Editors' Introduction to Special Theme Issue:
Meanings Under the Microscope (Part 4)

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Articles in Part 4

This is the companion to the three-part inaugural theme issue that constituted Volume 1 of the *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*. In combination, the numbers in that volume published the first wave of the refereed proceedings of the 2nd international pedagogies and learning conference, which was conducted at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland in Australia from 18 to 20 September 2005 with the theme "Meanings Under the Microscope". This special theme issue publishes the articles that make up the second wave of the conference's refereed proceedings – that is, those papers that were submitted after the conference for refereeing and possible publication. As with all refereed articles in the journal, these articles have undergone a rigorous, 'double blind' process of review by at least two anonymous referees.

This section of this editorial introduction presents an overview of the papers making up the conference's second wave of refereed proceedings. As anticipated in the introduction to the previous issue, the next section is a selection of reflections on some of the broader implications raised by the articles in the journal's first four issues that constitute those proceedings.

The first article, by Carol Butler-Made, Jeanne Allen and John Campbell from Central Queensland University in Australia, analyses the roles and experiences of teacher practitioners within the partnership arrangement in that institution's Bachelor of Learning Management degree. The authors cluster the results of a survey questionnaire with such practitioners around two themes distilling the perceived benefits and constraints of that agreement: professional growth and transition. In doing so, they reflect on a question that lies at the heart of all professional networks and partnerships: "What's in it for us?".

In the second article, by Henk Huijser from the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, the author interrogates assumptions underpinning the combined use of two contemporary concepts: the 'Net Generation'; and multiliteracies. Huijser argues for a shift from a teacher- to a learner-directed approach to enacting and engaging these concepts in order to maximise their potential benefits for learners. In doing so, he presents a number of possible strategies for that enactment and engagement.

Tim Davis, Theda Thomas and Alanah Kazlauskas from the Australian Catholic University in Australia use the third article to present an account of a course about reasoning and critical thinking for information systems professionals in the Bachelor of Information Systems degree at their institution. The authors reflect on how the academic team developing the course used action research to inform their pedagogical practices, drawing on successive sets of survey questionnaire data to underpin their analysis. Davis, Thomas and Kazlauskas conclude by advocating the wider consideration and application of both critical thinking and action research in course development in contemporary universities.

The fourth article, by Debra Manning from Monash University in Australia, explores the benefits of lecturers teaching in multicultural classrooms using a phenomenographic approach and metaphor analysis to enrich their pedagogy. The author applies cultural pedagogy as a conceptual lens for reflecting on the strategies that she developed to facilitate shared understanding between her Australian and international students. The article has a clear resonance with wider efforts to achieve the transformative potential of international education.

Vicki Jones, Jun H. Jo and Jeonghye Han from Griffith University in Australia use the fifth article to ponder the possible pedagogical applications and implications of robot-assisted learning. In particular, they argue that software robots can become effective tools in promoting e-learning if their design is based on constructivist learning principles. They provide examples of ways in which such robot technology can help young children to learn in the home environment.

In the sixth article, Abdul Hafeez-Baig, Raj Gurarajan and Vijaya Gurarajan from the University of Southern Queensland in Australia also take up the issue of mobile learning, this time in relation to wireless technologies such as personal digital assistants. The authors conducted a two hour focus group with five information technology undergraduate students to elicit the students' constructions of factors that facilitate and inhibit the wider adoption of mobile learning in tertiary education. They seek both to extend the scale of this preliminary research and to use its findings to elaborate an initial conceptual model of the pedagogical use of wireless technologies.

The seventh article, by Chizuko Suzuki, Yoko Watanabe and Shota Yoshihara from the Nagasaki Junshin Catholic University in Japan and Kyutae Jung from Hannam University and Sujung Min from Kongju National University in the Republic of Korea, examines the pedagogical implications of the collaborative e-learning environment, based on a tutorial device using a bulletin board system, that they established with their English language university students in their respective countries. The authors analyse 851 online messages posted by the students in evaluate the effectiveness of the environment in promoting learning. On the basis of that analysis, they identify three forms of student learning that were actively facilitated by the collaborative environment and particularly by the tutorial system.

