Promoting innovation in university teaching against the tide of centralised control and institutionalised risk avoidance

Julianne Lynch
jlynch@deakin.edu.au
Faculty of Education
Deakin University
Australia

Abstract

Over the last two decades, university systems worldwide have been subject to government initiated, top-down restructures in the name of greater effectiveness, accountability and quality. Within this timeframe, government interest in university teaching has increased, and innovation and responsiveness in teaching have been increasingly prioritised by both government and university policies. Academic interest in the teaching has also increased, and much research and discussion has focused on defining teaching as a source of scholarship and expounding its role in the promotion of innovation, and in the recognition and rewarding of teaching work. In this paper, I draw on a study of academics’ views, which I have reported at previous AARE conferences and elsewhere, to raise questions about recent and ongoing developments in the work environment of university educators. I raise the possibility that systems and processes whose express purpose is to facilitate and support university educators’ efforts to improve teaching are, in fact, inhibiting innovative practice by institutionalising an aversion to risk that is anathema to innovation.

In this paper, I draw on data collected in 2001 as part of a study of information and communication technology (ICT) education in Australian universities. This study, funded by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC), is referred to as the ICT-Ed Project (see Hurst (Chair), Lynch & Collins, 2001 for full report). Data excerpts are used as a springboard for raising questions about recent and ongoing changes in the work environment of university educators and effects on teaching practice. I discuss elements of this environment intended to assure quality in, and to facilitate and support, academics’ teaching work. These elements of the university teaching environment are discussed as potential inhibitors of educational innovation.

Changing context of university teaching

Over the last twenty years, university systems worldwide have been subject to extensive change, including increasing mass education, increasing government focus on vocational education, a changing policyscape for the funding and governance of higher education, the advance of information and communication technologies and their increasing use in the provision of university education. The pressures leading to changes in the Australian context are evidenced in, and acknowledged by, a series of government reviews and reports (eg. Dawkins, 1988, 1989; Hoare, 1995; Vanstone, 1996; West, 1998). Their implications for academic work have been widely discussed and commented (eg. Bessant, 1996; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; Crittenden, 1999; Evans, 1997; Marginson, 1997; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Peters & Roberts, 1999;
Simultaneously with these changes, interest in the scholarship of teaching has grown. Starting with the publication of Boyer’s (1990) book, Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate, the scholarship of teaching has been recognised as crucial in the promotion of excellence and innovation in university education (e.g., Alexander, 1999; Cosser, 1998; Elton, 1993; Taylor, 1999).

Despite the proliferation of literature that expounds the virtues of promoting, supporting and rewarding the scholarship of teaching, progress in the implementation of policy, systems and initiatives that respond to this literature has been slow. Thirteen years have passed since Boyer’s publication, yet as recently as 2002, Nelson (current Australian federal minister responsible for higher education) observed, “In many cases it is the selfless commitment and extremely hard work of academics that delivers a consistently high quality and meaningful educational experience to students” (2002, p.v). He argued that,

Credit should … be given to the thousands of academic and non-academic staff who on a daily basis deliver for their students and their nation. They do this frequently in spite of the current funding and policy framework, not because of it. (Nelson, 2002, p.vi)

Much of the existing research and debate surrounding the scholarship of teaching focuses on defining this form of scholarship (e.g., Trigwell et al., 2000), developing rationales for its promotion (e.g., Kreber & Cranton, 2000) and developing schemes for its assessment (e.g., Taylor & Richards, 2001). Others have speculated about the impediments to the promotion of the scholarship of teaching, with the relative valuing of research over teaching being the most oft cited factor (e.g., Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; McGinnis, 1999; Over, 1993; Ramsden et al., 1995). Commenting on the situation in Australia, Taylor (1999, np) wrote, “where academic career advancement is strongly linked to achievement in both teaching and research, much has been written about the need to recognise and reward teaching, but little progress made - research rules!” This paper builds on discussions of impediments to the promotion of scholarship and innovation in teaching, focusing in particular on developments in quality assurance processes and centralised support systems that increasingly surround and characterize university teaching.

