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Editorial

Engaging Communities

In 1996, Ernest Boyer challenged those of us working in tertiary and higher education – the academy – to reconsider our role in society. It was his view that, "The academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement."

The scholarship of engagement "means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethic problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities. Campuses would be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands, but as staging grounds for action."[1]

In calling for submissions to this 31st HERDSA conference we asked submitters to consider how we, as the academy in the opening years of the twenty first century, should respond to Boyer's vision and challenge and to find examples of vigorous and effective connections and partnerships with our communities, our students, and each other.

The response to this call was encouraging and exciting: we received over 240 submissions, from posters and symposia, to showcases and research papers. All submissions were subject to blind peer review by at least two of 90 reviewers, and we are most grateful to those reviewers for the thoughtful way in which they considered all the submissions. Eighty five submitters presented us with full papers, and thirty four of these papers are published in this volume. All these papers have been subject to peer review against the following criteria

- Suitability for conference presentation, relevance to conference themes and to the intended audience;
- Academic merit, including: contribution to scholarship; originality; critical analysis; and research methods;
- Implications for practice, theory and/or policy; and
- Standard of writing.

The papers collected here have considered the conference theme from a wide variety of perspectives. A number of authors have considered the challenge of the way in which we engage with learners in a range of settings – from the challenging issues raised by Annabel Beckenham of engaging students as 'friends' on-line to the problematic and ongoing issues of equity and access presented by Williams, Davies and Edwards. Bozalek and her colleagues ask us to consider the educators' role in bringing students to the recognition of difference in relation to privilege and deprivation in South African communities. Still others (e.g. Nettleton et al) have considered the ways in which professional societies and other employer groups can be engaged in the education of students.

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[1] Boyer, E. L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. Journal of Public Service and Outreach, 1(1), 11-20.

Some authors have considered how we might engage more effectively with each other by considering staff development programmes for women (see Tessens) to examining the most effective use of foundation programmes for academics. Still others (e.g. Radloff; Olsson and Roxå; Heinrich) have considered these questions from the point of view of institutional imperatives to enhance quality and to find ways to reward staff engaged in doing this.

In many of the papers, authors have explored applications of communities of practice models to various settings in the academy. Many have drawn on the work of Wenger and his colleagues and the conference attendees were fortunate to have been able to hear a concluding keynote from him in which he drew out key points from conference presentations and his work on communities of practice.

In the twenty first century, as in earlier times, tertiary education organizations, regardless of their name, face a multitude of challenges and demands. Under-represented groups are calling for new forms of engagement as learners and communities. Governments and employer groups are placing new demands on us. We hope that this volume will stimulate readers to continue to rise to the challenges placed before us, to confront those challenges when needed, but above all to play a significant and vigorous role in searching for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems.

Mark Barrow and Kathryn Sutherland
Editors