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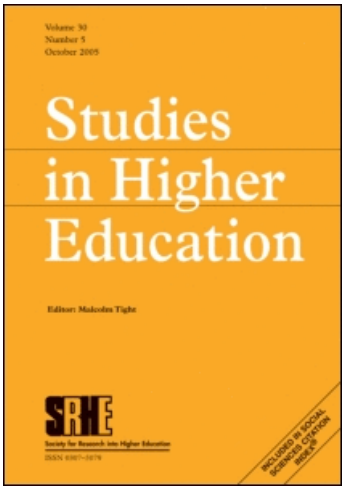

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Academic pedagogies, quality logics and performative universities: evaluating teaching and what students want

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Academic pedagogies, quality logics and performative universities: evaluating teaching and what students want

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Universities have focused on teaching and learning at a time when quality has become the marker of distinction in international higher education markets. Education markets have meant pedagogical relations have become contractualised with a focus on student satisfaction, exemplified in consumer-oriented generic evaluations of teaching. This article argues, by analysing one example, that generic evaluations are more about accountability and marketing than about improvement of teaching and learning. Furthermore, what students want is not the only criterion for judging teaching. Rather, professionals require, as do academics, a capacity for critical judgement about what constitutes valued knowledge in the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student.

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Introduction

Universities increasingly face contradictory pressures to change their practices of teaching and research – market pressures to meet industry and student demand, government pressures to be more accountable for their use of decreasing public funds, accreditation pressures to meet professional standards, technological pressures to use online learning, and academic pressures to maintain international status in teaching and research (Broadfoot 1998). As higher education has become commodified, technologised and internationalised, these pressures have converged to focus on issues of quality in teaching and research as a marker of distinction. Within the wider context of governance, quality assurance has become one of the disciplinary technologies mobilised by governments and university management in 'the audit society', to better manage knowledge production and knowledge workers (Power 1997).

In Australia, as elsewhere, a focus on accountability emerged from higher education's corporatisation, based on principles of new managerialism and a neo-liberal faith in the market as the mechanism to 'distribute' educational provision. On the one hand, universities, in Australia in particular, have become market driven, because of the need to supplement reducing government recurrent funding through fee-paying, largely international, students. Universities are therefore highly vulnerable to consumer perception and satisfaction. On the other hand, the new managerialism has devolved managerial work down, while individualising responsibility for outcomes (e.g. graduate completion rates, student evaluations, and occupational destinations) to academics. This process of devolution has been accompanied by strong accountability feedback to the centre, to facilitate government 'steering from a distance' (Marginson and

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Considine 2000). Thus universities have been caught up in the nation-state's desire for legitimacy, by responding to democratic demands for access to and accountability in higher education from within, and the pressures of the international education markets from without (Marginson 2006). This pincer movement between managerial and market accountability simultaneously intensifies control over academics, producing a sense of a crisis of trust in academic professionalism at the same time that it alters pedagogical relations between academics and their students, remaking academic identities (Nixon 1998).

This article argues that 'quality' has increasingly become the marker of distinction for the performative university competing in international markets (Cowen 1996). The article charts the emergence of multiple discourses around quality in higher education, then discusses how, in the Australian context, the focus of both markets and managerialism has been on quality assurance for accountability rather than substantive quality for improvement (Sachs 1994). I then explore the implications of the use of generic student evaluations of teaching within universities as a performance indicator, for both market satisfaction and internal quality control and as a mechanism to distribute funds internally for teaching, thus reinforcing the message to staff and students that quality counts (James, McInnis, and Devlin 2002). The use of generic instruments of quality is replicated at the national level, in the form of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), a graduate survey undertaken voluntarily six months after graduation. The CEQ, as a macro-level overview of teaching quality, is now used by the federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to fund universities differentially in teaching and learning, although there is a time lag of up to five years between when the course is taught and evaluated (Graduate Careers Council 2007). The CEQ is a:

> unique feature of the Australian system of performance indicators, and has been by far the most controversial part of that system. Inevitably, the instrument has been subjected to intense, detailed criticism, in terms of the philosophy of teaching and learning it embodies, the wording of particular items, the areas which are neglected, and the style of reporting of findings. Perhaps the deepest concern, though, has been with the whole idea of using a single instrument to assess the quality of teaching in all courses at all universities, which differ considerably in their histories, missions, approaches and student characteristics. (Baldwin and James 2002, 143)

The CEQ claims to capture the quality of up to six years of education, with the results published in a commercial *Good guide to universities* annually to inform student choice. This article considers how generic teaching evaluations, an institutional response to the CEQ, shape institutional and academic practices.

