

Education faculties the catalyst for change in unis

Faculties of education have the power to transform universities
as **JACQUI ELSON-GREEN** reports

PEDAGOGY must be the core of university activity in the knowledge society with faculties of education acting as the catalyst for change. This strong belief in the power of effective teaching has led to a remarkable transformation at the University of Southern Queensland where just 12 months ago the faculty of education was under threat of losing its identity following pressure to amalgamate.

Education dean, Professor Frank Crowther, explains that a raft of reasons had led the university's governing body to favour "integration" of the faculty with arts but understandably the idea did not resonate well with staff.

While Crowther concedes that cost efficiency was an important factor driving the proposal, he says the real issue was the persuasive view that the faculty was in a moribund state and did not have the capacity to rescue itself.

But within six months the faculty had not only restructured to the satisfaction of the university community ensuring its future as a separate entity, a fundamental shift had taken place in the way education was viewed and valued.

Crowther explains the turning point occurred when the university accepted that it should be looking to the faculty of education as a vital component in the lifeblood of the institution.

"The university has accepted if it's going to go ahead with its own strategic platform then it's got to structure its core business where teaching/pedagogy is fundamental to the institution," he tells *Campus Review/Education Review*.

"You may need good commerce, engineering and science departments, but education is the one faculty where you ought to be able to demonstrate that if you're effective in teaching and learning, you'll transform the broader community."

This is a fundamental principle in the newly emerged knowledge society, Crowther maintains and one that he says USQ has embraced.

To Crowther's knowledge USQ is the only faculty of education in Australia in at least a decade that has been able to withstand the push for amalgamation but he emphasises it was not simply a matter of rejecting that idea and continuing on.

USQ vice-chancellor, Professor Peter Swannell, agrees telling *Campus Review/Education Review* it was not a case of saying "no, we won't merge", but acknowledgement from staff that change was needed and that they could quickly deliver the desired outcomes.

"Education came up with a real understanding of what they were doing including recognition that in this generation, education faculties play an important role in linking closely with the core activities of the university," he says.

Extremely happy with the outcome, Swannell remarks that the new direction has led the breadth of talent in education to open up to a range of cross-faculty activities.

For Crowther the preservation of the faculty is highly significant and he links the revitalisation that has taken place to leadership in the teaching profession itself.

"The teaching profession is such a fundamental profession in the 21st century in this country and everyone has to be concerned about that. It's essential to show leadership for schools and the teaching profession and faculties of education must be given the opportunity to be at the centre of that process."

Crowther's explanation of how the faculty reinvented itself has close parallels with theories of leadership that he developed with academics in USQ's Leadership Research Institute.

Long recognised as a leader himself in the field of teacher leadership, Crowther and colleagues Margaret Ferguson and Leonne Hann had produced a manuscript *Teachers Lead Schools Succeed* that prised the lid off the "black box" revealing its contents for the first time.

As Crowther explains that while it has been accepted for years that leadership improves student achievement, no one knew how – it was an impene-

trable black box. The USQ team revealed the contents of the black box after conducting research which showed how a range of schools had achieved extraordinary success in changing not only student achievement, but teacher morale and parental attitudes.

Integrating the findings with other related research, the USQ academics sought a publisher for their manuscript but were soon persuaded their work would gain broader recognition if it could be shown to apply in the US environment.

Professor of education at Michigan State University, Professor Stephen S Kaagan, came on board working as a co-researcher and testing the theory in both the US and Canada.

So successful was the outcome of the research, the team was immediately offered a contract by leading US educational publishers, Corwin Press and *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success* was born.

Crowther says that while the research has a particularly Australian flavour in many ways invoking the cultural stereotypes of confronting the odds, taking a stand and inspiring a sense of egalitarianism, he says this is consistent with the kind of leadership characteristics that will prevail in our post-industrial world. In the preface to *Developing Teacher Leaders*, Crowther and Kaagan say that management theorist Peter Drucker's assertion is basic to their thinking. "In the emerging postindustrial world, leadership will be assumed by knowledge workers. We assert that teachers are ideally placed to become the central knowledge-generating profession. The concepts and the developmental activities that make up *Developing Teacher Leaders* reflect not only our optimism but also our view that for members of the teaching profession, the journey into the postindustrial world will be compelling."

