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Endnotes

- 1 For those too young and innocent, an OHP or Overhead Projector, is a

device for projecting images onto a screen behind the teacher.

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Talking about Teaching and Learning (TATAL)

By Coralie McCormack and Robert Kennelly

Introduction

Talking About Teaching And Learning (TATAL) is a network of ACT region learning and teaching leaders co-sponsored by ACT HERDSA (branch of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia) and the Promoting Excellence Initiative at the University of Canberra *Making Room to Lead* (an Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded project). The program is facilitated by the President of the ACT Branch of HERDSA (a HERDSA fellow) and the University of Canberra Promoting Excellence Initiative manager. (See page 12 for a photo of the team).

The program has its geneses in the desire of a number of HERDSA members to reconstitute the ACT HERDSA Branch to encourage greater collaborative scholarship in teaching and learning amongst the universities of the region. The new branch has been going for nearly 2 years. Current membership is 51. Over this time the branch has presented a number of activities including sharing perceptions of the 2008 HERDSA conference, a networking event and the TATAL program.

In relation to TATAL, two motivations coalesced: a need to encourage specific focus on the improvement of student learning; and a need to support academic and teaching-related staff in preparing a promotion application; faculty, institutional

or national teaching award applications; institutional teaching grant applications and HERDSA fellowship applications.

How does it work?

TATAL sought to establish and maintain a collaborative cohort of reflective practitioners who meet regularly to articulate a portfolio of their teaching and learning. The vision was to establish a supportive collaborative group who would work together over a year to produce a teaching philosophy statement and a teaching portfolio. Specifically, the program objectives were to:

- Provide a safe collaborative environment in which to investigate the challenges and successes of teaching and learning;
- Develop enhanced skills and confidence in writing and sharing teaching and learning experiences; and
- Provide support for colleagues preparing applications for:
 - Faculty/Institution/ALTC awards and grants.
 - ALTC fellowships / HERDSA fellowships / UC Teaching and Learning Centre fellowships.
 - ASCILITE awards and mentoring program.

Action research and reflective practice provide the framework for the program.

Action research in this context is a systematic way of investigating teaching practice with the aim of improving student learning and then undertaking further investigations to find out the outcomes of the changes implemented. Reflective practice is defined as a *robust, on going interrogation of one's teaching and one's students' learning* (Kennelly, 2004).

The program began in September 2008 with fourteen colleagues from three Canberra universities meeting for one and a half hours (see table below). In 2009 the program continues with seven participants meeting monthly for two hours.

Competing priorities led to most participant withdrawals. Sometimes the competing commitments related to work and further study (a PhD and postgraduate coursework qualification) or research publication. As two participants noted:

I was afraid this was going to happen this year ... my study and work commitments mean that something has to get pushed off the end of the perch... TATAL was my reflective practice and peer coaching time ... I have really enjoyed and appreciated the sessions.

Currently, I am working around 70 hours per week and I imagine I will be finalising the papers and sending them off until the very last minute of the due date. I do value the discussion that takes place around the practice and scholarship of teaching and have enjoyed

being involved with the developing community of practitioners who are committed to teaching and learning.

A family caring responsibility or a clash of the meeting time with teaching sessions could also lead to a re-prioritisation of commitments as one participant commented:

You will hardly be surprised to hear that my competing priorities and commitments are winning at present... I note that TATAL has moved to Fridays at 3-5pm. I'm afraid that this time will not work for me as it conflicts with a class that I teach.

One participant left academia to return to private practice in 2009.

Participants met four times in 2008 and have continued to meet monthly in 2009. The following table presents the timing and the session agenda for each meeting. Developing a teaching philosophy statement was the focus for the 2008 meetings. The focus for the 2009 sessions will be on developing a teaching portfolio.