Quality: the marker of distinction

The internationalisation of movements in quality assurance and research assessment in higher education has been rapid (Blackmore and Wright 2006). This push for quality assurance derives equally from market pressures and the infiltration of private sector management principles into universities during the 1980s. The context shaping these moves included a rapidly expanding export and import trade of higher education. In addition there have been growing pressures to adopt 'global' models of quality from global organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, UNESCO and the World Bank, in regional trade agreements, professional

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standards movements and international higher education associations. Initially, the direct relationship between quality review and funding was largely avoided, with a focus on self-review for improvement rather than ranking (Vidovich 1997, 5). In the UK, Research Assessment and Teaching Quality Assessments were introduced in the 1980s, followed by the Higher Education Quality Council (1992) and the Quality Assurance Agency (1997) which enforced accountability. Expensive and time consuming, both research and teaching assessment intensified competition between institutions and individuals (Morley 2001). Academics were expected to gain teacher accreditation through an Institute of Teaching and Learning, and the audit tools of benchmarking against national standards and cyclical reviews were instituted. In New Zealand, the Vice Chancellors set up an Academic Audit Unit, and in 2002 the Tertiary Education Commission was established, followed by the Performance Based Research Quality Framework in 2004 (Codd 2006).

In Australia, where higher education is a federal (national) responsibility, the political imperative for accountability through quality review emerged from a context of financial crashes in 1987. Within this frame, quality was readily confused with 'value for money' under 'coercive federalism' (Vidovich 1997). The first round of quality assurance in Australian universities (1993–5) involved short visits, interviews and reports, producing highly 'managed performances'. Most university managers and staff believed diversity was being threatened as a result of benchmarking and that common performance indicators encouraged uniformity, as the focus was on accountability to external interest groups. But the overall agreement was that 'core activities especially teaching had improved; that the QA [quality assurance] program had further differentiated the higher education sector towards a multistrated hierarchy, and that competition had been heightened' (Vidovich 1997, 16). A new regime of quality assurance began with the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2002. AUQA's aim was to assess quality against stated objectives by focusing on processes, monitoring through measurement of outcomes, and on quality assurance systems (AUQA 2003). AUQA was, as are other quality assurance systems, characterised by:

- definitions and criteria that explain scope and confidence levels in relation to academic quality and standards;
- external reference points – e.g. qualification frameworks and level descriptors, codes of practice, guidelines, benchmarks;
- review mechanisms such as self assessment frameworks and review visits (audits);
- outputs in the form of reports, reviews, self assessments, gradings, published statistics, performance indicators; and
- independence of integrated arrangements to promote and support quality improvement – e.g. best practice, networks of practitioners. (Middlehurst and Campbell 2001, 11)

Moves in quality assurance articulated with significant trends in higher education. Middlehurst and Campbell (2001, 12) conclude that:

> quality assurance is an important part of academic professionalism. It is also a key mechanism for building institutional reputation or brand in a competitive local and global arena, and a necessary foundation for consumer protection. Across the world, it is part of the armoury used by governments to increase, widen, or control participation in the face of rising demand for higher education, and it is central to current debates about whether higher education is a public good or tradable commodity. Quality assurance is also fundamental to the security of qualifications and the mobility of professionals.

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> Without effective and appropriate quality assurance policies and practices, aspirations, rewards, knowledge economies, lifelong learning, community development and social inclusion cannot be fully realised. It is for these reasons that quality assurance is receiving increasing attention at all levels.

Quality, while emerging as the signifier of distinction, takes on different meanings for a number of competing stakeholders, with different expectations and rationales as to the role of the university. For example, business seeks to be able to link generic skills to industry-based competencies (Business Higher Education Roundtable 2003). Foregrounded in a user-pays education market is the view that students increasingly choose courses on the basis of their relevance to immediate vocational aspirations of career and work and that employers expect universities to cater for their immediate needs. This market-driven approach assumes and encourages the view that students (and employers) know what they want and they have a right to get it – whether it be in content, assessment or contact hours. The extent to which student and employer expectations are met is increasingly measured in student evaluations of teaching.

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Quality and academic pedagogies

Whereas educators in the school sector have long been involved in debates about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and evaluation for accountability or for improvement, discourses about teaching and learning were largely absent from Australian universities until the 1990s. A clear paradigm shift with the quality agenda is that managers (both government and university executives) are concerned with what previously had been professional and pedagogical concerns. This managerial focus on pedagogy, curriculum and assessment has meant that:

> Controlling quality or improving quality … comes to be seen as a matter of technique. On the one hand we have the imposition of technique as a means of assessing institutional performance through performance indicators. On the other hand, the greater effectiveness of the curriculum is felt to lie in the promotion of specified competencies and outcomes. Here the curriculum becomes a matter of technology, in which the required outcomes are engineered. (Barnett 1997, 212–13)