While the concept of teachers as leaders framework is central to the text, the authors also introduce the notion of parallel leadership which Crowther argues is particularly suited to all organisations involved in knowledge generation – not just schools.

"It fits with all the theory about learning organisations, that says that if an educational institution wants to excel it has to create a particular sustainable, unique, distinctive product that focuses on knowledge and ideas.

"We're finding this kind of leadership allows you to do that because it not only captures a wide variety of ideas by bringing people together, it also links the strategic visioning or the development of the institution with the managerial and teaching aspect."

According to Crowther, once parallel leadership is in place different concepts of power, structures, roles and relationships emerge that pave the way for all involved to be contributors.

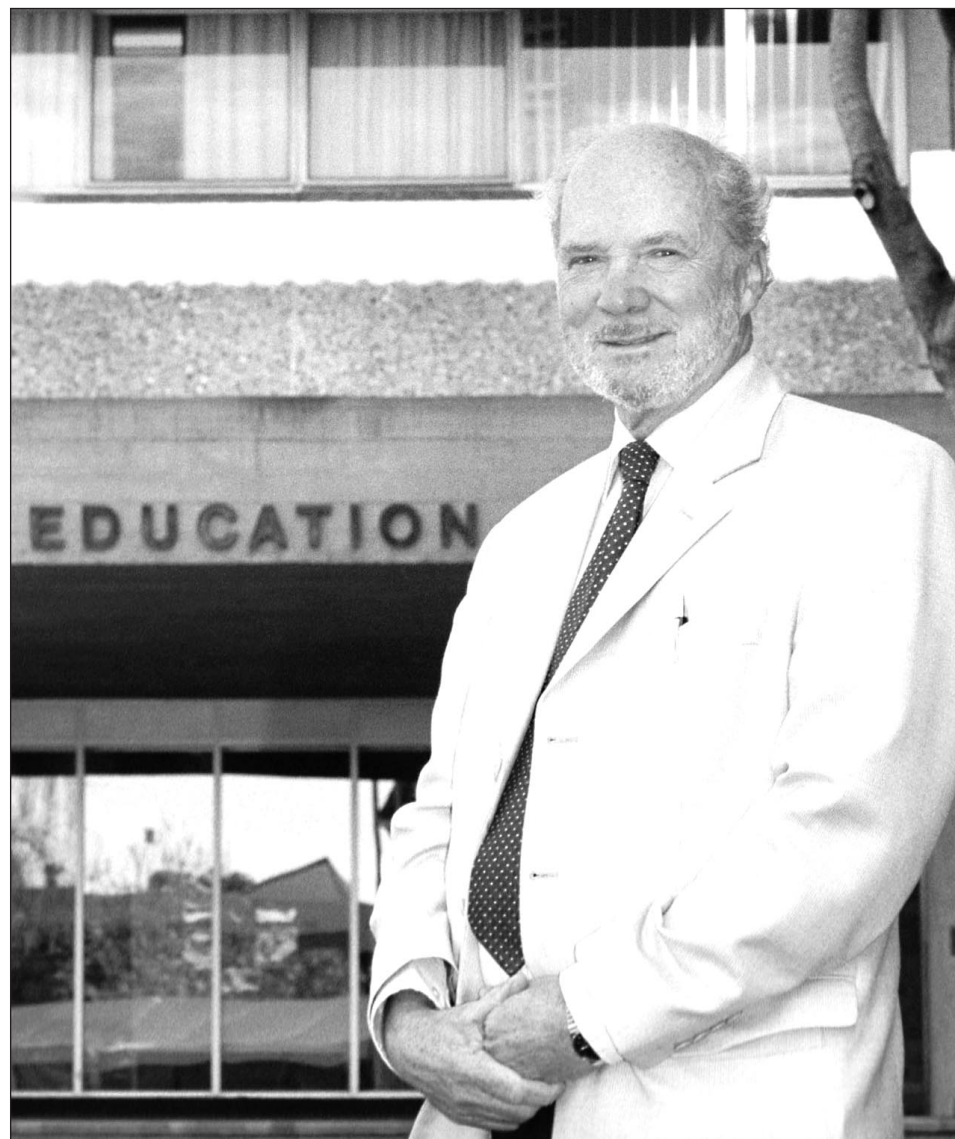
"It makes sense that in a knowledge society, if you're going to be competitive, you've got to keep on creating new ideas – more refined and sophisticated because that's what's 'sellable' in this era.

