

For outstanding leadership in developing a flexible learning environment in teaching Law, based on critical reflection and in response to evidence of student needs.

Overview and Context of Contribution

Over 5 years of tertiary teaching I have observed students grapple with the challenges of contemporary tertiary study. My observations of the competing imperatives in our students' lives are borne out by national studies (eg Universities Australia, 2007), and my own research (Galloway, 2008). As a critically reflective teacher I recognise teaching as a process of 'learning and change' (Brookfield, 1995) and accordingly, I observe and assess students' learning needs and their responses to my teaching to develop and adapt my teaching practice and to lead my colleagues in evolving a sustainably flexible learning environment in our Law School. This represents a systematic approach to developing and promoting a learning environment in which students can control their learning (Kift, 2005). I strive therefore to create a student-centred learning environment that frees students from constraints on their learning imposed by the curricular dimensions of *time*, *place* and *organisation* in the traditional Law curriculum. This is my interpretation of a *flexible learning* environment. My teaching practice is not however driven by flexibility for its own sake, but is informed by pedagogy so that I 'make informed decisions in relation to students' developmental needs and [place their] best interests at the heart of planning' (James, 2001). Likewise, leading change in the wider curriculum is informed by a desire to 'extend the good teacher' (Collis & De Boer, 1998).

Teaching in the Bachelor of Laws (LLB) in Australia and overseas continues to be a fairly traditional and formal mode of content-focussed delivery (Davis, 2008). This is so in the JCU Law School, a small school teaching across two regional campuses separated by some 350km. My students' flexible learning environment contrasts with the traditional notion of legal education as fixed in time, place and organisation, yet without becoming an 'external' or 'distance' mode of teaching. Indeed our law students seek *more* face to face contact with academic staff (Galloway, 2008) but outside the limitations of formal timetabling.

What sets my approach apart from other approaches to flexible learning is the context within which the Law curriculum traditionally operates; my critically reflective approach based on extensive use of evidence to justify flexible learning as a means to address contemporary student needs; and my drive to influence systemic changes to the way my Law School teaches Law to our students, to create a better fit for our own students' learning needs.

Criterion 1: Approaches to the support of learning and teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn

My philosophy of teaching centres on empowerment of the student as a learner. Initially based on anecdotal evidence and then Australia-wide studies (eg Universities Australia, 2007) since first teaching in 2004, I have considered that I would best empower students to learn based on evidence of what our students identify that they need and how they learn (Ramsden, 2003). I find resonance in the comment that: '[t]he way students perceive and understand their learning environment and the way they approach their learning in relationship to these perceptions have been found to be major intervening factors between teachers' teaching and students' learning outcomes' (Boud & Prosser, 2002). My approach is therefore evidence based, a 'hallmark of a professional approach to teaching' (Ramsden, 2003).

I have used student feedback since 2004 to assess aspects of student learning. I encourage an open dialogue with students in class time to understand the impact of my teaching and what students need to inspire learning. Based on this evidence, I reflect critically on the curriculum in all its dimensions in light of its responsiveness to these needs, and adjust or innovate in the curriculum or aspects of it, to achieve this goal. Three examples of this approach lie in my use of *time* and *place* outside formal university-scheduled teaching settings – that is, flexibly.

First, in response to my students' competing priorities in life, I support students to learn skills and to engage in their learning outside timetabled face-to-face sessions. In O-week each year since 2006, I have provided law students with an introduction to legal writing skills. This initial session allows students to move outside scheduled class time and outside regular content, in a 'low-stakes' environment while engaging in authentic skill development. Feedback confirms that students find it provides 'highly relevant information' and 'increases confidence'. In an unsolicited email, one student wrote '...your workshop last Friday was excellent! I went away feeling excited about starting my course for the first time during o week!'. Furthermore, my surveys reveal that attendees are more likely to attend writing workshops run by learning advisers during semester, indicating that my workshops motivate students to learn.

In response to positive student feedback, I build on the workshop's foundations from the first week of semester in the LLB first year program, using a range of complementary resources I have developed such as checklists for student self-assessment of writing, and podcasts, both of which are available in all first year subject sites and also through the Learning Centre website. My use of a podcast in this way was a first at JCU, and has resulted in development of a number of podcast resources from other schools. The scheduling of the initial workshop and location of supporting

resources online represents my flexible or student-centred approach to teaching – facilitating student learning at a time and place that fits the student's own needs.

