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The dilemma of formal learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts

Abstract:

In response to increasing pressures on universities from government, industry and students, specific formal roles, for example Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or equivalent, have been created to lead and oversee improvements in the quality of learning and teaching. What are the implications for the Associate Dean when leadership of learning and teaching for one or more creative arts disciplines is in their remit? We draw on informal conversations with 11 Associate Deans who had formal responsibility for leading learning and teaching that included creative arts disciplines in 10 universities across Australia. We explore issues around the role of the Associate Dean in general and then focus on the dilemmas associated with leading learning and teaching in the creative arts specifically. Our conversations reveal that Associate Deans face dilemmas around the viability of programs; communicating with, representing and advocating for creative arts disciplines when they are highly dispersed and often a very small component of a larger group of disciplines; managing to engage deeply with creative arts pedagogies when there is little time available and workloads are high; as well as being recognised and accepted as learning and teaching leaders for the creative arts. Encouraging Associate Deans who have the formal responsibility for leading learning and teaching in the creative arts to network may be a way of exploring and resolving these issues and dilemmas and in so doing strengthen their leadership.

Biographical notes:

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Thembi Mason is a Senior Advisor, Learning and Teaching in the DSC College at RMIT. Thembi's background and experience is in the area of learning and teaching with a specialisation in using educational technologies and blended learning. Thembi has worked across all educational sectors, including secondary school education, adult education, VET, and Higher Education. She has worked in Education and Multimedia since 2001. Currently, Thembi is working on an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching funded project which is investigating professional development approaches for New Generation Learning Spaces. Thembi has started her PhD in the area of learning and teaching leadership.

Keywords:

Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) – learning and teaching – creative arts – learning and teaching leadership – learning and teaching quality

Context for learning and teaching leadership

Many Australian universities are now large multinational institutions that are being driven by national agendas. For example,

in responding to the Bradley Review in 2009, the Australian Government [decided to] ... expand the system and create new opportunities for all Australians to reach their potential in higher education. The Government also committed to ensuring that growth in the higher education system will be underpinned by a robust quality assurance and regulatory framework, which places a renewed emphasis on student outcomes and the quality of the student experience' (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research 2012).

In this context, government imperatives increasingly demand a much more orchestrated approach to learning and teaching across universities, so that programs comply with standards and that graduates leave equipped and able to contribute to Australia's future within a global context – to be our future leaders and thinkers (Bradley 2008, Bullen, Gibbins & Brodie 2010).

In response, universities have appointed specialist staff charged with leading quality and learning and teaching reform agendas. Central roles have been created such as DVC, PVC or Dean Learning and Teaching and those in localised settings include, Deputy PVCs or Associate Deans or equivalent and Deputy Heads Learning and Teaching or Learning and Teaching Committee chairs. Central roles variously oversee the development of institutional strategic learning and teaching plans; academic policies, procedures and guidelines; as well as internal and external learning and teaching awards, grants and strategic initiatives. Local roles are more focused on the implementation of institutional strategies, policies and processes, and leading change projects on the ground. Together these roles are charged with the overall responsibility of ensuring university strategic visions and/or plans are enacted in a concerted and holistic way across all levels of the organisation variously through Deans/Heads of Faculty/Heads of Schools, Discipline/Program/Course Leaders, Managers, Course/Unit/Subject Coordinators (de la Harpe & Radloff 2006, Marshall 2006, Scott, Coates & Anderson 2008). No longer is it sufficient for individuals in schools/programs/courses/subjects to independently implement learning and teaching initiatives. This now demands significant understanding of contemporary learning theory and pedagogy (Brack, Samarawickrema & Benson 2005; Des Marchais et al. 2009), and the widely accepted practice of curriculum design based on the theory and practice of constructive alignment is critical in this process (Xiaoyan et al. 2012). Local leadership is becoming an increasingly important component of realising institutional learning and teaching change imperatives as these roles not only act as a 'catalyst for change ... [with responsibility for strategic planning] ... as well as upwards and sideways management ... and [are] expected to be ... a representative of faculty at university level' (Southwell, Scoufis & West 2008: 50) and provide 'hands-on and operational support' to those locally. It is at this local level that 'academic tribes and their unique ways of knowing' must be acknowledged 'in order to ensure success' (de la Harpe & Radloff 2006: 75, 76). Thus it is clear that the

Associate Dean (Learning and teaching) role involves both management aspects as well as leadership ones.