The Australian Higher Education Support Bill (2005) increased federal government power over universities in terms of student numbers and courses. Yet the teaching and research quality agendas, of both government and universities, have increased regulation at a time when institutional and academic initiative and creativity are arguably most needed to produce 'quality' outcomes. While the discourse of quality has assumed managerial credibility and reach:

> the reality is that one is dealing with intangible, non-observable qualities in higher education: the outcomes of university courses are much harder to assess and compare than, say, the holding properties of different brands of glue. They are complex and long-term, and many are hard to measure precisely. Further, the relationships between those outcomes and the characteristics of curricula and teaching methods which produce them are infinitely complicated by the diversity of the 'inputs' – the range of student abilities, interests and approaches. (Baldwin and James 2002, 142)

Quality assurance is just one recent policy initiative that has sought to 'manage' academic professionals, involving performance appraisals and the expectation that

academics undertake teaching qualifications as part of enterprise bargaining agreements. The growth rate of research management, teaching development units and courses, teaching, learning and research middle administrators (e.g. pro-vice-chancellors) in most universities has outstripped the growth of academic jobs. Every university has developed a Teaching and Learning Management Plan, and an array of policies associated with issues of quality assurance.

> Accountability grows with paperwork and also through student evaluations, changes in accreditation systems, compliance with new validation procedures (as in NZ [New Zealand]), inspections and audits (as in Britain), and faculty performance appraisal. Everywhere the 'supervisory state' … touches more areas of professional life in universities. (Knight and Trowler 2000, 110)

This has produced a paradigm shift in universities, with new administrative priorities and positions 'managing quality' tasks. While quality assurance is management-led, it quickly became the 'responsibility of everyone', as part of the processes of 'responsibilisation' of the workforce. Quality assurance sees the dispersal of the management of quality down to academics, exacerbating trends to intensify and fragment academic work (Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Shore and Wright 2000, 69).

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Evaluation for improvement or accountability in teaching and learning?

Accounting and auditing practices have established new 'transnational connections' as universities and professional organisations benchmark and establish policies and international standards (Power 1997). Performance is now central to the culture of learning, and evaluation of performance the focus. Quality discourses, as indicated, display a significant slippage between accountability and improvement, particularly around issues of evaluation. Evaluation for improvement focuses on identifying what worked, how and why it worked, and how performance can be improved. Evaluation for accountability focuses on the processes and outcomes: the visible and the measurable, tracking the paper trails to predetermined outcomes; more like an audit. The audit is a process of external examination, a 'ritual of verification', by those who exercise their power by making transparent what does not conform (Power 1997). The audit is a 'free floating signifier' that promises much and that, through its centrality in a cluster of other keywords such as accountability, 'performance', 'quality assurance', 'quality control', 'accreditation', 'accountability', 'transparency', 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness', has a 'domaining effect', becoming divorced from its initial financial meaning. This cluster of terms is now embedded in multiple discourses within the academy, in ways that reconstitute what it is to be an academic. On the one hand, the audit claims to be participatory in terms of letting individuals name their own targets, but, on the other hand, the boundaries and rules of the game are predetermined (Strathern 2000).

The audit is a key strategy of accountability, and student evaluations of teaching in higher education have become a key mechanism of accountability and quality assurance. Accountability is both a 'cherished concept' and a 'chameleon', with contested meaning because of its financial, ethical, legal and normative dimensions. As summarised by Sinclair (1995, 221 ff.), market accountability is premised upon information about a service to facilitate choice. Process accountability focuses on adherence to procedures, e.g. whether assessment protocols have been adhered to. Public accountability is more about transparency, fairness and the right to know, e.g. how courses are

assessed. Fiscal accountability is about efficiency. Program accountability is more about effectiveness of a course or unit, with a focus on improvement. Professional accountability occurs where there is a perceived duty to adhere to standards or ethics of professional groups, e.g. giving an account to students about their assessments. Managerial accountability is based on delegated authority to be accountable for measurable outcomes, e.g. retention rates. Managerial accountability often incorporates program, fiscal, process, market and outcomes accountability, but less so public, professional or personal accountability. All these versions of accountability are evident in the discourses around quality in higher education, but less so professional accountability, where there are commitments to the profession, to contribute to knowledge, to ethical research, to making a difference for others or to social justice. Indeed, the mechanisms of accountability have increasingly become detached from professional discourses, assuming a life and logic of their own. Academics refer to how they are increasingly managed by upward accountability to executive management, and outward to the evaluative state (Blackmore and Sachs 2007).

