email broadcast will be sent to all AARE members and pre-registrants once these are in place. Preference will be given to AARE members and pre-registrants but all interested researchers are welcome to apply.

Based on current expressions of interest, the majority of preferences have been for the following focus areas during the workshop:

- Bourdieu and Bernstein**
presented by Karl Maton
- Foucault**
presented by Valerie Harwood
- Globalisation, risk and postmodernity**
presenter to be finalised
- Social constructivism and Vygotsky**
presenter to be finalised
- Deleuze**
presented by Anna Hickey-Moody
- Policy Theory**
presented by Jill Blackmore
- Textual theories and semiotics**
presented by Bill Green

Jan Wright
Immediate past President



Sustainability of the research community:

I recently conducted a study into the institutional support for early career researchers (ECRs). There were two reasons for this study. First, today's research environment is dominated by very experienced researchers at the peak of their career. Consequently, competing for research grants and support is extremely difficult for ECRs. This disadvantage was highlighted in the non-defunct Research Quality Framework (RQF) which emphasised track records and research income as key indicators of worth. Despite the abandonment of the RQF, differentiation between researchers has not diminished nor have ECRs anxieties about working in this framework; particularly while we wait to see what shape ERA the Labor government's replacement for the RQF will take. Second, statistics indicate that between one third and one half of presently employed academics will reach retirement age in the next decade (Ackers & Gill, 2005; ESRC, 2006 cited in Furlong & Lawn, 2007). Amongst all the disciplines, education has the greatest representation of academics near retirement, with over 50% of those in this field aged fifty years and over (ESRC, 2006 cited in Furlong & Lawn, 2007).

The combination of these two issues raises serious concerns about the sustainability. The current research environment advantages the support of established researchers. However, if we are to develop a new generation of innovative researchers, then it is imperative we support ECRs to develop their research capacities. Consistent with Ackerlind's (2007) framework, movement from ECR to sophisticated researcher requires developing knowledge and experience in networking and developing professional partners; advanced learning in methodologies; administration of research projects and confidence and willingness to take risks in research. We know universities provide various support structures for ECRs. However, research indicates that ECRs are struggling. The aim of this study was to gain more understanding about the support structures in place for ECRs in universities and how useful ECRs are finding them.

The study

This was a qualitative study with two parts. First, case studies were conducted in two universities to generate an in depth analysis of the structural diversity in available ECR support. The two universities were at different points in their institutional development as research institutions: University A was a research intensive university and University B a new generation university. A telephone or face to face interview was conducted with the associate dean of research from each of these universities.

Second, 14 AARE members who self-identified as ECRs responded to six open-ended questions via email. The purpose of this part of the study was to obtain a cross sectional analysis of the support structures in place for ECRs and the ways ECRs experienced these supports. Participants were volunteers who responded to an open invitation, and they collectively represented eight Australian universities across four states.

ECRS: High expectations, frustration, vulnerability

In this summary for AARE NEWS, I focus on the feedback provided by ECRs. The ECRs considered high expectations were placed on them as researchers and they considered university structures did not adequately meet their needs.

A considerable amount of the ECRs' responses centred on external grants. All ECRs felt that they were expected to gain an ARC grant. However, they all felt ill-equipped and unsure on how to actually achieve this, and this caused considerable anxiety and a sense of feeling overwhelmed.

ECRs views of institutional support structures depended on how helpful these were for helping ECRs meet the goal of winning an external grant. All had access to various support structures to develop research skills and knowledge, and these were considered useful. However, all ECRs wanted to undertake research and these structures were decontextualised from the opportunity to conduct research. Many ECRs commented on experiencing exclusive and inequitable practices in their university that limited their opportunities for research. Many believed successful researchers received priority in terms of opportunity and support for research, and that research projects were only open to a chosen few.

Support structures and early career researchers

Joanne Orlando (formerly Dwyer)
AARE Early Career Researcher Representative



What ECRs wanted

No ECRs had access to formal mentoring schemes yet this was the most desired support structure. The majority of the ECRs felt angry, frustrated and defeated. They had limited opportunities to do research and develop their research capabilities yet they felt they had to win an ARC. They believed a mentor would help them in achieve this goal by taking an interest in them as researchers and showing them the ropes of how to get ahead in the 'game of research'.