Innovation and responsiveness in teaching are increasingly prioritised by government and university policy. However, very little research or discussion has focused on the effects of changes in the conditions of university teaching work on innovation and scholarship in teaching. There are signs that the valuing of teaching that is increasingly found in policy is beginning to influence on-the-ground practice, for example, through the instatement of Associate Deans of Teaching (or their equivalent) in most universities, the establishment of prizes for excellence in university teaching, increased funding for the training of lecturers, the establishment and increased resourcing of university divisions responsible for supporting academics in their teaching, and an increase in evaluation and quality assurance activities that focus on teaching. But do these initiatives, which are intended to promote responsiveness and support innovation in university teaching, have the intended effect? Is it possible that they might in fact stifle educational innovation? I will explore these questions below, with reference to both data collected by the ICT-Ed Project and pertinent literature. However, first I will briefly outline the key features of the ICT Ed Project’s methodology and findings in relation to ICT academics’ views of their teaching work and the current environments in their universities.
The ICT-Ed Project

The aims and methodology of the ICT-Ed Project have been described in detail elsewhere (Lynch & Collins, 2001a; Collins, Lynch & Markham, 2001), so will only be outlined here. In 2001, the AUTC funded the ICT-Ed Project to investigate the ways that teaching and learning are being approached in the major discipline of ICT in Australia’s universities. This study included the use of focus groups, within a mini-conference format, to elicit the views of university educators. Ten focus groups were run, attracting 83 participants from 29 universities. Data collection focused on eliciting participants’ views on the factors that inhibit, support and drive educational innovation in their work contexts. Ninety minutes of focus group discussions were recorded at each mini-conference, transcribed and then analysed using a constant comparative approach (eg. Silverman, 2000). This analysis has been described in detail elsewhere (Lynch & Collins, 2001a), as have the major conclusions and recommendations of this study (eg. Collins & Lynch, 2001; Lynch & Collins, 2001a; Lynch & Collins, 2001b; Lynch, Sheard, Carbone & Collins, 2002). In summary, four main conclusions about participants’ views were drawn from the study:

1. Educational aims were reported as the primary driving force in ground-up innovation in ICT education, particularly those answering the perceived learning needs of students. However, this “driver” was in competition with other powerful “inhibitors”.

2. Extrinsic motivation and reward for educational innovations were perceived by participants as minimal. In fact, many associate being an innovative teacher with personal and professional risks. Institutional agendas and reward systems were seen by many to discourage innovation that focused on teaching;

3. Participants reported a tension between some of the demands of students (eg. demands for particular skills and knowledge) and the skills and knowledge they believe are important for ICT graduates. They report that students are often misinformed or have misconceptions about their future working roles and careers. This tension reflects that perceived between the short-term needs of employers (for example, requiring that graduates possess skills in a specific programming language) and the skills and knowledge that participants believe are necessary for students to become ICT professionals and life-long learners; and,

4. Participants perceived students as generally conservative in terms of the types of teaching and learning activities they expected and desired in their courses. They reported that students were often resistant to innovative, non-traditional teaching and saw this as an inhibitor, particularly in the context of evaluation systems based on student satisfaction.

These conclusions should be read cautiously, with due attention given to the profile of the focus group participants. As discussed elsewhere (Lynch & Collins, 2001), the vast majority of participants in this study were ICT educators with particular interests in teaching and learning. Participants self-selected into the study knowing that it focused on teaching and learning, and the nature of participants’ contributions indicated that they were not only interested in teaching and learning, but were enthusiastic about and committed to improving teaching and learning in their disciplines. Therefore, participants are not a representative sample of ICT educators, but rather a self-selected group of ICT educators who value and prioritise teaching over other aspects of their university work.
It should also be said that little cohesion exists between the sub-disciplines that form this major discipline area. While, in some of the larger universities, these sub-disciplines are now administered under one faculty structure, in many institutions, they are found in different administrative units and are seen to have more in common with non-ICT disciplines than with other ICT sub-disciplines. For example, information systems might be administered by a business or a management faculty, while software engineering might be administered by a science or an engineering faculty. Similar diversity is found in both the substantive content and the approaches that are taken to the development of new knowledge in ICT sub-disciplines. In many ways, the diversity among ICT teachers and their teaching contexts is no less than that found among university teachers more generally. In fact, the issues raised by participants are similar to those that would be of concern to university teachers more generally.

Generally, participants viewed their work environments as unconducive to innovation in teaching, with many describing their work environments as hostile to educational innovation. They cited factors such as the increasing scale of teaching, technocentric pressure to adopt new delivery modes, and lack of support from management as inhibiting education-focused innovation (Lynch & Collins, 2001a).