At the same time, appeals to notions of academic freedom and professional autonomy against the encroachment of the audit are tempered by academic ambivalence toward discourses of accountability and quality, as both appeal to professional sensibilities: care for students, a desire to do one's BEST, and to contribute to the profession (Clegg 1999). Morley (2001, 1) points to a further contradiction for feminist academics:

> Both feminism and quality assurance movements have attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct the academic. Both have called for more transparency in procedures, accountability from elite professional groups and the privileging of student experience. Both are globalised systems calling for transformation.

Indeed, the processes of quality assurance have provided new career paths for women, a recognition of their skills, but also new networks of control, and devolution of responsibility but not power, that appropriate and consume time and labour. Yet 'the continuous improvement discourse is reminiscent of the cultural pressures on women in general to strive for perfection' (Morley 2001, 3). Quality assurance discourses therefore have both oppressive and creative potential (Currie, Harris, and Thiele 2000).

Within the quality assurance regime based on auditing for accountability, universities have established new policies, processes and procedures. Academic boards map out paper trails of curriculum and assessment to provide the 'evidence' required by quality assurance audits. Such monitoring processes not only produce their own logics of practice and language games (Bourdieu 1990), but change the institutional practices they are monitoring, defining what constitutes quality and performance. 'What is audited is whether there is a system which embodies standards, and the standards of performance themselves are shaped by the need to be auditable … [Thus] the audit becomes a formal "loop" by which the system observes itself' (Power 1994, 36–37), in which evaluations of teaching are a key link. Audits become 'staged performances', often with little relevance to real practice other than as worrisome data-gathering exercises. The characteristics of the audit itself are 'clarity (rather than logic); itemisation (rather than connection), bullet points (rather than paragraphs) and simplified organisation (rather than involution or evolution in management). Above all, no ambiguity, contradiction or hesitation' (Strathern 1997, 315):

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> the university's organisational structure must be able to be represented in a way that makes it recognisable for the auditors … There is a conflation between 'is' and 'ought'. Hence there is an expectation that there are aims and objectives clearly stated, and defined methods of understanding academic quality … Less so how the university worked. It is firstly, more a measure of how the university stands up against the standard models of representation of organisations; and secondly, by comparison to a similar organisation … The audit by its very processes pre-empts self scrutiny i.e. it plays back to institutions the model of an organisation in self scrutinising mode. That is why we cannot ask the native speakers and listen to their account of the system … They have already been given the description as laid down … there is little recognition that a university may have diverse, and even conflicting aims, because it is a university. Contradiction and ambiguity are out, although contradiction is the engine of the intellect. But turn aims into objectives, turn multiple possibilities into plans of action, and contradiction is banished. The institution becomes judged by acts that presume unity – by the degree of consensus by which it will achieve its aims and this by the effectiveness with which it has actually eliminated contradictions. (Strathern 1997, 301, 311–13)

Contradiction and ambiguity are also increasingly unacceptable in teaching and learning, either as a process or a product, as graduate attributes and outcomes have to be specified and accounted for. Generic standardised student evaluations of teaching act as key 'representations' of quality assurance. Quality is thus readily collapsed into an accountability exercise, operationalised as meeting predetermined benchmarks and standards, following processes and procedures laid out by a paper trail, rather than quality of teaching in terms of student needs and substantive pedagogical relationships. Furthermore, it is assumed that teaching will improve 'if it makes explicit what it does'. Education is in this sense understood as being about drawing out capabilities, and this 'finds common measure on the market place. The audit occupies the modest position of enabling individuals and institutions to compete better' (Strathern 1997, 315). But the skills within this regime are predetermined and defined, and it is up to the individual teacher and student to identify and display these predetermined expectations. The skills identified 'must be transferable, not just may be transferable', providing a 'wider utility' because they are 'extractable and transferable across environments', 'generic rather than specialised conditions of learning' (Strathern 1997, 315). These are the measures against which teachers are judged.

But such skills are only valued if the self-examining self knows what they are, can articulate them, and employ them to good effect in their careers as 'realisable assets' (Strathern 1997, 315). Thus, in the CEQ and evaluations of teaching, students need to be able to identify their learned skills and know the relevance of what has been taught to them, while not practising or having just commenced in the profession. In turn, academics have to make explicit their aims, practices and achievements, both predicting what is to be taught and how it is to be taught, and then teaching to that prediction without deviation, as laid down in unit guides and handbooks, regardless of their student cohort or the unpredictability of the teaching moment that may lead them elsewhere. Morley (2001, 6) argues that

> the process of making tacit practices explicit requires an element of performativity and textual representation that is temporally and emotionally demanding and potentially demoralising … Academics and managers have to decode, calculate and identify risk and reconstruct themselves textually in what is sometimes seen as creative retrospective archiving. While quality assurance purports to challenge routinisation and time serving complacency, it can also produce these dispositions.