Scott, Coates & Anderson point out that learning and teaching leadership roles are not easy: 'people in these [PVC and Associate Dean] roles report having to develop the skills of "leading through influence" and leveraging collegiality to engage staff in necessary change' (2008: xvi), given they do not have direct line management responsibilities. As well, this leadership is 'based on "authority" being placed in the individual's personal characteristics and expertise and in an ability to win followers in the collegial culture of the academy' (Scott et al. 2008: 4). Highly developed personal and interpersonal skills are necessary in this role in order to work collaboratively with others (Kotter & Cohen 2002, Marshall 2006, Southwell et al. 2008;).

Additionally, perceptions of the role and how they are valued is variable in institutions. Gray and Radloff report that stakeholder views of those in an academic development group

have been varied and often ambivalent with regard to the focus and value of our work. Sometimes we were expected to take leadership and responsibility for the quality of student learning. At other times, we were sought out as consultants and advisors. And at other times again, we were ignored and bypassed, and our contributions rendered invisible (2006: 87).

For local leadership to be successful it needs to be strongly aligned with university directions and relies on support and leverage from other more senior roles (PVC, Dean, Head of School) given 'initiating change ... is seen as too difficult without authority' (Southwell, Scoufis & West 2008: 100).

Local leadership of learning and teaching is critical in order to ensure that the creative arts engages with, and responds to, emerging sectoral directions and imperatives. What are the issues and dilemmas that those charged with the formal leadership of learning and teaching face when creative arts disciplines are in their remit? Drawing on informal conversations with 11 leaders of learning and teaching, namely Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching/Academic/Education) in universities in four States and a Territory, we explore the issues and their associated dilemmas.

Informal conversations with learning and teaching leaders

We had informal conversations with 11 Associate Deans or equivalent in formal institutional learning and teaching leadership roles with one or more creative arts disciplines, about being responsible for leading learning and teaching in April /May 2011. Initially, these informal conversations were conducted as a way to discover how a national network of Associate Deans might be useful to them. However, the conversations generated such rich material prompting us to explore and analyse them for the dilemmas Associate Deans reported in their roles with their permission (de la Harpe, Mason & Peterson 2011). Zhang and Wildemuth cite 'Minichiello et al. (1990) [who] defined [informal conversations] ... as interviews in which neither the question

nor the answer categories are predetermined. Instead, they rely on social interaction between the researcher and the informant'. Associate Deans were able to raise whatever topics they believed were relevant to the conversation in addition to those we broadly explored. The 11 Associate Deans or equivalent were from ten Institutions located in four states and one territory across Australia. Of the 11, six were female and five were male. Associate Deans or equivalent came from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. Three were from the humanities, three from art/art history, two from education, one each from law, engineering and performing arts.

Conversations took place as part of a larger Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching project entitled createED, funded to establish a network to strengthen learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts (de la Harpe, Mason & Peterson 2011). Disciplines included art, architecture, creative writing, design and performing arts (drama, music and dance), all of which use a studio model of teaching as part of their pedagogy. These disciplines face particular learning and teaching issues around maintaining studio as a viable model of learning and teaching; implementing innovative and efficient modes of assessment for creative works; and increasing the scholarship of learning and teaching (de la Harpe, Mason & Peterson 2011).

As mentioned above, conversations were informal and explored the Associate Dean or equivalent role in leading learning and teaching and how the createED network might be useful to them in this endeavour. We discussed whether sharing practices and resources, seeking expert assistance, collaborating on publications or projects and seeking critiques would be useful, as well as face to face meetings. We broadly explored the title and role of the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or equivalent, the time fractions allocated and workload implications. We also discussed the university context and the creative arts disciplines, how disciplines were distributed and perceptions of the Associate Dean role and its relationship to the creative arts disciplines and the academics who teach in them. We met in a variety of locations including coffee shops (on and off campus), offices, meeting rooms, boardrooms and a classroom for about an hour. Conversations were recorded with consent and we promised anonymity to all; permission was later sought to use the data for publication. Recordings were transcribed and common themes were identified through reading transcripts, notes taken during the conversations and listening to the recordings.