Secondly, through observation of the low numbers of students who approach me during my scheduled consultation times, I have reflected on the nature of the power relationship between teacher and student. In response, and in accordance with my philosophy of student empowerment and flexible practice, for a number of years I have moved from *my* environment (office) to my students' own 'place' in the Learning Centre or library. I encourage students to participate there in small group or individual discussion with me, or their peers, on topics of concern, assessment tasks and topical legal issues. Since introducing this flexibility of *place*, the quality of students' on course assessment tasks has improved, indicating improved motivation to learn. The sessions achieve almost universal student engagement with written feedback on assessment tasks, where beforehand very few students had collected assessment or sought advice on feedback. I have also used the sessions to support student learning through ready access to university support services co-located in the meeting venue, with higher referral rates than before holding the sessions. Based on the consistently high rate of attendance at these sessions, across 1st, 2nd and 4th year subjects, students value this approach. These results, arising from a pedagogy of engagement and communication, indicate how my adaptation of curricular dimensions of time and place to meet students' desire for flexibility, motivates students to learn.

Thirdly, I have extended the concept of rendering time and place more flexible through development of a variety of online learning resources including podcasts, quizzes and blogs, to inspire student learning. For example, my 2nd year subjects are renowned for their dry and sometimes complex concepts. I observed students' need for support in building confidence with threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2003), yet few students would ask questions during tutorials, or seek me out for help. I became an early user (since 2006) of 'podcasting' at JCU, adapting audio and web-based technologies to inspire student learning as a complement to scheduled class time. Five minute 'snapshots' of weekly lectures' key themes; explanations of concepts; and targeted guidance on approaches to applying knowledge to problem-style questions using this technology has underpinned effective student learning in these subjects through students' ability to access my (audio) explanations of the concepts, in their own time and place. Online quizzes to encourage students to apply their knowledge and self-assess their grasp of these concepts, support this tool and address the student need for engagement during their own time, in their own place.

Student use of my podcasts and quizzes is very high. In semester I, 2008, the 119 students across both campuses accessed *the first podcast alone*, 342 times, indicating multiple usage. These figures are supported my research that 60.4% of our students find podcasts 'appealing' as a means of flexible learning (Galloway, 2008). Students report using podcasts to 'reinforce the main points of a lecture' and to 'review [their] notes': this resource motivates students to learn through their ability to control when and where they engage and re-engage with their lecturer's explanation of concepts essential to their learning. Qualitative feedback confirms this: 'Kate's podcasts are an excellent assistance to learning...'; 'she ...provided a lot of assistance outside of the lectures. the podcasts that she done (sic) were excellent'; '[podcasts are] by far the most helpful tool that I have encountered seeing (sic) commencing my studies at JCU...' Likewise, one quiz was accessed by a cohort of 119 students some 115 times and another 182 times in one semester (indicating multiple attempts). Student feedback such as 'Kate makes a dry subject interesting' confirms my motivation of student learning in these subjects.

Another example of online learning resources is my use of blogs in a 1st year subject in response to geographically separated campuses and evidence in the wider literature of increasing student disengagement (McInnis, 2001). With a colleague I designed an assessment task involving blogs to encourage a learning community accessible by our students in their own time and place. A series of lower-stakes assessments in the blog medium provide opportunity for development of writing and critique skills and benchmarking of students' own work ('I like seeing the standards of other students' work to get a feel for how I'm going'). Over one semester, blog groups of 15-20 users, with approximately 50-75 entries, attracted 351-726 views – students 'like seeing what other students have to say'. This indicates the level of engagement in learning engendered through a breaking down of the constraints of time and place on student interaction in their learning. This approach motivated students to learn.

The design and integration of these resources into overall subject design demonstrate a systematic, sustained and reflective approach to supporting and motivating student learning through development of a flexible learning environment.