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Thus, the audit and accountability culture can lead to disaffection and alienation from teaching, as academics 'turn off' as teaching becomes routinised and non-reflective, which, ironically, in turn impacts on quality (Blackmore and Sachs 2007). What is assured through audits for accountability is the quality of control systems rather than the quality of first-order operations; the pedagogical relationships and content. In such a context, 'accountability is discharged by demonstrating the existence of such systems of control, not by demonstrating good teaching, or caring' (Power 1994, 19).

Making visible the invisible: evaluating teaching

Quality assurance is about explicitness, demanding an audit 'paper trail' that allows an external assessor to find evidence of what actually happens, to be tested against claims in policy statements (Power 1994, 19). The desire is to make visible what has previously been invisible in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Teaching and learning management plans now identify objectives, promote inclusivity, internationalisation of curriculum and graduate attributes, and mandate student evaluation of teaching. Magnusson (1998, 5) suggests that 'student evaluation of teaching represents a particularly important theoretical location at which to begin examining the political dimensions of institutional evaluation in that it reveals the ideological implications of conceptual practices associated with evaluation methodologies'. That is, executive management and government exercise greater control over academics and institutions by making tighter links between the nature and content of what is taught as well as how it is judged.

The use of the CEQ for performance-based funding nationally has led universities to focus on similar generic evaluations to monitor student experience. Course or unit evaluations have long been a common practice in universities to inform academics how to improve both content and teaching. Universities have now developed 'generic' internal student evaluations of units and of teaching, that claim to quantify, standardise and measure 'the learning experience', to monitor every unit and academic in order to be able to provide 'evidence' that is manageable, readable and simple. One such example used in an Australian university is included in Table 1. Students respond to each of the 15 questions on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree.

In many universities, questions (up to three) in each faculty, but not specific to each unit, could be added. These evaluations are either delivered by persons not teaching the unit or online by the administration. University executives tend to focus particularly on questions 5 and 14 that indicate student 'satisfaction overall', and that through 'word of mouth' would attract the new students so essential for survival in volatile markets. The form fits well with the strategic objectives of most university strategic plans – inclusivity, recognition of individual student need, online technologies, relevance and excellence. As a form of summative evaluation, these forms appear unproblematic, even if market oriented.

But there are issues. One study of eight Australian universities' use of such surveys found that they were neither:

> designed nor constructed according to sound questionnaire technique and that, as part of a teaching evaluation system, they are seriously flawed. Deficiencies include: their use as a sole measure of teaching effectiveness, the tendency for universities to rely on unmoderated student opinion without tempering the results with contextual factors, and

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Table 1. Student evaluation survey.

1	The teaching staff of this unit stimulated my further interest in further learning.
2	The teaching staff in this unit motivated me to do my best work.
3	The teaching staff in this unit provided me with helpful feedback on my work.
4	The teaching staff in this unit made an effort to understand the real difficulties I might be having with my work.
5	This unit was well taught.
6	I had a clear idea of what was expected of me in this unit.
7	Course materials in this unit were of high quality.
8	The unit developed my: a. analytic skills b. problem solving skills c. written communication skills d. ability to work as a team member
9	I consider what I learnt in this unit valuable for my future.
10	The library learning resources were appropriate for what I needed in this unit.
11	My experience in this unit encouraged me to value the perspectives of people from different cultures.
12	The amount of work required in this unit is appropriate.
13	Requirements for completing this unit successfully were clear and specific.
14	I would recommend this unit to other students.
15	The use of online technologies in this unit enhanced my learning experience.

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> a lack of testing for reliability and validity that renders the data of unknown precision. (Bedggood and Pollard 1999, 129)

Yet such evaluations are used to influence academic career advancement. As with all forms of evaluation and assessment, the key issues are what this form of evaluation replaces, what this form of evaluation tells us (or does not tell us), and the effects of its 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu 1990).

Replacement/displacement

Unit evaluations have been standard practice in Australian universities for at least the past 20 years. These have taken a variety of forms, quantitative and qualitative. In the early stages of evaluation, policies tended to separate out evaluation of individual teachers from the evaluation of units. The evaluation of teachers was difficult because of team teaching, off-campus courses that involved multiple input from different sections of the university in the process of the production of the unit, and confidentiality issues of performance appraisal. Evaluation of units was most often course or unit specific, with the desire for it to be manageable, purposeful and meaningful for academics and students in terms of providing feedback. Any university-wide 'guidelines' by academic boards, which then played a relatively benign role in terms of framing evaluation policies, were applied flexibly in order to accommodate differing needs, aims and modes of offer (on and off-campus) of the units. Education faculties tended to adopt more qualitative and formative approaches, as their discipline alerts them to how assessment and evaluation is the tail that wags curriculum and pedagogy. Such qualitative evaluations invited substantive feedback on all aspects of the unit,

particularly those in the off-campus mode, e.g. how did the communications, unit guide, reader, online conferencing, teleconferencing work for you? Although qualitative evaluations were suspect outside the social sciences as being 'anecdotal', particularly in university-wide promotion committees, this 'thick data' facilitated professional judgements about different aspects specific to each unit requiring improvement, and recognised different and diverse student needs. Many students may not like one particular reference, approach or assessment because it is too theoretical, but others may find it highly relevant and challenging for the same reason. Whether the reference was retained was, therefore, dependent on academic judgement.