Conversely a small number of ECRs felt more supported and included as researchers within their university than the others. Coincidentally these ECRs had negotiated their own mentors or were working in universities which promoted collegiality in research.

Vulnerability of ECRs

A significant theme emerging from this study was the vulnerability of ECRs. This was reflected in their professional identity, their sense of feeling overwhelmed in their role and in the powerlessness they expressed. The vulnerability of neophytes is not a new phenomenon. Consistent with Lasky's (2005) theory on vulnerability, it can however be experienced in a positive or negative way. Aspects of the university research environment were contributing to the ECRs' vulnerability negatively.

The findings indicate that ECRs are concerned with building knowledge of research and opportunities to conduct research and develop their careers. Support structures address these concerns can reduce ECRs feelings of vulnerability and increase their sense of competence and confidence as researchers.

Support structures to nurture and protect

Support structures with visible procedures for empowering ECRs need to be a priority in universities. The findings indicate that a powerful form of support for ECRs is the fostering of inclusive, knowledge building environments. This is not necessarily linked to big budgets but in the social and cultural environments in which ECRs work (Kemmis, 2006).

Research knowledge and opportunity

Support should focus on the development of knowledge and expertise. It was clear from the interviews that ECRs lacked the institutional and cultural knowledge about research systems to clearly identify what they needed for developing their careers. Structures which would support developing research knowledge and confidence in how to help themselves could include collegial mentoring, knowledge sharing and encouraging research teams that support commitment and collegiality in research.

Career knowledge

Structures should be provided which provide knowledge around what their position requires and how they are expected to progress. This could include for example, academic development contracts involving an agreement between the ECR to fulfil particular research goals and the university to provide resources to meet these goals. Also needed is clarity and reaffirming of the role as ECRs with the introduction of any new national research framework would help reduce the frustration and second-guessing they have been experiencing.

Challenge to Deans

This is a challenge to the Deans of Education not just provide services that are labelled 'support'. ECRs know when they are and are not being well supported. The provision of services alone is not beneficial to the early career ECRs or their institution in terms of the quality of research. Support structures need to provide and encourage environments which empower researchers. This will contribute to more equitable possibilities for ECRs to strengthen their research capacities and leadership.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Professor Jan Wright for her continued support with this study.

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Recent Doctoral Theses in Education

Robyn Gregson
Sub-editor AARE News



Louise Ryan

Title: *Forging Diplomacy: a socio-cultural investigation of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the "Art of Australia 1788-1941" exhibition*

Email: s2196154@unsw.edu.au
Institution: UNSW, COFA,
School of Art Education
Supervisors: Dr. Penny McKeon and
Dr. Gay McDonald

The study is an historical investigation exploring the impact of the Carnegie Corporation's philanthropic cultural and educational activities in North America and Australia during the 1940s. The author examines the Carnegie's formation of public values and perceptions using cultural and aesthetic material in order to transmit American ideological ideals with the goal of influencing Australian, Canadian and USA cultural norms. The principal case examined in the paper is the "Art of Australia 1788-1941" exhibition, which toured the USA and Canada during 1941-42. Scrutiny of the exhibition uncovers the role it played in alliance building and the promotion of a range of cultural and political agendas.

The investigation deploys a theoretical framework derived from the writings of Tony Bennett. The framework takes the form of a matrix that uses concepts of institutionalized agencies/power and individual agencies/knowledge detailed in a nine-cell matrix composed of propositional statements under the intersecting categories of culture, technologies, ethics, zones, objects, and visualization.

The "Art of Australia" Exhibition is a paradigmatic case of the instrumental, cultural application of exhibitions in the interest of the state, using government and non-government, public and private organizations as intermediaries. The analysis reveals the existence of diverse agendas and power/knowledge relationships between governments, corporations and the exhibition. This account highlights the museum as a significant arena for establishing and legitimating social norms and practices whilst steering cultural values. Such actions sponsored by government and entrepreneurial philanthropy are analyzed and interpreted as an early instance of building civic values and promoting the public belief in shared national identity. In this sense the investigation explores the educational mission of the museum and its supporting agencies in the broadest public context.

Nerilee Flint

Title: *Undergraduate university students' perceptions of the fairness of educational assessment: a grounded theory study*

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Institution: University of South Australia
Supervisor: Professor Bruce Johnson

This thesis was an investigation of undergraduate university students' perceptions of the fairness of educational assessment, using grounded theory methodology.