Investigating the fringes of the ICT-Ed focus group data

Much of the analysis of the focus group data collected during the ICT-Ed Project was aimed at reducing the data by identifying points of agreement in the views expressed by participants, and previous papers reporting this research present these points of agreement as themes in the data. The data is treated differently in this paper. Instead of aiming to reduce the complexity of the data, I will use excerpts found at the fringes of previously reported themes in order to decentre the more familiar discussions that surround academics’ teaching work and to point to areas requiring further exploration. This section of the paper looks at two phenomena that are part of a systemic change taking place in Australian universities:

- Quality assessment processes focusing on university teaching; and,
- Centralised systems for organising, regulating and supporting university teaching work.

These phenomena have intensified and become more formalised over the last five years.

Within each sub-section below, I revisit the ICT-Ed Project in terms of the original thematic analysis, citing other studies that have made similar conclusions. I then shift my lens to look at data excerpts that go beyond familiar themes and that point to more interesting foci for future research.

Quality assurance and assessment of teaching

Familiar theme: Systemic contributions to inadequate evaluation of teaching

Processes of quality assurance and assessment are increasingly a feature of the context of university teaching work. The evaluation of university course content and delivery has become an important task in an environment of inter-institutional competition characterised by pressure from government and other stakeholders to demonstrate the quality of teaching and learning activities (Trembath, 1999). Brennan observed that, “the growth of external assessment of higher education quality has been one of the most marked international trends in higher education in recent years” (Brennan 1997, p.23). As the key consumers of the Australian
university system, students are now positioned as an important source of information for the
evaluation of institutional performance.

Many ICT-Ed focus group participants criticised the processes that their institutions use for the
quality assessment of teaching, where these processes primarily focus on administering standard
student satisfaction questionnaires. A point of agreement in each of the focus groups was that
this type of evaluation of teaching is not very useful in terms of evaluating specific initiatives
aimed at improving learning outcomes or planning for improvement in this area. Representative
focus group excerpts include:

So if we do something innovative …, is that an effective means for students to learn?
How do we know if it’s effective? I mean at the end of the day, if you compare last
year’s and this year’s results -- if you’ve got an evaluation form, how effective is that
evaluation form that you are using?
The quality assurance doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with the quality of
[student] work.

Student evaluation of teaching was generally seen as part of a quality assurance performance
rather than being intrinsically valuable:

Our university would see something that’s effective as something that fits into their
teaching and learning plan which is ‘Let’s make learning flexible’. ‘Oh look, this
makes learning flexible: that’s effective.’

Existing literature suggests that evaluation of university teaching rarely focuses on the effect of
teaching work on student learning. Instead, the most commonly used means of evaluating
university teaching is standard student satisfaction questionnaires (Alexander 1999; Alexander &
McKenzie 1998). This approach to evaluation is inexpensive and has been found to be effective
for assessing students’ responses to course organisation and structure, workload and course
difficulty, marking and assessment, and global ratings of satisfaction (Stringer & Finlay 1993),
and it has been found to have validity with respect to the aim of improving student learning
(Moses & Trigwell 1993). However, such questionnaires are not intended to evaluate the effect
of teaching and learning initiatives on learning outcomes and, because of this, the reliance on
such methods as the sole means of evaluation has been criticised (Cosser 1998).

A potential and undesirable side-effect of the dominance of standard student feedback
questionnaires in quality assessment processes is that the evaluation of teaching methods and
materials more generally are often limited to this method; that is, the student feedback
questionnaires used for quality assurance purposes become seen as a sufficient means of
evaluating teaching and learning initiatives. ICT-Ed participants’ comments about the quality
assurance processes in their institutions suggest that these educators are looking for more from
the questionnaires than is usually intended by their use. They are looking for evidence that their
teaching and learning initiatives have positive effects on student learning, but student evaluations
of teaching do not provide this evidence (“The quality assurance doesn’t necessarily have
anything to do with the quality of [student] work”). Bain (1999) noted that reports of innovative
teaching practice

… often limit their evidence on the influence of the innovation to students' and peers'
reactions during development, and their impressions of learning achievements after
implementation. Sometimes data from standard course assessments also are reported,
but often without regard to the relationship between the learning encouraged by the innovation and the learning assessed by standard methods. (p.166)

Similarly, in a review of 104 teaching and learning initiatives that made use of information and communication technologies, Alexander (1999) concluded that,