Qualitative and formative assessments focused on improvement and substantive issues of content. Combinations of qualitative and quantitative evaluations indicated why there were variations in quantitative measures and how there could be improvement. For example, a poor result on a Likert scale on 'unit organisation' could often be due to a mishap in production and dissemination of materials, rather than the overall course organisation and pedagogy. But the growing trend for comparability through statistical representations between units, faculties and individuals has escalated, with accountability and quality assurance pressures from above and within, with procedural consistency being extrapolated into uniform assessment practices. Due to fear of 'evaluation overload' amongst students, universities have become more prescriptive, replacing specialist unit evaluations with compulsory generic unit evaluations as illustrated in Table 1. Yet generic questionnaires provide little substantive feedback to academics about what needs to improve, how or why, or what works well for some students and not others. Furthermore, these evaluations become part of the web of quality assurance, performance management and promotion practices facilitated by new data management technologies. These require academics to respond to poor results, often regardless of whether such evaluations are statistically meaningful, and without academics having the capacity to find out what exactly it is that students 'like' or 'dislike' or why.

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What is being evaluated: gaps and silences?

The student evaluation questionnaire focuses on the means by which students are taught, and thus the outcome of teaching in terms of organisational practice, rather the outcome in terms of students' knowledge (Strathern 1997, 309). As Bernstein (1990) argues, as education get closer to the labour market there is a need for a more 'visible pedagogy' of performance and transferable skills. This in turn leads to a separation of 'pedagogy as a process' and 'pedagogy as performance' that can be identified – generic, transferable skills – which assumes a knowledge transmission mode and neutrality of content and pedagogy. Pedagogy as process is necessarily 'fat': resource rich in terms of time and labour, reflective and dialogic, situated, culturally contextualised and inevitably inefficient. Evaluation, therefore, tends to be process driven, formative, developmental and less closely linked to content. The pedagogy of performance, in terms of its universality, disallows and negates diversity of need and the approach of situated pedagogy that requires professional judgement, autonomy and dialogical communication.

What do these generic evaluations represent? With user pays, students are more prepared to express their feelings in teacher evaluations. The market discourse suggests that students know what they want and should demand to get it. This raises considerable issues about the nature of learning in universities, and indeed the role of

universities. Is teaching and learning in a university based on professional and pedagogical principles, or the contractual arrangements of a producer–consumer relationship? Is student 'satisfaction' and 'comfort' the best indicator of quality teaching? While educators see the feedback of students as critical to the pedagogical relationships, where does professional expertise and judgement come in when determining what is taught and how? Academics as disciplinary experts usually have a sense about the field of theory and practice that shapes academic pedagogies and content, and indeed it is this expertise that is sought by students, and is often what attracts students to particular academics and units.

Students also come with expectations about what will be taught and what is relevant (Remedius and Lieberman 2008). Academics would agree that many issues, ideas and theories they raise lack immediate relevance but have long-term significance. For example, Barnett (1997) argues that there are particular discourses about what constitutes critical thinking. Some see critical thinking as involving a set of skills that are context and disciplinary specific; others perceive a set of 'generic' skills of critical thinking that are evident in all disciplines. Barnett argues that teaching for 'criticality' premised upon reflexivity and self study is increasingly important in professional practice in a time of greater social complexity and lifelong learning. Criticality is also essential as professionals have responsibilities beyond themselves, in terms of professional learning and knowledge production. Critical thinking within an audit culture takes on a different connotation:

> The right kinds of judgement by the external agencies, the right kinds of student outcome in the form of labour market attractiveness and the right kinds of course in the form of student enrolments. Thus the strategic thinking of the corporation begets performative measures of success and of value. Productivity is measure; students, indeed, become products. (Barnett 1997, 57)

Academic pedagogies for critical professionalism mean seeking to rethink knowledge, thinking cross-disciplinary, perceiving possibilities of action and effects beyond behavioural accomplishments and techniques.