The eighth article, by Terry Wrigley from the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom, is based on a presentation intended for the 2nd international pedagogies and learning conference, although the author was unable to attend the conference. Wrigley uses his paper to make a clarion call for a re-examination of the crucial link between social class and academic achievement, facilitated by the concepts of situated

cognition and activity theory. Drawing on a theoretical discussion of recent pedagogical developments and specific examples from successful schools in disadvantaged areas, the author presents a nuanced argument in favour of building carefully planned bridges in contemporary classrooms between symbolic representation and experience.

Reflections

Here we present our own 'editorial synthesis' of the articles that constitute the first and second waves of the refereed proceedings of the 2nd international pedagogies and learning conference and that compose most of the refereed articles included in the first four issues of this journal. That synthesis is necessarily not only restricted in scope by the limited space available here but also idiosyncratic, denoting as it does the editors' individual reflections on some of the topics suggested by the articles. It is likely that different themes would be raised by others reading the full collection of articles; it is also probable that as editors we would see different topics as important if we wrote this synthesis at a different time and/or in a different space.

That point forms the basis of our first reflection: that the meanings attached to and derived from pedagogies and learning are constructed *in situ*, in particular contexts and environments and with specific manifestations of the 'here and now'. This reflection underscores the importance of attending to the 'micro' in engaging with educational issues, which brings with it all the subtle nuances and the multiple layers of lived experience in locally bounded settings. Most if not all of the articles in these conference proceedings have dealt with and dwelt in – with varying amounts of detail – the micro level of those settings.

Our second reflection is that those situated constructions of pedagogical and learning meanings are linked with 'real life' and 'real world' issues and concerns. That is, the articles constituting these proceedings are all concerned in multiple ways with matters that articulate with the aspirations, emotions, fears and hopes of learners, educators and other participants and stakeholders in education. From this perspective, the 'micro' of individual settings is conjoined with the 'macro' of broader factors and forces influencing the effects and effectiveness of those settings.

Our third reflection is that "meanings under the microscope" are discernible and comprehensible only with the aid and application of various kinds of conceptual resources. As the articles in these proceedings have so ably demonstrated, concepts are crucial in making explicit and holding up to accountability and critique the otherwise invisible and taken for granted aspects of educational policy and provision. Concepts also help to make connections and to explicate dissonances and inequities across sites and groups, thereby highlighting the ethical and political dimensions of pedagogies and learning.

Our fourth reflection is that "meanings under the microscope" depend for their identification and interpretation on the deployment of well-designed methodological resources. These resources have been clearly evident in the articles in these proceedings – for example, when authors have tilted the microscope to different angles and have used alternative combinations of lenses in order to ask and address particular research questions and to collect and analyse specific data sets. If investigations into pedagogies and learning are to have any kind of positive impact,

they must conform – and be seen to conform – to the highest contemporary standards of educational research methods.

Our fifth and final reflection is that placing the meanings of pedagogies and learning under the microscope *should* have a positive impact – that doing so should 'make a difference'. In multiple ways, the articles published here have shown their authors' concerns with answering questions, solving problems and generating change – all with the common commitment to enhancing educational processes and outcomes. It is this transformative potential of education – often understood from very different perspectives – that helps to sustain the energy and enthusiasm of learners and educators alike, despite the frequently difficult and frustrating experiences associated with educational provision.

Planning is currently underway for the 3rd international pedagogies and learning conference, scheduled for 26 to 28 September 2007. We anticipate that the conversations and topics represented here and in the proceedings of the first conference will be continued and extended, and also that new discussions and narratives will be initiated, within the framework of that conference. More broadly, we hope that this journal will grow apace and will be seen by increasing numbers of educational practitioners, policy-makers and researchers as a significant site for the exchange of ideas and information that is vital if pedagogies and learning are to continue to receive in the 21st century the focused and respectful attention that they deserve and require.

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