We need...a way of knowing and educating in ways that heal rather than wound us and our world. Palmer 1983, p.2.

This special theme issue of the *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* is entitled "Town and Gown' in the Bush: Contemporary Regional Universities and Transforming Communities' and provides a forum for multiple engagements with the relationships (or lack thereof) between contemporary regional universities and their communities, whether in Australia or in other countries.

Many of the world's most prestigious universities, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg and Yale, are located in regional settings. Indeed in some cases, such as Utrecht, the regional town has developed around the university. Certainly, owing to the concentration of academics and students within a relatively underpopulated location, the atmosphere within a regional university town seems to be quite distinctive.

Such an atmosphere has not always been mutually fruitful, and there is a long history of distrust between the university and the town of which it is ostensibly a part. In the case of Oxford, tensions between townspeople, who resented the university's growing arrogance and authority, and students boiled over on 10 February 1354, the Feast of Scholastica: 'The countrymen advanced crying...'Smyt fast, give gude knocks'....Such Scholars as they found...they killed or maimed, or grievously wounded....Our mother the University of Oxon, which had but two days before many sons is now almost forsaken and left forlorn' (Anthony Wood, *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, 1674; cited in Drake 1991, p.3). The battle led to 62 students being killed and the rest being driven from the town.

In the case of Australia, most of the longstanding traditional universities were constructed within metropolitan centres and capital cities. One exception is the University of New England in Armidale. Indeed, up until the 1980s, higher education institutions in most country areas were limited to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges and colleges of advanced education (CAEs). The reforms by John Dawkins, the then Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, to higher education in that decade saw these CAEs attain the status of universities, a change that enabled them to award postgraduate degrees and be recognised for research. Colloquially known as 'gumnut universities', these regional campuses have faced ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining students and academics, building a competitive research profile and finding a secure niche within the Australian higher education field on the one hand and within the often culturally diverse and geographically dispersed regional communities from which they draw their allegiance on the other.

While several discourses can be discerned in these relationships, commentators on regional universities and communities commonly invoke at least two distinct narratives:

- Regional universities, like their communities, are marginalised and under threat, and their best chance for survival lies in working together to create alternative opportunities and futures.
- Regional universities, like their metropolitan counterparts, must increasingly adopt free market ideologies and practices whereby regional communities will be sidelined unless they can compete with national and international clients in accessing services from 'their' universities.

In interrogating, contesting and reconstructing these discourses, the authors of the articles in this issue address three key questions currently confronting regional universities and their communities:

- What are the identities and the missions of contemporary regional universities?
- How are those identities and missions manifested in the universities' negotiated relationships with their communities, only some of which might also be regional?
- What are the implications of those relationships for the likely future sustainability and survival of both regional universities and communities?

In seeking to address these questions, the issue is also directed at re-examining the concept of 'transformations' in regional communities in the early 21st century. Transformations, understood as permanent and substantial changes and improvements, are crucial for the ongoing development of individuals and groups. Yet often these transformations occur in spite of, not because of, the planned interventions of institutions. So it is vital, now more than ever before, to understand the drivers, influences and potential outcomes of and on genuinely meaningful and productive transformations in regional communities. Within that quest for understanding, a process of evaluating the roles and responsibilities of regional universities and communities with regard to themselves and to one another is a worthwhile endeavour.

At this point we need to offer an important explanatory note. The articles that comprise this volume were largely composed in 2004. Owing to various constraints publication has been delayed until 2006. Despite this delay, we believe that the approaches outlined and issues canvassed within the articles offer an enriching understanding of the relationships between town and gown within regional settings.

In the first article, Janet McDonald explores how a regional partnership among the University of Southern Queensland, the Queensland Theatre Company, the Empire Theatre and youth theatre group QUE has helped build a sustainable profile for youth theatre within the Toowoomba region. This partnership provides QUE with the pedagogical and industry support that enables it to create educational programs as well as to mount productions. While drama groups within regional Australia face particular challenges, this article provides one model for a successful collaboration between town and gown in facilitating youth theatre.

Ann-Marie Priest focuses in the second article on the use of online technology in facilitating the transformative learning of students from a range of different backgrounds. She writes from the perspective of Central Queensland University, which has a mix of students located on campuses within regional Queensland, studying by distance education and international citizens studying on campuses located overseas and within different cities within Australia. The article explores the ways in which learning technologies and pedagogical approaches associated with the Internet can create a rich educational environment that brings together such different cohorts.

In the third article, Maria Madsen and Andrew Wallace write from the perspective of the Gladstone campus of Central Queensland University. Acknowledging that the usefulness and cost effectiveness of the contribution that small campuses make to undergraduate education in Australia is still unclear, the article suggests that there may be a role for local campuses in supplementing ICT-based education in useful ways, a role currently ignored in the burgeoning literature, which tends to regard face-to-face and online education as mutually exclusive. So while Priest's article offers a broader picture of the contribution of online

technologies within a geographically dispersed and culturally diverse regional university such as Central Queensland University, Madsen and Wallace shift the focus to the particular challenges confronting small regional campuses in creating a productive dialogue between the learning technologies and the community of students.

Margaret Barrett, Tammy Jones and Sue Kilpatrick focus in the fourth article on the ways in which regional universities bring a research capacity to their home locations that is rarely available elsewhere in the region, demonstrating that research projects carried out locally can provide an opportunity for regional communities to examine their practices through a different lens. From their perspective in the Faculty of Education at the Launceston campus of the University of Tasmania, they advocate for a learning community approach, in which synergies from collaboration can generate new knowledge for the benefit of all university and community players and which provides an effective model for regional research engagement.

In the fifth and final article, Tony Schirato shifts the focus to a consideration of forces impacting on the Australian higher educational field as a whole, which have particular implications for emerging regional universities, Drawing on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, the article discusses the ways in which across the higher education field there has been, over the last 15 years, a gradual if inconsistent shift away from the values, logics and discourses connected with a traditional university culture towards values and discourses associated with government bureaucracy and business economics. While the new regional universities were faced with the challenge of producing themselves in accordance with the values promoted by the traditional university, such as building a research profile, they have also been confronted with an environment in which those values have given way to different ones associated with the market and corporate interests. This article challenges us to consider how regional universities might negotiate the tensions among these different interests in order to serve their communities effectively.

Taken together, the articles offer a rich and nuanced understanding of the challenges manifest in the relationships between regional communities and universities on the one hand and models for how these relationships can be mutually enabling on the other. If regional communities are not to be left behind within the global knowledge economy emerging in the 21st century, it is vital that they generate productive and respectful partnerships with higher education providers. In closing, we might return to the image of the strained relationship between town and gown within Oxford considered above. The university was able to recover from the tarnished relationship that saw 62 of its students killed and become one of the most prestigious universities in the world. It is a salutary lesson of the benefits accruing from a constructive and transformative relationship between town and gown in the regions.

The issue concludes with two reviews of books pertaining to different aspects of educational practice and lived experience. The first, written by Mark Tyler, is of Shaireen Rasheed's text *The Existentialist Curriculum of Action: Creating a Language of Freedom and Possibility*. The second, by Patrick Alan Danaher, Emilio A Anteliz and Phyllida Coombes, is of Susan Ellsmore's book *Carry On, Teachers! Representations of the Teaching Profession in Screen Culture*. The journal editors would be pleased to receive submissions of book and media reviews for future issues of the journal.

Acknowledgments