

# Challenging the Primacy of Lectures

Lectures, teaching, learning

The Australian Higher Education System is under increasing pressure as funds decrease, workloads and staff/student ratios increase, and as students demand more flexibility. At the same time, Information and Communications Technology has enabled alternative approaches to teaching and learning to be considered. These two factors have provided a driver for reform of curriculum within universities in Australia, as they aim to become more efficient, and better meet the needs of students and employers.

Unfortunately, in too many cases, this reform has taken the form of an unreflective replication of existing activities. I will argue in this conference session that it is valuable to re-examine fundamental assumptions about how universities work. I will commence by analysing the influence of the pre-modern, modern and post-modern periods on how universities viewed knowledge, considering how this informed views about the nature of university teaching.

From this starting point, I will critique the traditional, lecture/ tutorial/ examination approach to teaching at university, in the context of empirical research results about how people learn. This analysis indicates that there is a disjunction between research about effective teaching and learning (the Espoused Theory) and existing teaching practice (the Theory-in-Use). This contrast is expressed in several dimensions in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of a learning environment according to the Espoused Theory and the Theory-in-Use.

	<b>Espoused Theory</b>	<b>Theory-in-Use</b>
<b>Pedagogical philosophy</b>	constructivist	instructivist
<b>Approach to learning</b>	deep	surface
<b>Approach to teaching</b>	student-centred	teacher-centred
<b>Course design</b>	outcomes-based	content-based

The contrast illustrated in Table 1 lead us to question why the Theory-in-Use is so different from Espoused Theory in tertiary education. It cuts to the core of the effectiveness of universities and exposes questions about the fundamental role of the institution. In particular:

- Why is university teaching and learning practice not informed by research?
- Why do university lecturers not practice the Espoused Theory?
- What are the personal, cultural and institutional barriers to practising the Espoused Theory?
- In what ways is it possible to achieve a deep learning, student-centred approach to learning within the traditional approach used in universities?
- How can the Espoused Theory be put into practice in a cost-effective way?

The answers to these questions are fundamental to effective university teaching in an era of mass participation in tertiary education, and there is scant evidence of their consideration in practice or in the research literature about tertiary education.

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