There continues to be a heavy reliance on student reaction surveys, and in some cases there is an apparent confusion between student reactions and student learning. Positive student attitudes and increased motivation may encourage better learning outcomes, but they are not in themselves evidence of improved learning. While student reaction surveys are a useful component of any evaluation, they should not be the only component. (p.181)

The ICT-Ed data, and the findings of other research on the evaluation practices of university teachers (eg. Bain, 1999; Alexander, 1999), suggest that caution needs to be taken in the initiation and implementation of department- or university-wide subject evaluation schemes that such processes are not seen as substitutes for other procedures more suited for evaluating the effects of particular pedagogical decisions on learning. It also points to another theme reported previously but not taken up in this paper: that of reported inadequacies in terms of lecturers’ skills and knowledge in activities such as evaluation that are required to pursue and demonstrate scholarship in teaching. These deficiencies in evaluation practices can be overcome through the professional development of university teachers and through the increased professionalisation of the teaching component of academic work. In part, instances of inadequate evaluation (such as those noted by Alexander) are reflective of a progression, from a profession that in the main conducted no formal evaluation of their teaching, towards the use of more sophisticated and better targeted evaluation practices. If this is the case, the reliance on student feedback questionnaires, and academics’ resulting dissatisfaction, will be short lived. However, less often discussed effects of quality assessment processes based on student feedback are likely to be more enduring. Focus group data sitting at the fringes of a general dissatisfaction with these processes suggest that student evaluation of teaching, when embedded in quality assurance processes, might also inhibit educational innovation.

**Fringy (heretical) suggestion: Student evaluation of teaching inhibits innovation**

This statement is provocative because of the omissions it contains: as outlined above, there are many things that student evaluation questionnaires are good for. It is also heretical because it suggests that student evaluation of teaching, as a feature of university quality assurance processes, is not about teaching and learning, and that they put neither students nor teachers first.

Resistance to internal scrutiny and external assessment for accountability by the evaluand is not a new phenomenon. Brennan (1997) wrote that, “quality judgements which lack legitimacy in the eyes of those on the receiving end of them are not likely to be acted upon if action can be avoided” (p.13). Similarly, Cosser (1998) concluded that, “unless teaching is seen to be valued in and by the institution, all attempts to introduce new systems for evaluating its effectiveness will fail” (p.159). However, an arguably more concerning suggestion made by some participants was that the quality assurance processes that are typically aimed at teaching not only fail to inform or stimulate innovation, but can stifle innovation. Consider the following data excerpts:

We could add need to perform well on student evaluation. Is it an inhibiting factor.
We’ve got QA reports and sometimes what the students like is not something that necessarily is helping their learning.

If the innovation is genuinely pedagogically challenging and the students don’t appear to like it, then the institutional reaction is to revert to delivery because that’s safe. So you don’t necessarily get proper institutional support for innovation, I don’t think. Because the students are often conservative… I mean of course you can do some little innovation if it’s put your material on the web, say. That’s not very threatening because students love that, because it’s all about the delivery rather than the teaching and learning. But if you do something that’s a bit way out, even though it’s pedagogically really well known and understood, then the institution might rally.

These data excerpts suggest that the student evaluation of teaching that predominates in Australian universities quality assessment of teaching processes could lead university educators to make decisions to be conservative in their teaching in an effort to make students comfortable and, therefore, score well on evaluation questionnaires. Universities, in their efforts to satisfy government demands and eliminate risk through the monitoring and assessment of student satisfaction, are in danger of producing professionals who take the “safe” option and avoid change and experimentation in fear of causing discomfort among their students. This is a potentially dire situation in terms of the quality of student learning. As indicated by a participant above, “sometimes what the students like is not something that is necessarily helping their learning.” And, as indicated by the ICT-Ed Projects key findings, students often have misconceptions of what skills and knowledge ought to be the focus of their courses. As the elimination of risk at the institutional level translates into risk avoidance at the individual level, will we see the primary driver of ground-up educational innovation shift from the learning needs of students to the need to keep students happy in the short-term? Will innovation be constrained by students’ expectations?