"To get to that point you have to go beyond the idea that all wisdom resides in the office of the vice-chancellor, or the principal. You must fundamentally accept that in an educated community the possibility exists that some of your most able contributors maybe shrinking violets who don't have any real 'power' in the organisation, but if you don't have a way of recognising them, you'll miss the boat."

Excited about the effect of this research on the international education community, Crowther says that after working for 40 years under a cloud that "schools don't count, and teachers don't count" – that cloud has finally lifted liberating many from its negative effects.

"And what's really great is that we are creating these ideas in Australia and selling them to the rest of the world. The real brains trust in all of this is held in Australian universities," he says.

"We have to accept that the world has changed and if we're going to survive it will be because of the nature of our education, our schools and our universities. Faculties of education must be at the centre of this development."



Dean of education at the University of Southern Queensland, Professor Frank Crowther

Advertorial

Imagine Huts with No Walls

PICTURE the most pristine bushland you can, stunning views, magic spots for quiet reflection on rocky outcrops, beside creeks and in gullies. A wilderness river with deep pools flows nearby. There is little sign of human habitation for 20 kilometres. The environment draws even the most hardened city dweller into nature. The place is just two hours from the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

In this bush, imagine a series of bright, modern huts, each sleeping 12-16 students, accessible only by foot. The huts have no walls; though they can be sealed from 'the outside' with clear vinyl blinds. There is a solar/wood heated shower, a composting toilet, an open fire, but no running water.

What happens?

After briefings and cross-curriculum related classroom work at school in the weeks leading up to the program, students on arriving on the perimeter of the site, split into their small sub-groups to determine their food, drinking/washing water, fire wood and stove fuel requirements for the program (3-7 days). After estimating the consumption levels and determining resources, the groups would transfer their chosen quantities and all personal items to their hut, using hand carts. Each hut is several hundred meters from its neighbour, so visiting is unlikely.

The group focuses on developing a "community" without distraction. Daily rituals include reviewing resource consumption, allocating duties, (such as wood cutting, stove feeding, cooking using raw ingredients to bake bread and prepare meals, water carting, and cleaning up) discussing group issues, planning the days outdoor and environmental activities, reflection, and journal writing.

The concept

The 'Huts with No Walls' concept, bridges the gap between dormitory style camps and bush and journey based outdoor education programs, where students live and travel closely to nature. The concept is purpose built to NSW education, where various cultural, climatic, industrial and societal expectations have meant that whilst bush based tent camping programs are preferred in concept; in practice, they are hard to implement.

In the last three years, schools committed to outdoor education, and the three facets of learning about self, community and the natural world and the interconnection between these, have begun suggesting that dormitory style facilities don't meet modern curriculum needs. However, bush and journey based tent camping expeditions are rapidly becoming beyond the capabilities of staff and students in many schools.

This project is a social ecology experience that draws young people into nature, themselves and their place in their community. It promotes reflection, values clarification, and connection with/understanding of self and community, impelled by a medium of resource, consumables and community effort management and outdoor adventure activities.

If you would like to know more about the 'Huts with No Walls' project, or any other OEG programs, please contact Dr Lorraine Smith, Executive Director, OEG (NSW Division) on (02) 4782 9919, or visit our website on www.oeg.net.au