Session timing	Session agenda
TATAL 1 September 2008	<p>Introductions: Program aim/objectives, participants, key program elements</p> <p>Process of reflective practice underpinning this group's work</p> <p>What is a teaching philosophy? A teaching portfolio?</p> <p>Free writing activity: Why are you a teacher? What personal experiences inform/motivate my teaching?</p>
TATAL 2 October 2008	<p>Review first meeting and ground rules</p> <p>Share writing activity from TATAL 1: Why are you a teacher?</p> <p>Ingredients of a Teaching portfolio (inc. a statement of philosophy of teaching and learning)</p> <p>Free writing activity: What do I believe about teaching? What do I believe about learning?</p>
TATAL 3 November 2008	<p>Sharing views: What do I believe about teaching? What do I believe about learning?</p> <p>What is a teaching philosophy statement? Further discussion.</p> <p>Three ways to get started on your statement</p> <p>Three ways to continue to work on your statement</p> <p>Preparing for TATAL 4</p>
TATAL 4 November 2008	<p>Collaborative conversations about teaching philosophy statements: Read, reflect, respond</p> <p>Collaborative feedback on philosophy statements</p> <p>Assessing your philosophy statement,</p> <p>Looking forward to teaching portfolios</p> <p>Reflection on expectations & look to the future</p> <p>Over summer continue work on teaching philosophy statement and post on program Moodle site in preparation for TATAL 5</p>
TATAL 5 February 2009	<p>Workshop facilitated by visiting scholar Dr Dieter Schonwetter (Schonwetter et. al., 2002):</p> <p>Framework for a teaching philosophy statement</p> <p>Assessment of philosophy statements including general feedback from Dieter across the group's philosophy statements (Each participant also received individual and private feedback on their philosophy statement from Dieter)</p> <p>Components of a teaching portfolio</p>
TATAL 6 February 2009	<p>Reflection: Where to with teaching philosophy statements?</p> <p>TATAL for 2009: Review ground rules, expectations of participants and facilitators and development of 2009 program: timing, content, processes</p> <p>Preparing for collaborative inquiry into your teaching: discussion of action research, critical incident analysis</p> <p>Presentation of a case study story from facilitator's teaching practice and feedback to facilitator</p> <p>Reflect on critical incident for discussion in first story</p> <p>Preparation for TATAL 7: Write first teaching story</p>
TATAL 7 March 2009	<p>Reflect on TATAL program so far</p> <p>Begin collaborative inquiry by sharing a written critical incident story. Small group guided discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you do? 2. What were the results? 3. What did you learn? 4. Finally what will you do next? <p>Collaborative group discussion of stories</p>
TATAL 8 April 2009	<p>Participants continue to share their first story</p> <p>Participants share reflections on first story and process</p> <p>Discussion: writing up stories and support for this process</p> <p>Participants reflect on possible second stories to share</p> <p>Reflection on group processes</p>

What are the results so far?

Program evaluation to date suggests outcomes for participants align with their expectations (table below). Four themes have emerged: group characteristics, enhancing teaching and learning, personal/professional learning, and recognition and reward.

The emerging themes suggest the TATAL program, with its grounding in action research and reflective practice, combined with its emphasis on collaborative group processes, as well as the outcome of a teaching philosophy statement, is different from *most common approaches to writing a teaching philosophy [which] offer descriptive lists of questions regarding one's beliefs about students, the role of the teaching, and the outcomes of higher education.* (Beatty, et. al., 2009, p.100). The process appears to be as important as the outcomes. As Beatty et. al., (2009, p.112) also note:

Because one's teaching philosophy is such a core element of one's identity as a teacher, direct criticism of one's teaching philosophy is akin to a direct assault on

the self and will shut down any kind of learning dialogue ... a shared discussion ... can help build community.

Through TATAL we are developing communities where this on going shared discussion can take place. The success of the first TATAL has prompted us to start a new TATAL which has met twice. Please watch this space, as with the editor's agreement, we will keep you posted on our progress.

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Emerging themes	Participants' expectations	Participants' outcomes reported to date
Group characteristics	Sharing perspectives Share experiences Collegiality (collaborative cohort) Collaboration	Safe sharing Support for a community of teaching and learning interests Direction and dynamics of group Diverse group, great networking making for creative conversations That I am excited about TATAL and working with the others to improve teaching and learning at UC Collegiality (motivating, like-minded colleagues) Shared perspectives Luxury to engage in this process (implicit/explicit)
Enhance teaching and learning	Improve practice Motivate students Sharpen teaching skills Share and receive feedback on teaching problems Assessment that encourages depth of learning	This activity connects with my learning and teaching goals Reflective practice consolidated Teachers have common concerns/issues/ideas regardless of discipline I plan to help other academic staff benefit from reflection on their teaching/assessment practice and their underlying motivations
Professional / Personal Learning	Consolidation of information on teaching portfolios and develop a philosophy statement Develop a teaching portfolio	Teaching philosophy statements developed (7 participants) Opportunity to keep moving on the T&L journey I learnt to write the "big" version of my teaching philosophy first then cut it down to a shorter version for my specific purpose. I thought about the things that will help me carry on with the teaching philosophy part of the journey and two things came to mind: a metaphor and goals. These propelled me to move on to the next stage of my thinking. I have learnt that I need to be more systematic and less descriptive when writing about my teaching and that I need evidence to support my claims. I learned that though I have been teaching for a very long time. I have been teaching, without having ever asked myself why I am doing this as a profession. I wonder whether I am not reflective enough.
Recognition & reward		One participant has registered for a HERDSA Fellowship; another has begun working towards a fellowship application. Another member has been awarded a University of Canberra Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning (the application included the teaching philosophy statement developed in TATAL). The participant has been nominated for an ALTC award.