Centralised systems that organise, support and regulate university teaching

Familiar theme: Systemic contributions to the emaciation of academic freedom

A second and related theme that was identified in the initial analysis of participants’ contributions was perceived challenges to academic freedom and removal of academics’ control over their teaching work. This theme represents a point of agreement in the focus group data and it is a familiar one, reflected in academic commentary and analysis. Bessant (1996, np) explained that many of the initiatives implemented by universities in response to funding cuts and the increasing demand for accountability and quality have been seen by academics as challenges to traditions of collegiality, institutional autonomy and academic freedom. McWilliams and Taylor (2002) observe that “the tenor of such arguments seems to be that the instruments of accountability used to define and improve quality in higher education impose models of organization that are incompatible with traditional academic work” (np). McWilliams and Taylor (2002) recast this notion of the faltering academic identity by exploring academic grieving at shifts away from “‘unique, informal’ relationships with students and peers to formal relationships with the ‘expert’ information systems’” (np). They explain that the increasing regularity and control that surrounds academic work is based on a logic that “systems of management need to be uniform because individuals are not” (np).
The elements of their work environment that were most often described by ICT-Ed participants as constraining academic freedom were guidelines and processes for the production of teaching materials and university-level decisions to support particular platforms or courseware tools. The following data excerpt points this point of agreement: that the increasing centrality and intensification of the role of guidelines and university divisions that support the production of teaching and learning materials and the use of course tools, diminishes academic freedom as is it traditionally practiced in university teaching work.

Participant: I've got one more inhibiting factor, in terms of the university policy towards initiatives, in many cases there's a removal of control from the academics. Like at [my university] we have [a resource unit], which, from the university perspective, are responsible for the flexible delivery, but what happens is that academics end up working for them rather, rather than them working for us, so that we're the providers.
Moderator: You're the content provider?
Participant: Yeah.
Moderator: And they wrap it up?
Participant: And they wrap it up and in many cases they wrap it up in a non-innovative way.
Moderator: So how would you ... Participant: Well I think I would just describe it as a removal of control if you like.
Moderator: Of your material?
Participant: Of any form of initiative in some cases.

Many participants observed that they have less flexibility in and less control over the subjects they teach in terms of how and when they are taught, and the design process and the tools used, and they described an increasingly centralised organisation of teaching.

The ICT-Ed data suggests that the increasing centrality and intensification of formal systems for the regulation and production of subject materials and pedagogical tools are experienced by academics as a removal of control and ownership over their teaching. Anxieties about such systems could in part be due to organisational change that challenges academics’ identities and expertise and their conception of what it means to be a teacher. Issues of academic identity and a perceived de-integration of the roles that traditionally comprise academic teaching work have been discussed elsewhere (Lynch & Collins, 2001b). Individuals’ experiences of organisational change are an important consideration in the management of change. However, in keeping with my focus in this paper on systemic effects on innovation, I will now move to a second, potentially more insidious, effect that is suggested by a number of participants’ comments that sat at the fringes of the more dominant theme of challenges to academic freedom: that centralised systems for organising resources and producing teaching materials and tools inhibit educational innovation.

Fringy (heretical) suggestion: Centralised systems for organising resources and producing teaching materials and tools inhibit educational innovation

Again there is some deception in this statement. Centralised systems for organising university teaching, for example, room booking and timetabling systems, do facilitate university teaching work and have long been seen as valuable, and are increasingly seen as essential to the management of teaching in universities. But, like any technology, such systems have both
affordances and constraints, and, the less flexible they are, the more they constrain and inhibit practices not anticipated by the system. And, again there is some heresy in the statement in that it belies the efforts of the educational designers and technical support personnel who work with in such systems to improve the experience of university students and the appreciation that academics have for this support, but my focus here is not on the experience or efforts of individuals, but the effects of systemic change on the choices made by individuals.

It is clear from the ICT-Ed focus group data, and from existing literature, that academics perceive organisational changes towards centralised regulation and uniformity as an attack on the traditional work of academics and values of academe. However, further research is required to establish whether processes that explicitly intended to regulate and support academics teaching work, have an inhibitive effect on individuals’ pursuit and implementation of educational innovation. Strathern (cited in McWilliams and Taylor) noted that, “contradiction, conflict and maverick conduct seem to be as important to the intellectual life [of academics] as they are anathema to the audit exercise” (np). Are these qualities also crucial for academics to be responsive and innovative in their teaching work? The following data excerpts suggest centralised systems for organising teaching and teaching work could indeed inhibit innovation:

Another inhibiting factor that I've found is that we have centralised timetabling now [and] things are locked in a year ahead, what the number of contact hours and what kind of classroom you've got for your subject and for example, I didn't want two hour blocks, but I'm stuck with it for second semester this year … But that is important because we very rarely get to have the choice of what kind of blocks we want and that's typical as well.

