Putting educational strategy in its place

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Slides and references to accompany a talk at the Future Teaching & Learning in Higher Education Conference, Melbourne, March 2019.

These will be updated after the event.

Peter Goodyear
My work .. over the last 30 years or so

How do the key participants in teaching and learning in HE make sense of the challenges and opportunities?

Especially with the added complexities of:
- digital technologies
- active and collaborative learning
- new learning spaces
- light (or no) direct supervision


https://petergoodyear.net
On a basket of research and teaching output measures, Australian universities perform very well, especially when compared to input of financial resources.

Williams, R., & Leahy, A. (2018). *U21 ranking of national higher education systems*. Melbourne
**Student Issues** (Australian data; mostly QILT)

In general, Australian students rate their experiences highly – comparable with UK & US data

**BUT**

- 20% of first year students & **25%** of final year students rate their experience **negatively**

- 50% of students report they **do not feel as sense of belonging with their university**; only interact with other students when course requires; **not interacting with students ‘very different’ from selves**

- 50% do not feel they get useful **feedback**
**Staffing Issues** (Australian data)

**Tenured core vs tenuous periphery** (Megan Kimber, 2003)

**Tenuous periphery (precariat)**
- HE has 3rd highest proportion of casualised workers (after retail & health)
- 2012: 80% of first year undergrad teaching done by casual staff
- 2017: 94.5k people working casually; 123k on fixed-term or perm contracts
- Casual staff rarely included in course & curriculum planning meetings etc

**Tenured core**
- Intensification, job fragmentation & burnout
  - In conflict with educational innovation

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doi:http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjhe20
Putting Educational Strategy in its Place

(also) means integrating educational, digital and learning space strategies

Raises deep questions about the university itself, what university is for, what the campus is for, etc.

Doubts
Complexity
Risk

Photos by Mikael Kristenson Lucrezia Carnelos and Filip Bunkens on Unsplash
**Education(al) Strategy** – also known as Learning and Teaching Strategy

**Relatively new** and taking shape quite quickly

- The use of explicit education (L&T) strategies in universities is relatively new (early to mid 1990s in Australia & the UK)
- Originally understood and implemented in very diverse ways (Gibbs et al 2000)
- But now characterized by a great deal of convergence (policy sharing, benchmarking, national QA regimes etc)

**Purpose** of an education strategy is to:

- focus attention, harness activity and resources,
- galvanise people and processes into action,
- align internal systems, and raise awareness of external pressures

all in order to achieve the education mission

Education Strategy

Is meant to help the multifarious members of the university co-ordinate some key parts of their work

help align the university’s deeper purposes and values with distinctive programs, intended graduate capabilities, course, curriculum and assessment designs compatible with the formation of those capabilities

establish desiderata for congenial learning environments

intersection of education strategy and (complex integrated) learning spaces

where education strategy comes to land

complex = material-digital-hybrid-nested & in flux


The Study: Semi-structured interviews with 3 kinds of leaders

Education leaders ≈ Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) DVC(E)

IT leaders ≈ Chief Information Officer (CIO)

Facilities leaders ≈ Director of Estates (DoE)

Ellis, R., & Goodyear, P. (4th April 2019).
*The education ecology of universities: integrating learning, strategy and the academy.* Routledge.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DVCEs</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIOs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoEs</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>(of 42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewing Team

Nick Klomp
(formerly DVC Academic U Canberra; VC Central Queensland University)

Bruce Meikle
(formerly CIO University of Sydney)

Kenn Fisher
(Educational architect Woods Bagot & academic, U Melbourne)

Rob Ellis
(formerly Director of eLearning at The University of Sydney;
Dean L&T, Arts, Education & Law Group, Griffith U)
Semi-structured interview questions: DVCEs

1. What university-wide frameworks guide course design at your university?  
   [Note: ‘course design’ interpreted broadly, to include program, course and credential design.]

2. What do the changes and challenges arising in this area mean for university teachers and students?

3. What strategies exist in your institution to address these challenges?

4. What institutional impediments need to be overcome for an effective university teaching and learning system that supports innovative course design?