The study showed that students regarded fairness in assessment as: having the opportunity to demonstrate their capability, and perceiving that their capability is recognised. Students had various understandings of what it meant to be able to demonstrate capability. Frustration with assessment was a problem shared by all, to varying degrees. The key source of the feeling of frustration was due to not knowing and/or understanding the expectations of the assessment tasks or the teaching staff, nor the criteria and standards by which performance was judged.

The resultant substantive theory, 'demonstrating capability', is cyclical and consists of two stages. In the first stage, students decide fairness by making comparisons with personal expectations and past experiences, taking into account six key considerations: level playing field; feedback regarding their assessment; balance and variety in the type of assessment tasks; relevance of assessment tasks; skilful teaching staff; and teaching staff displaying a caring attitude. Students also talk with other students, compare with other students, and compare with past performance, using effort as the key comparative referent.

In the second stage, students have a range of responses which are described in three groups: opting out, surviving, and taking action. These responses are influenced by six response modifiers: level of desperation; concern about ramifications; maturity; self-confidence/sense of self-efficacy/self-concept; perception of approachable teaching staff; and knowledge of process.

The findings have implications for university educators who are interested in improving the educational experience for students, and in improving student evaluations of teaching. There are implications for students, as they would benefit from understanding how their fairness perceptions might be hindering their opportunities for success at university. Recommendations are made for teaching staff, course coordinators, program teams, and the university.

This NEWS feature is dedicated to celebrating the research of PhD and EdD graduates whose degree was conferred by an Australian university in the last 6-12 months. Contributions for 'Recent Doctoral Theses in Education' should consist of an abstract from the PhD or EdD (300 words maximum), the name of the conferring institution and faculty/school/department; graduate's name and email contact, and the title and name of the supervisor/s.

Please email contributions for the 'Recent Doctoral Theses in Education' to Robyn Gregson r.gregson@uws.edu.au

News from ACDE

Sue Willis and Peter Renshaw
Australian Council of Deans of Education

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) has been very active in engaging with federal policy makers and administrators. While we are promised an 'Education Revolution', and Education is mentioned in a number of places in the brief initial 2020 communiqué, the most prominent mention is with regard to human capital and productivity. There is an ongoing challenge for us collectively to keep the broad-based and substantive issues of *Education* on the national agenda. More on that issue later.

To update the outcomes from our meeting with Julia Gillard in late January - we put before her and her staff a range of concerns regarding:

- 1 National accreditation of pre-service teacher education
- 2 The Placement Fund
- 3 Educational research
- 4 The RFCDC codes being revised by the ABS.

There has been considerable movement with regard to these issues in the past few months. There are ongoing consultations between the States and the Federal Minister which suggests that the governance structure and procedural processes of a national accreditation body for pre-service teacher education programs will be agreed in the near future at MCEETYA.

With regard to the placement fund, DEEWR has reviewed the requirement for a specific number of days of practicum - in effect enabling all institutions around Australia to be eligible for quality funding within their established pattern of practicum days. This outcome was mediated between the ACDE and the officers in DEEWR. This specific funding mechanism has only a three year term - 2008-2010, so lobbying for on-going support beyond this first cycle will be high on our future agenda.

With regard to support for Educational Research, ACDE wrote to Minister Kim Carr pointing out that Australia currently "punches above its weight" in contributions to Educational research internationally, but as stated in the report of the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education, *Top of the Class*, educational research is at considerable risk due to inadequate funding. We asked that Minister Carr give serious consideration to the recommendation in *Top of the Class* that a special educational research fund be set up akin to the NRMHSF. We will keep you informed of the outcomes of our approach.

New items (i) - Early Childhood.

A group from ACDE (Sue, Peter and Lucy) and academic staff from Early Childhood Education Schools (Toni Downes, CSU, Victoria Whittington, UniSA, Jane Torr, Macquarie, and Sue Grieshaber, QUT) met with Hon Maxine McKew on 17th April and provided advice to her and her staff regarding Early Childhood Education. There is significant investment proposed by the government in Early Childhood Education - new University places and a renewed concern with quality staffing and a focus on learning outcomes. Our meeting with Maxine McKew occurred the day after PM Rudd announced the proposed one-stop centres to provide day care, preschool learning and health services for all children up to the age of five, along with support programs for parents. There was considerable goodwill and enthusiasm from Maxine and her staff - and a sense that they were listening and wanting to engage with the sector in improving the quality of Early Childhood Education and outcomes for children.