Furthermore, there is an assumption that all students receive the same knowledge in a similar fashion. Indeed, many students are resistant to particular ideas with which they feel 'discomfort', and vent their anger in evaluations. Some would argue that such 'resistance' is because the unit is not taught with sensitivity or good pedagogy. But learning is itself emotional work, it is about identity formation, and some issues can challenge a student's sense of competence and self more than others (Boler and Zembylas 2003). Pedagogy, particularly in a university where professionals are being educated to develop criticality, is about 'discomfort', because it challenges the common sense through research and debate, inquiry and constantly unpacking one's assumptions about the world (Walker 2006). And, of course, cultural, gender and class differences emerge. In particular, 'teaching against the grain' around key sociological issues, such as race, class, gender and religion, produces 'pedagogies of discomfort', because often a student's world-view is threatened (Boler and Zembylas 2003). What counts as quality also differs according to cultural perceptions. Some students prefer more teacher-centred approaches, others more learner-centred; some students prefer online activities and others face-to-face. Such sensitivities are ignored in universalised generic evaluations. A single model of good practice fails to consider the diversity of approaches that often lead to innovation, and often focuses on the wrong things, such as the structures and mechanics, and not relationships of academic pedagogies.

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Effects of its logics of practice

Research on assessment also shows that standardised teaching evaluations encourage lecturers to focus on the narrow range of outcomes that are measurable, on style rather than substance, to minimise the discomfort by reducing contentious readings and watering down substance to produce 'thin' pedagogies. Indeed, 'the sign of an organisation with emotional and moral anorexia is one living on a diet of thin measurable outcomes that is slender spiritual nourishment' (Sinclair 1995, 236). Student evaluations are now linked more tightly to other managerial practices such as promotion and performance appraisal. Shore and Wright (2000, 57) argue that:

> the relentless spread of coercive technologies of accountability into higher education … have had such a profound impact in re-shaping academics' conditions of work and conditions of thought … these are not innocuous neutral legal rational practice, rather they are instruments of new forms of governance and power … that are designed to engender amongst academic staff new norms of conduct and professional behaviour.

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Furthermore, the evaluative institution produces another layer of 'quality' administration (supervising, recording, analysing and disseminating evaluation data) that intensifies work for academics, students and administrative staff (Winter et al. 2000). External demands to perform in audits focus energies on the audit, and distract from what could lead to real improvement. While some academics quickly learn the game, others struggle between the competing agendas of accountability and improvement, between system-wide concerns for performance, efficiency and academic achievement, and an educator's sense of care and investment in broader cognitive, social, emotional and moral development (Meadmore 1998).

In addition, there is now intense pressure, as funding is connected to the result, on academics to achieve certain targets in student evaluations (e.g. above a 4 on a Likert scale of 5). Strathern (1997) insightfully analyses the relationship between organisational audits (e.g. quality assurance) and assessment practices. First, 'when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure. The more a 2.1 examination performance becomes an expectation, the poorer it becomes as a discriminator of individual performances … However, targets that seem measurable becoming enticing tools of improvement for institutions' (308). The discourse of quality enthuses academics to maintain and constantly improve on student evaluations. Falls in 'average' statistical performance (so vulnerable to individual outliers high and low) cannot be attributed to work overload or student cohort, but are deflected onto individual academics. The implication is that any decline results from the 'management inadequacy of the academic – one has not paced oneself properly. One should make time for time' (Strathern 1997, 318). The effect of this deflection of responsibility by the institution about academic conditions of work is that the 'the goal becomes not for self improvement, but to improve your rating', leading to a 'fever of enhancement' (318). Meanwhile, a similar abrogation of responsibility for inadequate funding by the federal government means that the institutional requirement to monitor performance outcomes so diligently becomes an interest in performativity itself (managing perceptions and image – Blackmore and Sachs 2007), rather than improved performance (based on substantive content and interaction). Morley suggests that in the assessment exercises in the UK:

> Funding is based on performance indicators which are often experienced as reductive and over simplistic. There is an obsession with classifications and boundaries – disciplinary administration boundaries between the state, the market and the academy have also

> been re-conceptualised. The new world is of impression management, judgements and penalties and creating new professional subjectivities, new modes of description and new organisational identities. (2001, 6)

Of course, the other side of quality is failure. Quality assurance exercises often lead to the public naming and blaming of individual institutions. And institutional failure translates into individual failure. One likes to be associated with a successful institution. This further engenders academic self-management to meet institutional goals, encouraging the individual to be compliant for the good of the collective, a truly self-regulating academic habitus (Zipin and Brennan 2003). Academics read the new cultures and reward systems, and respond accordingly, while lamenting the loss of academic judgement. As a consequence, staff and students become evaluation weary. The ritual of the teacher evaluation means 'institutions and individuals are in a constant state of alertness, self awareness and explicitness' (Strathern 1997, 318). While the external audit may assist in image management and representations of quality to attract students, internally the audit produces considerable turmoil and a sense of loss of trust through imposition of processes that disempower academics (Newton 2000). The impact of constant surveillance produces considerable anger, frustration and generalised anxiety, reconfiguring priorities about what gets done and what gets left. More broadly, the wider organisational effect of audit cultures means:

> Some erosion of trust as universities become more managed, so that faculty can see themselves as less 'professional', less trusted, more called to account, and required to spend more time on paperwork and less on what matters to them … as well as threats to self-identity particularly in those institutions that have become 'greedy' asking for more without caring sufficiently for the humans who work for them. Tensions between work and private life become acute. (Knight and Trowler 2000, 110)

While the audit is one response to loss of trust, the audit itself exacerbates the very sense of loss of trust it seeks to address. Management now replaces trust. Herein lies the contradiction of the audit process: it encourages a form of 'reflexivity', but the reflexive subject is caught within tightly fixed parameters that appear to render opposition futile (e.g. academic whistleblowers – Shore and Wright 2000, 78). But as Magnusson (1998, 10) warns, 'once the social meanings of evaluation are constituted within the organisation, it is very difficult to challenge the imperative to evaluate, and it is very difficult to change how evaluation gets done' as the range of legal, material, industrial factors become intertwined.

Alternative approaches to student evaluation of teaching

Ultimately, the irony is that, in an era characterised by student diversity and difference, standardisation has become the institutional and governmental response. Audits for accountability rather than evaluation for improvement are the easy way to manage risk and quality. The external pressures of the performative state and university have pushed the quality movement towards accountability and assurance, rather than improvement. The current quality agenda, that equates quality to consistency and fitness for purpose rather than exceptionality and transformation, denudes the learning experience from its possible richness (Harvey and Green 1992, 20). Magnusson (1998) suggests that evaluation needs to be situated within intellectual

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traditions, professional and not managerial accountability. Furthermore, the development of teaching centres and courses needs to provide a clear sense of how educational practice is shaped by evaluation, what types of practices we value, and what types of evaluations we need to encourage. Evaluations of teaching need to be to be 'read with a political eye', where mean scores gloss over polarised reactions of students – some very enthusiastic, some not bothered and others very antagonistic – and moderated with other forms of assessment. If the aim is about quality this would be better achieved by situated formative evaluations of each unit moderated by random statistical samples that would confirm or identify patterns. Qualitative evaluations can also be moderated to produce substantive data that serves multiple functions of accountability and improvement. Quality teaching also cannot be extracted from the conditions of learning as it is influenced by staff–student ratios, professional development, work conditions, university priorities, expectations and collegial relations.

For students, understanding the connections between learning, knowledge and evaluation are critical, particularly if they are entering the professions where they will be subject to a range of evaluation measures and pressures for improvement. Undertaking formative and even self evaluation are more likely to provide a pedagogical approach to evaluation that would impart a form of professional learning in itself, as well as alleviate the boredom and unsubstantive nature of compulsory and universal generic evaluations (as suggested by the poor return rates). Likewise, employers would be better served by creating industry-specific evaluations that are based on actual student experience. Finally, educational developers could then assist in developing courses that see evaluation as embedded in the pedagogical process, rather than as a one-off outcome where content, pedagogy and evaluation are treated as discrete components. This assumes, of course, that governments can find more appropriate aggregate measures of performance of teaching and learning that are both meaningful and timely.

Evaluation of teaching also means considering what type of graduates we want. If valued graduate attributes are compassion, care, a sense of social justice, a sense of public service, what does this mean for our understandings of teaching, pedagogy and quality learning? Where are these capacities mentioned in evaluations of teaching? As Bernstein comments (1990, 155), as knowledge is 'divorced from inwardness, commitment and personal dedication', it is dehumanised. Teaching students a critical spirit relies on a commitment that questions what is and asks how should and could it be: these are moral, ethical and political questions (Walker 2006). The issue for universities is what might be the principles informing evaluations of teaching based on such a perspective? And how will this provide feedback to what courses are taught and whether they are based on a 'thick', progressive and ethical understanding of undergraduate pedagogical practices that has a wider commitment to democratic institutions and professional practices. To demonstrate care and informed teaching requires qualitative and formative evaluations that are not preconceived in terms of outcomes, or based not only on what should be done, but also on what has been done and what was learnt. Academic pedagogy is necessarily, as intellectual work, informed by theories and research, open to discussions that cannot be predetermined, requiring new inputs and directions, as each teaching moment is situated and non-replicable. This is the central dilemma for evaluating educational practice: the unpredictability of learning and intellectual work.

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