Varying titles and roles

Titles and roles of the learning and teaching leaders differed from university to university. Titles included Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Associate Dean (Academic), Associate Dean (Education) and Dean (Teaching and Learning). Assistant Dean (Learning and Teaching), Deputy Dean (Learning and Teaching), Deputy Head (Learning and Teaching), Director (Learning and Teaching) are also common in the sector. Distribution of titles across the 11 Associate Deans is outlined below in Table 1.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Number</i>
Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)	3
Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning)	3
Associate Dean (Academic)	2
Associate Dean (Education)	2
Dean (Teaching and Learning)	1

Table 1. Learning and teaching title and number of participants interviewed

Titles were sometimes not consistent even within the one institution, with some of those in learning and teaching leadership roles performing the same role in a different faculty/college/division but with a different title. Conversely, there were others doing different roles with the same title. Roles were sometimes split between the areas of strategic leadership, quality assurance, operational tasks and/or academic development. In three institutions, the Associate Dean function was split into two positions, for example Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or (Education) with an Associate Dean (Quality), or Associate Dean (Academic) or Associate Dean (Student Progress).

The realities of the job on the ground differed from Associate Dean to Associate Dean or equivalent. Some focused more on strategic leadership;

... this is more kind of you know, that slightly more high-level, strategic [role] ... what does the curriculum look like, what about programs, what are we focusing on ...

... the integral part in my work is to drive forward debate about learning and teaching.

some focused more on operational management activities, including quality assurance and curriculum approval;

... we need to filter it and get it sorted ... we are looking at operational issues ...

Learning and quality about curriculum, curriculum development and evaluating the curriculum – you know, all that kind of stuff ...

I see my role as one of representation, reporting, communication, encouragement, all of that kind of ... I'm the reporter, I'm the representative, and I'm the reminder (the three Rs) ...

some focused more on academic development;

... more hands-on teaching side of things ... the real nuts and bolts of what teachers do and what students do as learners.

My mind's all passion about learning and teaching stuff ... empowering both students and staff to enhance their teaching journeys and learning journeys ...

So a teacher or an academic would come to you and you would say bring a group along and then you all sit down and have a look at well how can we introduce peer feedback or something ...

while some focused on combinations of the above; for others, work was devolved by the Executive Dean/Dean.

... the Executive Dean basically devolves responsibility for oversight of learning and teaching, learning and quality ... onto the Associate Dean.

In our faculty the Dean would just leave learning and teaching to me, anything that has learning and teaching in it. He just sends stuff to me and says, do it.

As an Associate Dean in the study by Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008: 57) pointed out,

the (Associate Dean) role is ill defined, and it does not fall naturally within the Department/School/Faculty hierarchy. Whilst this gives me the freedom to make of it what I wish it also makes it difficult or uncomfortable to implement policy. When your role is not clearly defined within the structure, there is a fine line between implementing and interfering (Associate Dean, female, 46-55).

The idea that the role was open to interpretation was reinforced by Associate Deans or equivalent in our conversations, one of whom stated, 'The idea of the role is a little slippery'.

No Associate Dean or equivalent who we spoke to had line management responsibilities. The majority of Associate Deans or equivalent were working hard to action their role through influence and persuasion through senior line managers, committee structures and personal relationships. Roles were often dependent on senior management for legitimacy.

We don't have any line authority which is quite typical of Associate Dean ... so it is the Dean and the two Heads of School that have the line authority ... I, as Associate Dean, have learned to go through them.

[The Heads of School] ... are the ones with the line management for transformation ... they are the keys.

A lot of it [capital] depends on the support you get from your own committee – and you know faculty ...

... it's coming via me, by the Associate Deans, into the Faculty level ... and the working relationship I have with the Faculty Executive, Heads of School, Executive Dean, people like that ... the danger is that there's a disconnect on the ground.

