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Editorial

The concept of a modern university is based on the combined research and teaching model as set out by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early nineteenth century in Germany, and much recent effort has been expended in attempting to elucidate the so-called research-teaching nexus. Two common results from the literature stand out: firstly, university academics seem to believe the link to their research exists and is important to them in their teaching; secondly, the link resists most attempts to quantify it in any statistically meaningful way. This ghost-like quality only adds to its allure.

In their chosen fields of interest the research focus of academics leads them to a consistent discipline-specific pattern of behaviour. The role of the literature is central to the activity, often hinting at the problems to be tackled in the first place and fulfilling the important role necessary for a sustainable system by allowing one person's finishing point to be the springboard for another.

Given the research background of academics it is fascinating to see the way so many approach teaching with much of the behaviour driven by tradition, habit, and casual consensus. When new teaching strategies are devised they are often implemented with little research and an almost total lack of reference to the education literature. The field is cluttered with a vast array of re-invented wheels.

There are, however, signs of change. In a recent review of publication patterns in engineering education Borrego (2007) noted an increasing rigour in the papers with contributions moving away from the description of classroom innovations towards those that included evidence of the effectiveness of the innovations being described. For the engineering disciplines under investigation this increase in sophistication was linked to the requirements of the U.S. Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, but any external body with a focus on teaching (such as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council) is likely to foster that sort of development.

With the pressures currently facing the Australian university sector (the ERA and its effect on funding, increased local participation rates, continuing engagement in the international student market) it does seem a bad time to be removing one of the key drivers of teaching development, rigour and recognition.

David Walker
Editor

Borrego, M. (2007) Development of Engineering Education as a Rigorous Discipline: A Study of the Publication Patterns of Four Coalitions. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 96(1), 5-18.