New items (ii) - Review of Higher Education.

ACDE made a submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education regarding the initial terms of reference. While we welcomed the review, we suggested that the current terms were quite restrictive and omitted key considerations. In summary we suggested that in the current terms of reference, Higher Education is positioned as simply a market-driven and market sensitive enterprise rather than an enterprise of developing an informed, articulate, broadly educated and engaged citizenry. We suggested that this general public educational purpose of Higher Education should not be assumed and tacit within the terms of reference but made part of the explicit terms for the Review itself. We also highlighted the significance of Education Faculties for the development of an informed and educated community. ACDE will be making a substantive submission when the final terms of reference are announced in the near future.



AARE Awards

Debra Cunningham, Honorary Secretary

Each year at its Annual International Conference, AARE recognises excellence in educational research through the following awards:

Honorary Life Membership Award for outstanding career achievements by an AARE member who is retired and who has made a substantial contribution to educational research. Nominations close 15 September. Do you know someone who deserves recognition in this way? See Call for Nominations in this edition of the NEWS.

Award for Doctoral Research in Education for an outstanding doctoral dissertation in education. Anyone who has been awarded a doctoral degree from an Australian institution in the two years prior to 30 June in the year of the award is eligible. Nominations are by universities and close on 30 June.

Betty Watts Indigenous Researcher Award for an outstanding AARE conference paper written by an Indigenous Australian researcher. Nominations close 30 October by submission of full paper (proposal must be accepted at the 2008 conference). *Please indicate when you submit your proposal that you intend to apply for this award.*

Early Career Researcher Award for an outstanding early career researcher paper presented at the annual conference. Nominations close 30 October by submission of full paper (proposal must be accepted at the 2008 conference). *Please indicate when you submit your proposal that you intend to apply for this award.*

Postgraduate Student Travel Awards provide support for postgraduate students to attend and participate in the annual conference. Nominations close 30 June. *Please indicate when you submit your proposal that you intend to apply for this award so your paper can be reviewed prior to 30 June.*

We invite and encourage eligible researchers to self-nominate for the *Betty Watts Indigenous Researcher Award, Early Career Researcher Award, and Postgraduate Student Travel Awards*. Colleagues, please draw these awards to the attention of eligible researchers in your Schools and Faculties.

For more information on all of these awards, including award criteria and how to nominate, please visit: <http://www.aare.edu.au/awards/index.htm>

Call for nominations for Life Member award 2008

Debra Cunningham, Honorary secretary

AARE awards an Honorary Life Membership each year at the annual conference. In special cases or circumstances more than one award may be made.

Criteria and Procedures for Nominating Members of AARE for Life Membership

Members nominating a particular candidate should:

1. Ensure that the candidate fits the criteria for Honorary Life Membership, that is:
 - Member of AARE;
 - Retired from full-time employment;
 - Has made a substantial contribution to educational research.
2. Provide a profile of the candidate that provides grounds for the nomination. Pertinent information about the candidate would include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:
 - Contribution to educational research;
 - Contribution to AARE;
 - Length of membership of the Association;
 - Overall contribution to the educational community (policy formulation, public awareness etc.)

The nominee must be able to attend the annual conference in the year of nomination in order to accept the award in person.

Members of the Association are invited to nominate a member for the award of Honorary Life Membership. Please send a statement indicating how the nominee meets the criteria for the award and providing grounds for the nomination as outlined above.

Nominations must be received by **Friday 15 September 2008**.

Please send all Honorary Life Membership nominations to:
Debra Cunningham
AARE Honorary Secretary
Queensland College of Teachers
PO Box 389
TOOWONG Qld 4066

Email: debra.cunningham@qct.edu.au

Selection Procedures

A sub-committee of the Executive, chaired by the Honorary Secretary, will examine the nominations received and taking into account the criteria for Honorary Life Membership, make a recommendation to the Executive. In addition to the stated criteria, the sub-committee monitors the gender, regional and disciplinary distribution of Honorary Life Members. Where marked discrepancies in the distribution occur, the sub-committee may implement positive discrimination procedures.

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