Several Associate Deans or equivalent discussed the competition between research and learning and teaching.

Learning and teaching is just not on the radar...

[the Dean says] It doesn't matter how you teach, if you've got research you'll get promoted ...

Differing time fractions and workloads

Time allocations for the Associate Dean or equivalent role also differed across universities. Time allocation depended on budgets, the size of the university, the size of the faculty, division or college, on whether the university recognised the significance of the role and on whether individuals wanted to stay teaching and

research active. Just over a third (4) had time fractions of 0.5 or below, one each were 0.6 and 0.8, while just under half (5) were full time. Full time roles were more likely to be in the stand-alone creative arts areas or in large structures.

Most of the Associate Deans or equivalent we met reported great demands on their time and claimed that their time allocation did not match the workload requirements of the role.

I'm somebody who also finds himself in a position where I'm struggling to keep on top of workloads and things like that ...

I took on too many things. I mean I wanted change. And I think you find that the fights take so much time.

Many were trying to privilege some aspects of their role over others because they did not have time to do everything. For others, the challenge of taking on the role within the time frame they had was unrealistic and they were actively trying to change their situation.

My role is 0.4. But I am trying to change it to 0.6. I suggested this to X but he said, 'Oh you can't be more than 0.5 because of Heads of School' [who are in a 0.5 position].

My job here is 0.4 ... [to increase it] I wrote a job description and counted my hours because everything was diarised ... I presented that to the Deans at the Executive but they knocked it back ...

Changing university contexts

Our conversations with the Associate Deans or equivalent highlighted how many creative art disciplines had been or were currently being restructured. There were accounts that a number of discipline areas had already disappeared from universities due to funding cuts and viability issues. The perception was strong that in university contexts, learning and teaching in the creative arts was seen as costly, specifically the studio teaching model with its small class sizes.

... they've [creative arts disciplines] increasingly found themselves coming up against the reality of faculty budgets ...

They [financial managers and senior administrators] argue that our model doesn't have enough bums on seats and we should be filling them.

We're always under the gun here. I can say we are the poor relations ...

The push is coming from the reality of budgets and student load ...

This situation reflects the findings from the Studio Teaching Project where the majority of Heads of Schools reported '... that some aspects of studio teaching in their institutions were currently marginally viable and/or under threat' (Zehner et al. 2010: viii).

On the positive side, some Associate Deans or equivalent reported that the creative arts disciplines were often seen favourably by senior university leaders and were

often called upon to showcase the cultural side of the university, stating that ‘They [creative arts disciplines] are the jewels in the crown...’ However, there is evident pressure on creative art disciplines to reduce their costs and this is leading in some cases to courses being cut or rationalised so that they combine with other courses or units (ANU).

Dispersed disciplines

Creative arts disciplines were spread variously across universities. Most often they were grouped in one or more faculties, colleges or divisions, as schools, departments or programs. Creative arts disciplines were most often in arts, humanities and social sciences faculties, divisions or colleges, as a school or department or program within a larger faculty. Other than for architecture and some design disciplines, they were less often located in faculties, divisions or colleges of business, law, education, built environment, IT or engineering. The creative arts disciplines of art, architecture, creative writing, design and performing arts were never grouped together on their own in a faculty, division or college in any of the institutions. Art, however, was on its own in two universities, while music stood alone in one. Art, creative writing or design disciplines were rarely named in the faculty, division or college title in which they were located, however, architecture was more likely to do so, appearing in the title of two faculties.

Most universities did not have the creative arts disciplines grouped together, either geographically or organizationally, and often Associate Deans or equivalent would have a small creative arts discipline or two in their much larger faculty.

... the problematic for us is that the creative arts is so dispersed.

It’s diverse. It is, we have a really big range of departments you know [lists areas] ...

But when you look at the [creative arts] they’re not covered within a single organization ... we have a school of [creative arts discipline] ... I’m sitting in the [non creative arts area] school, it’s got [creative arts discipline], and we have [another creative arts discipline] in the Faculty of Arts and I think we’ve got a [creative arts] group somewhere in the Faculty of Arts ... there are three people you could talk to, three Associate Deans, because they’re in three of the faculties here.

