Editors’ Introduction to Special Theme Issue: Meanings Emerging in Practice (Part 1)

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Rationale

This issue publishes the initial set of refereed papers from the first wave proceedings of the 3rd international pedagogies and learning conference, held at the Springfield campus of the University of Southern Queensland in Australia on 27 and 28 September 2007. The first conference in the series (1 to 4 October 2003) explored the theme “New Meanings for a New Millennium”, while the second conference (18 to 20 September 2005) engaged with the proposition of “Meanings under the Microscope”. This third conference took up this focus and shifted attention to “meanings emerging in practice”.

The conference organisers, and the editors of these conference proceedings, consider this examination of the interface between the performance of practice and meaning-making potentially highly significant for understanding and enhancing pedagogies and learning in their myriad contexts and manifestations. In particular, this interface can be seen as the site where ‘macro’ meets ‘micro’, where ‘theory’ encounters ‘practice’ and doubtless where other binaries are enacted and subverted. From this perspective, practice is posited as the place where educational ideas can be tried out, where new strategies can be implemented and evaluated and taken-for-granted assumptions can be questioned. The meanings that emerge in and through and from this practice can then feed into new and more sustainable and even transformative instantiations and institutions of such practice.

35 papers were submitted for refereeing for the first wave proceedings, just over double the number submitted for the first wave of the previous conference. At the time of writing, a few papers are being finalised. Suffice to say that a rigorous process of anonymous peer review was applied to each paper, with approximately 25% of referees’ reports recommending that the paper not be accepted for publication. The editors contend that this statistic is one useful indicator of the quality of the papers appearing in these proceedings, as well as a reflection of authors’ and referees’ commitment to enhancing the standard of scholarship in pedagogies and learning within an international arena. It is expected that the conference’s second wave proceedings will be published in the first part of 2008.
This issue of the journal also marks the first issue published under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning (APACALL). One consequence of the introduction of the Australian Research Quality Framework – whose own quality and impact will hopefully be the subject of future examination – has been to render the position of journals such as this one at once more important and more precarious. The capacity building and empowerment that the editors wish as outcomes of the journal’s operations must be juxtaposed with the largely hidden and unacknowledged work needed to make those operations possible, with resultant potential angst and stress. In that context, APACALL’s invitation to the journal to make its home with such a hospitable and efficient organisation is both timely and welcome.

**Articles in Part 1**

Eight anonymously peer refereed articles have been selected for publication in this initial issue. They are clustered around three of several key themes identified by the conference organisers as applying multiple lenses to the crucial topic of pedagogies and learning being maximised through meanings emerging in practice.

The first three articles take up, from different perspectives, the first theme, ‘researching personal pedagogies’. The first article, by David Giles, deploys the rich concept of phenomenology to explore his experience and understanding of the teacher–student relationship within teacher education at the author’s institution. The result is a lively mix of critical reflection and conceptually framed autobiography, evoking distinctive elements of practice that resonate beyond their institutional boundaries. Humanising the researcher – in the sense of explicating and challenging one’s otherwise taken for granted assumptions and actions – is a worthy goal indeed.

In the second article, Bernadette K. McCabe reflects on her research into her personal pedagogy, which she links with her students’ search for knowledge. In particular, she juxtaposes her own movement from laboratory work and quantitative research to education and a qualitative focus with her nursing students’ initial encounters with studying science. The author explains how the results of survey questionnaires, completed by the students, have informed ongoing modifications to course design and to parallel changes to her practice-based meaning-making.

Andrew Hickey and Jon Austin use the third article to explore the self by means of Freire’s concept of conscientisation and the contemporary method of autoethnography. The authors report selected findings from an ongoing research project recording elements of undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education students’ professional identities. They argue in favour of the concept’s and the method’s utility in facilitating prospective teachers’ movement from the personal to the social and their engagements with key aspects of critical pedagogy.

The next three articles shift the focus from ‘researching personal pedagogies’ to ‘features of successful pedagogical practice’. The fourth article, by Charles Kivunja uses the grounded theory method to analyse the impact of structural reform on the pedagogies and learning enacted in 14 multi-campus senior secondary colleges in New South Wales. On the basis of the study’s findings, the author elicits the New Dynamics Paradigm, consisting of 30 variables, as a framework for interrogating the
meanings emerging in new contexts. More broadly, the study reveals both cognitive and affective dimensions of complex educational change.

In the fifth article, Sara Hammer highlights criterion-referenced assessment as the focus of debates about quality outcomes in learning and teaching and hence about the meanings that can potentially emerge in successful pedagogical practice. The author articulates six principles of ‘best practice’ in using criterion-referenced assessment, based on her critical reading of the literature and her own practice. She also identifies particular challenges in applying those principles in generalist and multidisciplinary programs.

Geof Hill uses the sixth article also to engage with assessment, but from the perspective of promoting quality in academic writing by postgraduate students. The author deployed the dimension of the productive pedagogies framework related to providing explicit assessment criteria as a guide for providing feedback to his students about selected aspects of their academic writing. The article’s appendix elaborates six criteria for effective writing that underpin that provision.

The final two articles move our attention from ‘features of successful pedagogical practice’ to ‘understanding transformative pedagogies’. The seventh article, by Robyn Torok highlights the pedagogical implications of what she advocates: a re-historicisation and increased contextualisation of curriculum that she contends are pre-requisites of teachers be(com)ing transformative professionals. She links these changes with equivalent pressures and responses in educational reform. The author illustrates her argument by reference to selected outcomes of the ongoing Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) project, developed by the Leadership Research Initiative at the University of Southern Queensland.

In the eighth and final article, Jon Austin and Andrew Hickey examine transformative pedagogies from the perspective of meaning-making about white racial identity in initial teacher education. They focus on their conversations with one of their teacher education students, taken from a broader study directed at understanding prospective teachers’ constructions of ethnic and other dimensions of identities. The authors use the analysis of those conversations to generate four types of pedagogical possibilities for change and transformation arising from this kind of focus.

It is clear that these eight articles, and the others to follow in the coming issues of the journal exhibit considerable diversity in the empirical settings in which meanings continue to emerge in the authors’ practice, as well as in the conceptual and methodological resources that are considered useful in identifying and reflecting on those meanings. At the same time, these and the other articles have in common the authors’ shared commitment to seeking current and new meanings and an associated courage in opening their practice up to scrutiny and contestation. That commitment and courage are indeed worthy of emulation across other sites of practice and associated meaning-making.

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- Lindy Abawi (Education Queensland, Australia)
- Mohammad Aliakbari (University of Southern Queensland, Australia)
- Clint Arizmendi (Independent Scholar, Australia)
- Nan Bahr (University of Queensland, Australia)
- Kathy Baker (Central Queensland University, Australia)
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- Susan Bolt (Curtin University of Technology, Australia)
- Lorelle Burton (University of Southern Queensland, Australia)
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- Kaye Cleary (University of Southern Queensland, Australia)
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- Russell Cross (University of Melbourne, Australia)
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- Geoff Danaher (Central Queensland University, Australia)
- Mike Danaher (Central Queensland University, Australia)
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