

For sustained research informed and imaginative curricula design, assessment and teaching resources that are effective with diverse learners in teacher education programs.

Overview

With a 20 year history as a teacher educator at James Cook University, this nomination outlines my long term commitment to supporting student learning, particularly diverse learners in regional Queensland. My work has spanned a range of areas: working in Indigenous education initiatives; extensive teaching in the subject *Studies of Society and the Environment* and the subject *Education for Cultural Diversity*; teaching leadership positions as Director of Professional Experience and more recently the Director of the Remote Area Teacher Education Programme (RATEP).

My goals as a teacher educator have been shaped by my previous teaching in schools, predominately in low socio-economic areas and with significant populations of Indigenous students. My initial appointment at JCU was as a support tutor within the Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (AITEP), a nationally and internationally recognised innovative program committed to increasing the number of qualified Indigenous teachers. The over 500 graduates from this program plus over 100 from the RATEP program helped develop my "robust hope" in the potential of tertiary teaching for social change. My personal and professional life reflects a commitment to the region which this university serves and, hence, I have a deep appreciation of the significant challenges facing the region, including the need to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. In my role as Director of Professional Experience (since 2005), I have extended my long term commitment to sustained and respectful contact with local schools and teachers. As noted in my referee's statements, this regular contact with schools ensures that my curricula goals, design, pedagogy and assessment practices are grounded in the reality of teachers' work as they deal with the educational challenges and the diverse learners of the region. My long term commitment and goals for my own teaching reflect recent national priorities as expressed in the 2008 Bradley report, specifically increased success for "groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas" (p xi).

In this nomination I provide evidence from students, peers as well as my research publications related to teaching to demonstrate how my curriculum design and teaching practice has enhanced student learning.

Criteria 2: Development of curricula, resources and services that reflect a command of the field

Within teacher education, 'command of the field' has a double edge as 'curricula, resources and service' are integral to the field, thus, I consciously design curricula and resources which model principles that I would want students to put into practice in their own teaching. To facilitate their learning, I promote the use of metacognition and metalanguage so that students are better able to reflect on their learning. I also model good practice in my teaching and am constantly engaged in updating curricula and resources to reflect current policies and practices in schools at the same time as engaging students with research that informs the field.

Implementing research-informed approaches to learning and teaching:

My design of curricula is informed by deep understanding of curriculum theory and practice. It has been informed, and is informed, by my PhD research into exemplary teaching practices for Indigenous students and in 2008 an action research project *Disadvantaged Students in Independent Schools Queensland* with Professor Nola Alloway and one of my former AITEP students who is now a colleague, Juanita Sellwood. While the focus of this research is pedagogy, research findings add to my understanding of curriculum theory which emphasises the tight integration of outcomes, content, pedagogy, assessment and interpersonal relationships.

While I have always had a passionate interest in curriculum and pedagogy, the recent attention to assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning in both school and university sectors has provided me with opportunities to become excited about assessment as a key component of curricula design. This was prompted in 2003 when, in my position at the time as school curriculum coordinator, I organised a school wide one day workshop focusing on assessment for learning based mainly on the work on McInnes and Devlin (2002) and within the context of JCU emerging assessment policies. Similarly, assessment for learning/ assessment as learning has had a significant influence on recent developments in Queensland school curriculum and the design of my subjects models constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003) in its focus on assessment as a key aspect of curricula for student learning. As Klenowski (2008, p.140) notes, "assessment is the key to good education and is inseparable from curriculum". Thus my curricula design works from the development of rich authentic assessment tasks which require engagement with curricula content and pedagogy to promote learning.

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Student feedback on subject design and delivery as outlined in Table 1 demonstrates the positive impact of my efforts to tightly align outcomes, pedagogy and assessment where I have been the subject coordinator, lecturer and tutor, and supervised any additional tutors.

Table 1: Percentage of students with satisfaction levels of 4 (more than acceptable) and 5 (outstanding) 2003-2007 on key SFS indicators of course design and delivery

Questions	2003	2005	2007
1 The quality of the learning experiences in this subject was	51	62	85
2 The interest level generated by this subject was	48	67	84
4 The organization and structure of this subject was	45	71	84
9 The level to which we accomplished the aims of the subject was	45	63	84

As noted above, my curricula design is based on a tight alignment of outcomes, pedagogy and assessment and I provide students with a clear coherence of the subject outcomes, content, resources and assessment tasks that promote and support learning. Student appreciation of my command of assessment issues is illustrated by Table 3 which indicates the percentage of students who experience very high levels of satisfaction with the subject ED3190.