Our conversations highlighted that when a discipline is a minority in a larger faculty/division/college, for which Associate Deans or equivalent have responsibility, there is a possibility that it may be overlooked.

On the other hand, some of the Associate Deans or equivalent responsible for leading learning and teaching for the creative arts saw this dispersal as beneficial. Adjacencies with other disciplines enhanced the cross-disciplinary capacity of the disciplines, which led to new and productive partnerships. It made the creative arts more viable, since teaching could be cross subsidised through combining the more expensive aspects of creative arts studio teaching model with less expensive ones.

... you know all these creative areas are becoming more successful because in fact we are bringing together a range of groups and in fact we are starting to complement each other.

Disparate disciplines and ideas can come together to create something new. And I think it is economic reality. Where, at least on the ground, in everyday society, it could help people, because otherwise they think it [creative arts] is just fluffy.

Varying role perceptions, relationships and communication

Some Associate Deans or equivalent reported that they believed their role was sometimes undervalued in the university by those in Schools.

There's a lot of hostility to the Faculty by the schools ... we should really be a Faculty asset and yet they feel so hostile ... and so they're not very cooperative. You know they see it as a burden ...

Many of the Associate Deans or equivalent also talked about the resistance from academic staff and the difficulty of getting academic staff who are very busy to engage in learning and teaching matters.

Everyone is involved in teaching or you know really busy...and it doesn't seem to ease up.

[time] ... is the number one killer. I mean, it's fantastic ideas, wonderful, but once you get them off the ground. But it's really hard finding you know ... the space and time because everyone has a research commitment.

... relies on people who are already over pushed to take, to almost take on something new ... I know that you can always say that you are too busy to do things but ... who has the capacity?

The staff are overworked, I think. Some staff are overworked and another thing that's very consistent, you've got some ... staff who are not engaged in anything.

With regards to the creative arts, many Associate Deans or equivalent spoke about the difficulty of being accepted by, and being able to lead, creative arts disciplines.

... I [Associate Dean] teach outside the faculty in science and nursing so I don't think they think I'm really a member of the [creative arts] faculty.

At the moment they [creative arts disciplines] are shutting the door, you know. They have been shutting the door.

The people who are involved in teaching in the [creative] areas ... do have a strong sense of their differentiation ... much more intensive teaching, so there is a lot more individual work, you know one-on-one supervision. A lot of the things we talk about falls on deaf ears ... they are very resistant even if you mention their model of teaching

Others relied on gaining information directly from those in the creative arts disciplines.

If I need to know anything about teaching in [the creative arts discipline] I just go straight to the School L&T Chair or the Head of School ... so again if I need to know anything about [creative arts discipline] I would go and talk to [name] who looks after all the teaching in the School and then [name] will go and talk to [name] because it is a multi-discipline, multi-program, school ...

Others stated they did not need to lead the creative arts disciplines since they were proactive and leading themselves.

I certainly don't feel I have to take a lead ... in the case of [creative arts disciplines]. They have actually taken the initiative recently to go ahead and do some quite serious thinking and put some plans in place to do some quite, you know, quite big changes around their curriculum.

At the heart of this is whether Associate Deans or equivalent feel they are able to communicate with the creative arts academics and disciplines and be an advocate for them. This difficulty in translation comes through in some of the language our Associate Deans used:

... It's a hard place to fight from. I mean [the creative arts] are going to die if we don't learn to translate.

We've got to have someone who can get the message across so that they [creative arts disciplines] can feel included in it.

So far, we have described the variation in Associate Dean titles, roles and time allocations, the university sector, the dispersed nature of the creative arts disciplines, and variation in the perceptions of the role and its relationship and communication with the creative arts. The responsibility for learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts in Australian universities is not as clear as many in the sector may assume. In the next section, we postulate the dilemmas arising from the realities painted above for leaders in formal learning and teaching roles and their leadership of the creative arts.