Criterion 5: Scholarly activities and service innovations that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching

My scholarly activities focus on leadership to enhance learning and teaching within the Law School. I have supported student learning through influence on and enhancement of teaching in the Law School and more widely across JCU, through sharing my knowledge of the application of educational technologies and my approach to development of

flexible curricula. In 2006 on the basis of my approach I was invited to address students in the Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary Teaching) on curriculum redevelopment. I have led change to teaching approaches in the Law School through introducing my conceptualisation of flexible learning as a student-centred evidence-based response to fixed dimensions of curriculum that constrain student learning. In March 2009, I was invited to address the School of Business Teaching Workshop on approaches to flexible learning. Engagement over many years with the scholarship of teaching and learning and my development of a system for curricular responses to flexible learning and teaching practice, resulted in my leading a (successful) application (2007) for a JCU special initiatives grant to lead the Law School Flexible Learning Project (2008). The Project aimed to identify how the Law School could best meet our students' learning needs through 'flexible learning'; and how to embed this practice within the LLB. I established the project methodology involving: reviewing the literature to benchmark our practice; surveying all LLB students to ascertain how *our* students learn (focussing on flexible learning); surveying academic staff teaching in the LLB 4th year to ascertain their experience and understanding of flexible learning and their role as teachers; and working with academic staff to assess 4th year curricula, trialling a range of flexible approaches to enhance student learning.

My activities in the Project, grounded in my long-term teaching practice, have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching in three ways.

First, I have used the student survey I designed and conducted to lead changes in teaching and learning in the Law School. I have used survey results generally to inform my colleagues in the Law School of our students' learning needs, and have used the results specifically in supporting development of teaching practice amongst my colleagues. For example, I supported colleagues to design curricula for block mode subjects taught contemporaneously over the summer break. In doing so, I was seeking to develop the pedagogical foundation for 'block mode' where students had appreciated its flexibility of time and organisation of their study units but found it an often unsatisfactory learning experience. Taking a systematic evidence-based approach resulted in my providing a clear strategy for staff. First, this intensive period of face-to-face learning preceded a hiatus before the final exam. I developed a range of resources and assessments to support ongoing student learning during this time, focussing on engagement through flexibility in time and place. Second, an explicit organisation of face-to-face time using activities, student 'down-time' and a move away from the traditional mode of law teaching centred on content, helped to support flexibility of the subject's own processes, encouraging student reflection during scheduled (inflexible) block teaching time, and engagement with academic staff and with other students.

Secondly, I have led Law School staff in rethinking the organisation of the LLB curriculum. In contrast with other degrees, undergraduate law degrees (subject to professional accreditation requirements) traditionally do not provide majors thus leaving students with little guidance in focussing their interests and aptitudes. My student survey highlighted the impact on student learning of the inflexibility of curricular *organisation* to support students in selecting pathways for their learning. In response, I aligned LLB elective subjects into identifiable programs to offer more coherent yet flexible pathways to support student learning. The programs offer students a clear means for course design, through an explicit statement of subject outcomes. I secured agreement amongst Law School staff for this approach, through a two day staff retreat at which this issue was on the agenda. I called the retreat as a means to disseminate the Project findings, and to encourage ownership by Law School staff in the approach we would take to embed flexible learning in the LLB. I organised the agenda and the program, and identified outcomes to be achieved. There was a high level of engagement by staff with the ideas I led, and consensus was reached as to the need for alignment of elective programs, amongst other things. I am presently integrating this strategy into the LLB. This reflects a foundation of student engagement, and responsiveness to students' self-identified learning needs, namely their call for flexible pathways to support their learning, as well as indicating leadership in curriculum design within the School.

Thirdly, my critically reflective practice extends from my teaching and informs my approach to leading development of teaching practice within the School. I recognise the importance of drawing on the experience and beliefs of our teaching staff rather than imposing 'power-coercive strategies' or a default *ad hoc* 'reliance on innovators' (Phillips, 2005). I therefore adopted a 'middle-out' (not top down) approach to leading change in the Law School (Phillips, 2005) recognising that the 'degree to which the innovation can be tried out in non-threatening and experimental circumstances' and the 'degree to which the efforts made will be observed and valued by others' are key factors in the uptake of innovation (Collis & Moonen, 2001). The effectiveness of my approach in encouraging professional development in teaching is evidenced by the extent of Law School staff engagement in my initial survey (13 out of a possible 18 staff participated). I have influenced teaching practice from the earliest stages of the Project, through encouraging and supporting dialogue and reflection on teaching practice in the context of flexible learning.