Table 2: Percentage of students with satisfaction levels of 4 (more than acceptable) 5 (outstanding) 2003-2007 on key SFS indicators of assessment design and support

Questions	2003	2005	2007
3. The explanations given by staff in this subject were	55	62	77
5. The quality of information provided about assessment requirements was	55	58	84
6. The quality of comments on assessed work was	33	47	77
7. The specification of criteria used to assess work was	52	54	77
8. Staff interest in assisting students to learn in this subject was	64	75	92

My close connection with schools has allowed me to develop professional relevant authentic assessment in very productive ways. Students value my use of carefully scaffolded unit plans, authentic scenarios and well developed criteria as evident in the following feedback:

Table 3: Indicative feedback 2003 to 2007

Student Feedback
Helen was extremely helpful with regard to her availability to students. Sose was a well run subject and generated many good ideas for future educational endeavours.
I was extremely impressed with the lecturer/tutor in this subject. The preparation that went into both the lectures and tutorials was outstanding. The style in which Helen delivers her lectures etc is unique and the variety of activities
The way the subject was organised for the students was the best thing I had ever come across while at JCU
The best part of this subject is actually producing an assessment item that I learnt from and will use in the future. It applies and culminates all the learning process up until now.
I loved the fact that we got to actually develop a unit of work. That was very useful going into our final year of uni. It was hands on and very relevant. It sorted moulded everything we already know together, and by the end of the semester it all just had 'clicked'.
I really enjoyed the unit plan assessment and the assessment fit the subject perfectly!! Thank you for an amazing journey Helen!!!
I appreciated that our assessment was made as authentic as possible. Helen gave us lots of practical tips for our classrooms.

I am particularly committed to the provision of clear assessment guidelines for all students. Scott Bradey, Manager Learning Technologies, JCU, comments:

I particularly value Helen's ability to write detailed information in unambiguous, plain English and structure it in a way that makes it accessible and doable for students. I have frequently used Helen's subject outlines, criteria sheets, and subject web sites as best practice exemplars in Teaching and Learning workshops.

Her criteria sheets for example, are written in a way that clearly delineates the difference between each level of achievement for each dimension that is being assessed. This has been enormously beneficial for students to get a handle on what is required of them for each assessment task as they grapple with new theories and practices in a professional domain.

My attention to explicitness has the specific goal of ensuring those students under-represented in university participation rates are not disadvantaged by the taken-for-granted understandings of "insiders". This is particularly important for

Indigenous students studying via RATEP who may not have access to the many informal supports available to students from more privileged educational backgrounds.

My understanding of curricula design is also evident in the changes I made in *Secondary Curriculum* and *Key Learning Areas 1*, a core six point subject within a one year Graduate Diploma of Education. This subject anchors the program and involves a number of academics as students study different components depending on their elected secondary areas of teaching. In 2007, this subject scored an average 3.05 on teaching-related SFS questions. Students expressed concerns about the lack of integration in the subject, therefore, when I took over the coordination of the subject in 2008, I restructured it to include core curriculum issues which I taught, and to ensure there was comparability between the experiences and assessment of students irrespective of the specific teaching areas they elected. Subsequently, the average SFS score on teaching related questions increased by 16% to 3.54. The improvements in the subject also contributed to improved retention rates in 2008. Based on professional experience placements, the retention rate in 2008 was 22.3% better than in 2007.

My command of the field is also evident in my publications particularly in the bestseller text, 'Studying Society and Environment' which is in its third edition. My contribution to this text focuses on curricula design and delivery in Social and Environmental Education and also my commitment to equity through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives.

- McDonald, H. (2004). Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in SOSE. In R. Gilbert (Ed.), *Studying society and environment: A guide for teachers 3rd Ed* (pp.153 – 169). Southbank, Vic: Social Science Press.
- McDonald, H. (2004). Planning for practice. In R. Gilbert (Ed.), *Studying society and environment: A guide for teachers 3rd Ed* (pp. 37 – 55). Southbank, Vic: Macmillan.
- Hoepfer, B. and McDonald, H. (2004). Critical inquiry in SOSE: The big picture. In R. Gilbert (Ed.), *Studying society and environment: A guide for teachers 3rd Ed* (pp. 37 – 55). Southbank, Vic: Macmillan.

This text includes chapters by many of the most respected writers and researchers in the area of social and environmental education in Australia and my inclusion in the text provides clear evidence of the peer esteem beyond the university. We are currently negotiating the fourth edition.

Developing and presenting coherent and imaginative resources for student learning:

Throughout my teaching career at James Cook University, I have prepared course materials for a range of subjects and a range of delivery modes. These include core early childhood and primary education subjects- *Studies of Society and the Environment*; and *Cultural Diversity* for all areas of the program- ECE, Primary and Secondary. I have also taught a range of subjects linked to curriculum theory. Delivery has spanned on-campus internal mode subjects, distance mode subjects and blended delivery modes for the RATEP program. For Indigenous students studying in remote communities and for whom English may be a second language, online interaction with course materials and presence of teaching staff are critical to supporting their learning and overcoming their sense of isolation in their study. To provide RATEP students with an effective and user-friendly learning online platform, I have led many developments for the School of Education in the use of Blackboard- with meticulous and precise design features that enable students to easily navigate and maintain interest. Furthermore, I have also included podcasts for students in both on campus and remote locations to provide them with learning environments that cross platforms of multi-medium. To enhance the virtual interaction with RATEP students, I am facilitating fellow RATEP lecturers in trialing the use of "Elluminate" an online interactive learning environment which gives students a more interpersonal 'live' engagement. Students and peers recognise and appreciate the rich learning experience in my use of the new electronic media. As Scott Bradey Manager, Learning Technologies at JCU, comments:

Helen's use of the online learning environment for teaching both on-campus and external students is equally as accessible. Her site is structured around student activity, use of rich media, engagement with real life examples, current issues in teaching and learning, critical thinking, and peer interaction. Helen uses technology thoughtfully in ways that enable and support learning rather than simply because the tools are available.