Dilemmas

The dilemma that the variation in titles and roles may create for learning and teaching leaders and their leadership of the creative arts is that it contributes to a lack of shared understanding of the role, its purpose and value in institutions and makes it difficult to anchor the role in organisational structures. As Gray and Radloff point out, 'the nature and status of this [academic development] work at the start of the twenty-first century remains loosely understood and organized among both practitioners and their stakeholders' (2006: 80). Variation makes it difficult to find commonality with others in similar positions both within and across institutions.

Differences in titles and role descriptions also create tensions for the focus of the role, notably between leadership and management and between quality assurance and learning and teaching development initiatives. Research in the area of leadership of learning and teaching (Challis, Holt & Palmer 2009, Fraser & Ryan 2011, Manathunga 2007, Scott et al. 2008, Bullen, Gibbings & Brodie 2010) has identified

issues such as authority, legitimacy, marginalization and lack of homogeneity in the roles across the university sector, as did our conversations with Associate Deans or equivalent. The Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or equivalent is in a difficult position when they are dependent on senior management, the Dean or the Heads of School, for support in order to enact leadership and influence. This often results in being ignored or enacting the role in a way that may focus on compliance.

The dilemma that differing time fractions and heavy workloads may create for learning and teaching leaders and their leadership of the creative arts are feelings of being overworked, rushed, spread thinly and sometimes being unable to deeply engage with the tasks at hand. Time pressures resulted in Associate Deans considering whether they would stay in the role and a high staff turnover. In addition, some Associate Deans were experiencing health problems and others reported being challenged to stay positive and optimistic in the role.

The dilemma that the changing university sector may create for learning and teaching leaders and their leadership of the creative arts is how to effectively lead learning and teaching in uncertain environments and under difficult circumstances. Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008) report that leaders in learning and teaching find antiquated institutional processes, meetings with no outcomes, and university cultures which are rigid and reluctant to change as the most challenging areas of their roles. Many of the Associate Deans or equivalent we spoke to echoed this, and some reported that they never got onto important committees because they were time-poor or excluded.

Research in the area has also ‘repeatedly identified how unsure learning and teaching leaders are about what they might best do to lead in such a context to ensure that essential change takes hold [that is] sustainable and consistently [applied] in daily practice’ (Scott et al. 2008: vii). Those in learning and teaching leadership roles often find themselves grappling with very ‘complex activities that take place in complex contexts’ and yet their efforts in leading and bringing about positive changes in learning and teaching practices are frequently seen as ‘inadequate’ (Radloff & de la Harpe 2007: 132, 133).

Moreover, is it not an easy ask to bring about learning and teaching changes in creative arts disciplines, including supporting staff to consider ‘alternative and more efficient ways of delivering studio teaching’ (Zehner et al. 2010: viii) and to more resourcefully and effectually ‘us[e] a range of learning opportunities made available through contemporary study options’ (xi). The studio teaching mode is deeply held in the ‘zeitgeist’ of the creative arts disciplines and is resistant to change (de la Harpe & Peterson 2008).

The dilemma that the dispersal of creative arts disciplines in university settings may create for learning and teaching leaders and their leadership of the creative arts is that it makes it more difficult to identify the creative arts as a group and to understand, and where necessary, advocate for disciplinary ways of knowing and doing. When dispersed, while opportunities for multi-, cross- and trans-disciplinary collaborations are greater, the remit of the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching is it significantly stretched. Associate Deans observed that the dispersed nature of the creative arts disciplines made advocacy and representation for the creative arts more difficult for

them. It made it harder to support the development of a shared identity, and to foster working together collaboratively with cognate disciplines to develop collective clout. Rather than acting to support cohesion and the development of a shared and collective identity across the creative arts disciplines, the splintering of the disciplines may be contributing to further cementing individual and siloed creative arts disciplinary identities.