My subsequent work with Law School staff to develop flexible curricula and subject resources based on my literature review, student and staff surveys, and my own practice over time, has already resulted in wider adoption of approaches to flexible learning in the Law School, including increased uptake of learning technologies (eg digital audio) available

online; FAQ sites within subjects; face-to-face tutor support for video-linked classes; and more widespread use of online communication tools such as discussion boards. This has occurred in an environment with traditionally limited use of educational technologies and a relatively traditional, fixed approach to teaching and learning. In each case, I have supported staff to articulate the pedagogies underpinning their introduction of this resource or approach, focussing on constructive alignment, student engagement and equitable access with the outcome of improved support for student learning.

Statement on sustained student learning, engagement and recognition

The effectiveness of my approach to teaching and my students' experience of their learning in subjects I have taught is demonstrated by my consistently high scores in student feedback surveys. In 2008, my results for 'motivating students' were between 4-4.7 (out of 5). In 2007 'quality of learning experiences' was rated between 4.5-4.7. My achievement of consistently high scores has been recognised by a Faculty Teaching Award in 2007. Each semester from 2006, for all my subjects, students have predominantly rated me as *more than acceptable* or *outstanding* in their responses. For example, the overall quality of my teaching was rated by 84%-92.9% of students as *more than acceptable* or *outstanding*. Comments such as 'Kate made a great effort to motivate the students...' and 'Kate...makes you want to learn to achieve the best possible outcome' confirm these results. Similarly, 81%-88% of students rated my use of teaching aids as *more than acceptable* or *outstanding*, supporting an inference that my use of educational technologies has supported student learning. (See also student comments above.)

My leadership has had very positive outcomes for the changing profile of teaching and learning in the Law school. This is apparent from the willingness of my colleagues to be involved in the Flexible Learning Project I have led, and their ongoing support for and adoption of more flexible teaching practice to support student learning. In addition to participation in the staff survey (above), feedback from staff at the retreat indicates that they were highly satisfied with the outcomes of the retreat, and that in fact a consensus was reached. Staff acknowledged my leadership of the retreat and cited the retreat's positive aspects as including: 'discuss different models and get us thinking in a similar direction'; 'learning what people think of flexible learning'; 'engaging with staff on issues which we rarely get a chance to discuss as a group'. Consensus could not have been achieved without recognition by my colleagues of my sustained contribution to student learning.

The Law School has recognised my contribution to student-centred teaching through my appointment in 2007 (continuing) as joint First Year Experience Coordinator. My contribution to the practice of flexible learning was recognised in 2008, with explicit responsibility for leading development of flexible learning. In 2009 I was appointed the Law School's Director of Teaching and Learning.

My contribution to supporting student learning through flexible practice has been recognised more widely within JCU also. I was invited in 2008 to join the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee and the JCU Flexible Learning Committee, and since 2006 I have regularly been invited by other faculties, schools and divisions within JCU to address academic staff on my work in flexible learning – both in development of resources and in approaches to curriculum: eg in 2006 on the basis of my approaches to student learning, I was invited to address students in the Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary Teaching) on curriculum redevelopment; and in April 2009 I led a JCU Teaching and Learning Development workshop on assessment using Web 2.0. I have also been approached by academic staff from around the university to work with them on a one-on-one basis, developing online resources to support student learning. My involvement in so many university teaching and learning activities evidences the recognition I enjoy from fellow staff and the institution, of my contribution to student learning through the development of a flexible learning and teaching environment, in response to evidence of student needs and best practice pedagogy. Dr Nick Szorenyi-Reischl, Director of Teaching & Learning Development at JCU, has said that 'Kate Galloway has shown outstanding leadership in responding to the challenges of teaching Law in the face of the changing student cohort. Her evidence based work is a model for this university and beyond... As ...Ramsden has recently stressed, universities need to find new ways to be successful and Kate is in the front line of such change.'

More widely, in response to my survey of our students and how they learn, Dr Dale Spender, author and educational consultant, has commented that for me 'to actually have some data, to have asked students what they have, what they use and what they like, is almost unknown...' Following a national workshop on assessment in tertiary education, Professor Rosalind Mason, Head of QUT Law School, wrote that she had 'recommended [me to her colleagues] as a reflective practitioner ... to inform how to select and design units [in contextual (law) and complementary (non-law) electives in the revised LLB at QUT]'.