My work in *Social and Environmental Education for Early Childhood and for Primary School* epitomises the resource rich environment that I see as fundamental in teacher education. While an inquiry approach to learning is advocated as the most appropriate in Social and Environmental Education, many students report that in their own school careers, learning in this area was largely based on text book readings and worksheets. To be competent facilitators of inquiry learning in SOSE, student teachers need to experience resource rich inquiry learning themselves. Therefore, I design and select resources that reflect multiple perspectives, make use of a variety of text types, including authentic, community based and multimedia texts and provide scaffolds for the collection and analysis of data. Being cognisant that students have

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diverse interests, I support their learning and inclinations by catering to a range of learning preferences through visual representations, narratives, music and drama.

Student comments since 2003 highlight how the effective use of resources is seen as highly relevant to their future work as teachers:

Table 4: Indicative feedback 2003 to 2007

Year	Student Feedback
2003	The level of presentation really assisted to prepare classroom teachers.
2004	The teaching of practically useful strategies which could be taken straight into the classroom was brilliant.
2005	Very informative and interesting subject. Provides pre-service teachers with a great opportunity to engage in 'hands-on' unit planning. Suggested resources to assist preservice teachers (with planning and ideas) was outstanding and consistent throughout the course
2006	Enjoyable and interesting subject when it could have been boring and old hat! I have found examples of ways to make this subject interesting to my future students.
2006	Best aspect was the real life relevance to teaching in schools.
2007	The sequence of learning experiences was excellent for remembering new knowledge (exam) and then building on this foundation with applied assessment (resources, rationale and unit plan).
2007	Helen is keen to help us pass the subject by providing support in relation to assessment items. Activities we could do with students were presented in workshops. Discussion formed part of our lectures which added interest for me.

Statement of contribution

My teaching career has been characterised by a commitment to quality teaching especially for students from diverse, disadvantaged backgrounds. JCU's goal to "produce graduates with the expertise and intellectual curiosity required for sustainable development of our communities" (JCU strategic intent) combined with Bradley's focus on participation by disadvantaged learners reflect my robust hope in the power of transformative teaching. As a teacher, I am excited by the potential changes that will come with the Bradley report's goal to increase the proportion of students from disadvantaged groups to 20 per cent by 2020. I believe that my contribution to student learning to date will position me well to respond positively to this challenge. Further, my ongoing teaching in RATEP confirms my ability to develop research informed and imaginative curricula, assessment and teaching resources that can promote meaningful relevant deep learning for disadvantaged groups. This is evident in the following sample feedback from RATEP students:

- *Helen is outstanding in making sure that all students succeed in RATEP. Her explicit teaching has made me want to take risks without feeling like I have failed when in fact I can turn it around and try something new while still gaining pleasure from my mistakes.*
- *She explained very clearly what was expected of us and was very supportive and patient. She is brilliant. She made my understanding of unit planning, using a topic very easy and I will be using that unit in my practicum this year.*
- *Over the years I have found Helen to be very helpful. Obviously studying by distance means that we don't have that face to face contact but Helen is always very prompt in returning emails or phone calls and is more than happy to help clarify any issues that I have. I find her teleconferences relevant to what we are working towards (assessment) and she is always friendly and eager to hear what we have to say.*

The learning needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have always been at the forefront of my curriculum design and course delivery. My command of this field is acknowledged by QUT's Professor Annette Patterson (also Director on the Board of Teaching Australia):

Helen's curriculum design is informed by a unique blend of social justice and professional practice – she is committed to developing effective curricula for teachers working in diverse, regional and rural environments. [...]Helen is widely acknowledged as an expert in the field of curriculum design, social justice and teaching practice. She is regularly called upon to offer advice ... Helen is considered to be one of Australia's foremost experts in the area.

University recognition of my expertise and commitment to enhance student learning is also evidenced by invitations to present in the 2006 *Teaching and Learning Symposium* and successful applications of teaching and learning grants, such as *Focus on Professional Standards, Collaborative and Reflective Approaches to Teacher Education* in 2006 and *Reframing Assessment Tasks: A Catalyst for Reform* in 2007. Furthermore, my sustained contribution to service learning is a significant factor in my appointment as Director of Professional Experience and Director of RATEP.

This nomination showcases my commitment and service to student learning which is principally demonstrated by my research informed and reality-conscious curricular, assessment and resource design as well as explicit pedagogy that support the diverse learning needs of JCU students and particularly those who are under-represented in tertiary education.