The dilemma that varying role perceptions, relationships and communication may create for learning and teaching leaders and their leadership of the creative arts is that it requires significant personal self-assurance, dedication and commitment to learning and teaching and its advocacy. Academic staff may 'question the institutional approach to quality which they perceive as compliance driven, creating busy work (Radloff 2008: 288, citing Anderson 2006, Harvey & Newton 2004, Laughton 2003). Radloff argues that 'academic staff may experience conflict in relation to their work priorities affecting their willingness to engage in efforts to improve the quality of learning and teaching' (2008: 288). Additionally, different disciplines have their own cultures, languages and practices which influence their approach to learning and teaching (Becher 1989, Becher & Trowler 2001, Donald 2002, Knight, Tait & Yorke 2006).

Culturally, organisationally and academically, staff identify with their discipline and approach their professional life by their discipline [and] while there is evidence that a lot of teaching and learning matters are generic, there are issues that are specific to disciplines (Hare 2007: 1, 5),

thus, having responsibility to lead and represent disciplines outside individual disciplinary specialisations requires gaining significant understanding of the other disciplinary ways of knowing and doing.

One way to address these dilemmas is for universities, Associate Deans and others to find forums in which to discuss and reflect upon them. This will help clarify the role of Associate Dean, so that there is homogeneity across universities in Australia, which will increase identity and authority and reduce possible confusion. Additionally, how the creative arts disciplines are structured and, therefore, represented as a group, remains an issue to resolve for some universities.

Conclusion

In this paper we have offered some insights, based on informal conversations with 11 Associate Deans or equivalent, into the realities of the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or equivalent role in the university sector. We have discussed the role from a leadership perspective, the importance given to it in an institutional setting and its relationship to the creative arts disciplines.

The conversations raised both the positive and negative issues that Associate Deans or equivalent, with responsibility for creative arts experienced enacting out their roles. This raised a number of dilemmas related to the role of the Associate Dean or equivalent. These included the place of the role in the university structure, the impact

of high workloads, a lack of authority for leading change, and disconnection on the 'ground' given the attitudes of many to the role.

The Associate Deans or equivalent we met all assumed a responsibility for learning and teaching in the creative arts. However, the range of structures and roles within which each Associate Dean or equivalent worked varied from university to university. The area of learning and teaching leadership itself did not appear to have long term stability in appointees and many of the Associate Deans or equivalent performed these roles part-time, holding down other roles in their primary discipline. The size of universities made communication difficult and it required communication channels that were both bottom-up and top-down. Associate Deans or equivalent were often 'caught' in the middle regarding issues involving learning and teaching. In this position, institution-wide decisions often rubbed against the idea of academic autonomy, which some academic staff in faculties venerated. This led to resistance to change by academics on the ground.

There were many instances when we saw the strength of the role for many of the Associate Deans or equivalent, but there were also frustrations of working in complex organisations, without in some cases the authority to lead change. The personal characteristics and backgrounds of Associate Deans influenced how they were perceived and how much change they were able to achieve. For the Associate Dean or equivalent role to succeed the role has to be able to connect to, and draw on, the strength of staff members in schools and have the authority to do so, and it requires the academic discipline areas and their academics to accept their leadership. When considering the appointment of Associate Deans or equivalent we can draw a parallel from the work of academic development and that

ways forward ... may include defining the skill base needed for Academic Development work clearly and recruiting appropriately qualified staff deliberately, rather than the casual or even accidental way that vacancies are often filled (Gray & Radloff 2006: 85).

Recognition that an Associate Dean or equivalent has to cover a number of disciplines in his or her portfolio and also that an Associate Dean is willing to become conversant with multiple disciplines if he/she is to have a successful leadership and advocacy role for them is critical.

Translation is another critical area. It is important that Associate Deans or equivalent connect with the creative arts and advocate and translate for them. Efforts by Associate Deans or equivalent to understand pedagogies of learning and teaching in the creative arts are well accepted by those in the creative arts. It is very important that positive interaction occurs because the viability and future of creative arts disciplines in universities may depend on such understanding.

If Associate Deans across Australia have opportunities to network with one another in relation to learning and teaching issues – including the dilemmas in leadership of the creative arts – and are themselves open to communicating and listening to new ways of learning and teaching, we believe this article shows that this has the potential to influence university creative arts structures and lead to the strengthening of learning and teaching leadership for the creative arts.

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