5. How are effective relations made between new course designs and integrated learning spaces?  
   [Note: ‘Integrated learning spaces’ - integrations of physical and digital spaces, tools, resources etc, with the aim of supporting more ‘seamless’ learning and teaching.]
Semi-structured interview questions: CIos and DoEs

1. How would you define ‘learning space’? To what extent is that definition understood across your institution?

2. What strategies does your institution adopt to plan and develop learning space?

3. What can impede the effective development of learning space?

4. What things would you resolve to improve effective learning space innovation and planning?
DVCEs pulled two ways: balancing QA with enhancement & innovation

“It’s the classic tension, and a healthy one, between quality assurance and quality enhancement. There’s a compliance element to these roles and then at the other end there is a need to innovate... actually you need to create space to think outside the box and to think entrepreneurially as well”

“I don’t think that quality is going to lead to innovation. I think innovation is a different sort of head space. I think it’s a cultural thing for me. It’s about engendering a bit more experimentation for teachers and allowing students to come into the design process a bit more and opening up a little bit how we look at things. So I think to put quality and innovation too close together at this stage, I don’t know if it would be that beneficial. Because it feels to me that it’s a different set of drivers behind them. One is sectoral improvement of quality and the other is about creating a way you can actually support innovation across the piece”
CIOs and Directors of Estates: insufficient detail to map education to space requirements

“The problem is strategy development for learning space is not coordinated. So the university does have a vision 2020 for learning and teaching but that doesn’t specify the physical space. It talks about the activities they want for students and the academics to engage in in the future, but it doesn’t have enough detail to inform the spaces we build. It says we want more real world activities, and says we want less lectures and more collaboration-type activities, but it’s not sufficiently detailed to inform the development of learning space. The IT strategy also does not specify what physical spaces we have to provide”

(Director of Estates)
CIOs and Directors of Estates: **funding** (DVCEs didn’t mention funding)

$\text{Budget}$

$\text{Time}$

$\text{Quality}$

(fitness for purpose)

Slipperiness of language

vs

the concreteness of infrastructure

**Structure of Budgets**

Easier to get capital for a one-off project than the recurrent funding needed to ensure it works & keeps working properly

Central budgets for new capital devs vs delegated & uncertain recurrent budgets for e.g. professional development of teaching staff
Thematic analysis of interview transcripts:
five emerging themes, aka ‘organisational elements’
Five ‘organisational elements’

1. **Strategy** ... the means by which a university community decides on key priorities for courses, curricula, learning and teaching, learning spaces, learning resources, etc over the next time period

2. **Governance** ... the mechanism by which the university implements strategy: how decisions are made, how progress is measured, how priorities are determined

3. **Policy** ... policy frameworks tend to combine both statements of intent and procedural guidance (specifying mandated, desirable and/or prohibited actions). They provide means of connecting higher-level goals and values with specific actions ‘on the ground’.

4. **Management** ... the processes involved in controlling and guiding the activities of the people (teaching staff, providers of infrastructure, etc) whose work directly shapes learning opportunities and learning environments for students

5. **Funding** ... the means by which the university provides resources that enable strategy to be shaped by governance and implemented through management processes; budget structure as well as quantity matters
# Expert judgement: capability and alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements &amp; criteria</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capability criteria</strong></td>
<td>Comprehensive Student-centred Teaching-informed Clear Shared ownership</td>
<td>Representative Integrated Effective Collaborative</td>
<td>Student-centred Outcomes-focused Practical Best practice Externally-aligned</td>
<td>Agile Engaged Quality assured Integrated Effective delivery</td>
<td>Well-structured Balanced Prioritised Risk-managed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alignment criteria</strong></td>
<td>Strategy effectively informs governance, management of its implementation within funding envelopes.</td>
<td>Governance directs strategy and oversees its effective management and funding.</td>
<td>Policy reflects strategy achieved through good governance in ways that can be effectively managed within funding envelope.</td>
<td>Management implements strategy, directed by governance, aligned with policy within funding envelopes.</td>
<td>Funding effectively realises the strategy, directed by governance, aligned with policy and implemented by management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent)
Strategy readiness
(n=39 universities)

Capability
and
Alignment with other
Organisational Elements
All 5 elements
(n=39 universities)

Capability and Alignment between the Organisational Elements
Problematic Areas

1. Quality Assurance (QA) x (Educational) Innovation

2. Professional development of teaching staff

3. Difficulty of integrating/aligning the planning/design of new courses (etc), IT and physical spaces: need for students to be able to move seamlessly between learning spaces

4. Problems in aligning strategy, governance, policy, management and funding

5. Funding and budgeting

6. Outcome measures x understanding processes that produce the outcomes

7. Lack of shared concepts and terminology – esp. in relation to implications of new educational designs for IT and built infrastructure

8. Difficulty of pinning down user requirements:

   Configuring the user: managed customer; stereotypes & averages; folk psychology of teaching & learning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIO</th>
<th>Valued Outcomes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employer satisfaction (ESS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoE</td>
<td>Academic &amp; other graduate attribute outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVCE</td>
<td>Student experience; eval of teaching etc (SES)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core challenge: understanding and (indirectly & partially) shaping learning environments & activity systems
Applied Educational Ecology

Concepts & methods for understanding and shaping local learning systems

Educational ecology is an applied science that studies and shapes learning systems. A learning system is a dynamic coupling of people and the multifarious resources on which they are drawing in order to learn.