I thought we might have touched on the … over regulation… If you want to do the same thing online, you've got to go through umpteen committees, approval from the, you know where and all sorts of other -- over regulations from outside interests before you get even onto the web site. You know that sort of thing has changed and not many people are aware that it’s shifting [in] that direction. Centralised, corporatised teaching is what you’d call it.

These data excerpts suggest that systems and processes that function in universities to organise and support academics’ teaching work may also inhibit academics’ ability to innovate. In particular, ICT-Ed participants were wary of the introduction of online courseware systems that they saw as making assumptions about teaching and learning that would constrain future innovation. As with the pressures of student opinion, systems that organise resources and support the production of teaching materials and tools, if not sufficiently flexible, are in danger of limiting innovation to those practices that are expected and anticipated by the system.

How dangerous is it to be an innovative educator?

McWilliams and Taylor (2002) wrote, “all contemporary organisations, including universities, are risk organisations. This is because all organisations must, of necessity, focus on guarding themselves against the risk of failure” (np). Both the intensification of audit activities surrounding teaching, and the formalisation and centralisation of systems that organise and support teaching, can be seen as effects of the risk organisation. Risk organisations construct risk sensitive individuals, engendering conservativeness and high degrees of paranoia around professional practice other than the tried and tested. Risk featured heavily in the ICT-Ed focus group data. The academics who participated in the ICT-Ed focus groups are highly attuned to
their organisations’ increasing shutting out of risk. They are also very aware of the professional risks associated with their own practice and that such risk taking will not be well tolerated. Many participants discussed innovation in teaching and the prioritising their teaching work as a risky pursuit:

So innovating is at the level -- someone described it in our department as individual heroism. It’s a heroism that I would call bravery personally.
Riskiness is an inhibiting factor. The riskiness of actually trying something new when it just may not be valued? … And it will affect your reputation for life so if it goes badly you have got this black star against your name and nobody will want to do anything with you but [if] it goes well, well you could be an international superstar, who knows.

And this professional risk was seen as a consequence of an increasing organizational aversion to risk:

It’s really lack of -- understanding [that] the innovation might fail. I mean, in industry… it’s quite clear right from the beginning that not every idea and project [will succeed]. Okay, that’s fine, but this is something we don’t have in the University.

In this paper, I have discussed two developments in university teaching work that are ostensibly intended to improve university teaching, but which in fact function to eliminate risk taking behaviour and practices that are other than those anticipated by the system. I have suggested that these developments could inhibit educational innovation, particularly the type of ground-up innovation that has traditionally arisen from the activities of individual academics. Risk taking is a critical part of innovation, yet comments found in the fringes of the ICT-Ed focus group data suggest that recent and ongoing developments that characterize the growing audit culture in universities and the increasing regulation and control of academics’ teaching work appear to encourage conservatism in academics teaching behaviour. Is it possible that the move away from the unique and informal craftwork of traditional academic work (McWilliams & Taylor 2002) and the growing intolerance of “contradiction, conflict and maverick conduct” in academics’ intellectual lives (Strathern paraphrased in McWilliams & Taylor 2002) will stifle the responsiveness and innovation that governments seek to promote?

These suggestions are based on comments made by ICT educators as they discussed the emergence of these two phenomena. While these developments were generally discussed in familiar terms (that is, in terms of the effectiveness and suitability of evaluation methods and in terms of challenges to academic freedom, respectively), several comments at the fringes of these discussions suggest they might also inhibit innovation in teaching. There is a risk that conflicts that are played out on the ground during the implementation of new systems for assessing, regulating and supporting university teaching, will be seen as an inevitable consequence of a change process and the resulting need for professional development and the reconceptualisation of university teaching work. While this interpretation may have its merits, it needs also to be recognised that systems and processes that require academics to shoehorn their practices into forms that are anticipated by such systems are likely to stifle educational innovation.

This discussion also points to questions requiring further exploration. In respect to student evaluation of teaching, do students resist innovative teaching by scoring it poorly on unit evaluations? Do academics perceive this to be the case? And, if academics do perceive this
to be the case, does it affect their innovation behaviour? In respect to centralised systems for organising and supporting academics’ teaching work, how do these systems affect academics innovation behaviours?

References