People and environments change each other.
Educational Ecology as an Applied Science: four conceptual steps

- From product design to the co-design of services
- From ‘student as managed customer’ to activity systems
- Explaining how the university’s main activity systems function
- Ways and means:
  - Participatory approaches to understanding local learning systems
  - Building capacity; institutional infrastructure: Research-practice partnerships


Other influential work from an ecological perspective


Educational Ecology as an Applied Science: 1

From product design to the co-design of services

- Design of e.g. specifications for assessment tasks; course web-pages; learning hubs – design of products to be handed over to the user

- Co-designed services – part-finished designs to be completed (co-produced) by students, teachers, others; education as a relational service


Educational Ecology as an Applied Science: 2

From ‘student as managed customer’ to activity systems

• Understanding process as well as outcome
• From manipulating correlates of outcomes to creating shared understandings how activity systems function

“The defining characteristic of a situative approach is that instead of focusing on individual learners, the main focus of analysis is on activity systems: complex social organizations containing learners, teachers, curriculum materials, software tools, and the physical environment.”

(Greeno, 2006, 79)


Educational Ecology as an Applied Science: 3

Explaining how the university’s main activity systems function

- Broadly applicable principles about ‘good learning’ (e.g. Schneider & Preckel, 2017)

- Local explanations

  “... it is a mistake to presume that general laws are the only form of useful knowledge. Rather, ecology has been advancing significantly through the development of local causal mechanisms and approaches to testing for their occurrence in systems.”

  (Hammer, Gouvea & Watkins, 2018, 14)


doi:10.1080/02103702.2018.1504887
Educational Ecology as an Applied Science: 4

Ways and means:

Participatory approaches to understanding local learning systems

- Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, Ison)
- Realist Formative Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley)
- Formative Interventions (Engeström)
- Participatory Design-Based Research (Bang et al)

Institutional infrastructure for educational ecology: Research-practice partnerships

- Models for sustainable investment in the capabilities needed to understand how local activity systems function and how to help improve them
- Real, on-going, trusting relationships between researchers and practitioners
- Proven mechanisms for sharing actionable knowledge


Key messages: macro to micro

1. Activities within a university are enmeshed in (seven) much wider ecological zones (Barnett)
2. The university as a self-organising, self-improving system, noting that the capacities for self-regulation and self-improvement depend upon timely flows of actionable knowledge and the means to make and explain evaluative judgements about the quality of the educational work being done
3. Clearer recognition of the importance of materials and their properties: for a better understanding of how the physical (material, digital, hybrid) environment and its tools, artefacts, spaces etc function in educational ecologies.
4. Reimagining the acting and learning student: setting university discourse free from the limitations of individualistic folk psychology (and the ‘managed student’).


Key messages: recursiveness & defragmenting academic life

The value of recursiveness in approaches to analyzing and designing/producing complex (local) learning systems (students, teachers, leaders)

Strategies that resolve rather than exacerbate tensions (esp. between teaching, research & service), e.g.

- Connected Curriculum
- Students as Partners
- Learning to co-design relational services & epistemic environments


Designing for learning; designing for change

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

“The Best Chance for All”

Advancing Australia’s future depends on all its people, whoever and wherever they are, being enabled to successfully engage in beneficial and lifelong learning.

Contributing to: A fair, democratic, prosperous, and enterprising nation; reconciliation with Indigenous Australia; and cultural, civic and intellectual life.

Achieved by: An inclusively designed system with multiple entry and exit points; proactive removal of barriers to participation; and tailored support where needed.

Accountable through: An integrated approach to measuring success at institutional and national levels to align performance with policy objectives.

“The goal should be for all Australians to be able to step in and out of tertiary education throughout their lives and to have the capability and confidence to navigate the ever-changing world of work. ... It is now imperative to genuinely engage with students as partners to find out about their needs, preferences and challenges.”

Designing for learning; designing for change

Lifelong learning is more than a disposition. It involves complex skills and experiences; some of these need to be grounded (physically & socially)

Design thinking and social innovation
(Manzini, 2015; Carvalho & Goodyear, 2018)

Students should be helped to develop the capacities needed to configure future environments for inquiry, learning, problem-solving, decision-taking and action.

These are part of what it means to be an autonomous lifelong, life-wide learner, a capable knowledge worker and a critical citizen.

Such a conception helps align thinking about learning activities and learning environments at each level in a university hierarchy. In its absence, there is a risk of serious conceptual discontinuities between (say) leaders’ strategic plans and students’ everyday experiences.


Thanks & follow up:

e-mail: peter.goodyear@sydney.edu.au

https://petergoodyear.net

@petergoodyear

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ARC DP150104163  (Jan 2015 – Dec 2019)

In R. Barnett & N. Jackson (Eds.), Learning ecologies. Abingdon: Routledge.