

Lewis Elton, *Teaching in Higher Education: Appraisal and Training* (1987). Guildford, Surrey: Kogan Page, pp. 211. Reviewed by Janet Donald, Centre for Teaching and Learning, McGill University.

This book is vintage Lewis Elton, and provides a great deal of insight into his concerns about teaching and learning in higher education over the last twenty years. To a North American, the references in this slim volume may appear strange – most of us are not familiar with the Jarratt Report and do not expect to see references to the National Board for Prices and Incomes in our books on higher education. Our inclination is not to make comparisons between the university and the military; but in this book the author contends that “the personal relationship with one’s superiors in a university is much more like that in the army ... than, say, in commerce and industry” (p. 22). There is no mention of the importance of collegial relationships.

The traditions from which Professor Elton speaks may also appear as shrouded in the mists of Avalon: North Americans may find it difficult to envisage a higher education system in which one central body of Vice Chancellors and Principals makes decisions about the future of all universities. Recent attempts at overall governance in British universities as denoted in the description of the resource allocation formula used by the University Grants Council (p. 41) may cause a few shivers. The formula is based largely on the research income of universities from councils, charitable bodies and contract research, with the explanation that performance indicators are available for research but not for teaching. What about educating students?

Several major concepts which Professor Elton uses have meanings different from ours. For example, he differentiates between assessment and evaluation, using the term “assessment” to describe “appraisal for judgment” and “evaluation” to describe “appraisal for improvement” (p. 12), while our texts on evaluation define it as a broad category of judgmental behaviors having two major purposes, those of improvement and decision-making. Sometimes the difference in language reveals a trend of thought parallel to one we have gone through, but with different results. For example, use of the term “didactic” to describe “a theory of the art and systematic training in the art” of university teaching (p. 53) developed historically as an alternative to the term “pedagogy”, in the same way that we have attempted to promote use of the term “androgogy” rather than pedagogy to deal with the education of adults.

A focal conceptual difference is the use of the phrase “staff development” to describe the identification of the needs of faculty members and the development of programs to satisfy these needs (p. 55). Although some North American universities talk of faculty development in conjunction with instructional development, the trend on our continent has been to focus on the improvement of teaching and, more recently, of learning skills. Stanford may have a faculty renewal program, but most of us have small teaching and learning centres or

committees in our universities, and we hesitate to label ourselves responsible for the development of our colleagues.

Having spoken of the differences, let me now say that the propositions that Professor Elton puts forward would meet with a great deal of agreement in Canadian and American universities. He suggests that staff development programs which provide counselling for individual professors cannot be based on Senate Committees for Teaching and Learning and require properly staffed educational development units (p. 26). This is becoming the preferred pattern in North America as well, although the units tend to be small. His model for raising teacher quality consists of a small central educational development unit, with specially selected academic staff in subject departments who would serve as resource persons (p. 77). The unit would be staffed by academics whose research is in the area of university didactics and whose teaching would consist largely in the provision of academic teacher training, as well as acting as educational consultants to subject departments. He suggests that the cost of operation would normally not exceed one percent of the institution's operating budget.

Less generally understood or less frequently voiced is the idea that we need "To transfer the attitudes which university teachers normally hold towards their research activities also to their teaching activities" (p. 56). This means applying the scientific method, "assembling the evidence" before making decisions about teaching issues in the university. He argues that it is as easy or difficult to make judgments about teaching as about research and that both can be made in the same manner (p. 44). We are finding that out too, or at least that both are dependent upon peer judgment and convention. He makes a strong argument, backed by the Association of University Teachers, that if there is to be appraisal, then there must also be training (p. 55). This parallels our argument of "No evaluation without development."

Elton is also concerned with teaching students to learn and "to learn in such a way that they not only know but also understand what they know" (p. 112). This closely parallels the recent interest in students' metacognitive processes and in critical thinking and problem solving in North America. One of his examples for teaching mental skills is of small problem solving groups given the task of making an order of magnitude estimate of some situation (p. 118). The university teachers in my research study on the learning task frequently made reference to the need for students to develop the concept of orders of magnitude – a general concept of numeracy or measurement essential for problem solving and for validating one's work.

The most challenging suggestion that Elton makes in this book concerns the relationship between research and teaching. Elton talks about finding a better understanding of their relationship through the concept of scholarship, "the pursuit of new and deeper interpretations of what is already known" (p. 156). Although not a new concept in itself, it suggests a way of bridging the gap which we have created between these two important parts of our lives. It reflects the recent call in

North America to pay greater attention to how we conceptualize our disciplines and present them to our students. I have recently talked about the middle road in which the continuing development of a conceptual framework guides both our research and teaching, and Elton's reference to scholarship or concern with interpretation of what is known strikes me as getting at that very important point.

In summary, this book reviews a number of critical issues in the field of teaching improvement. The format is odd. At times argument or example is repeated because the book is composed of articles previously written with brief introductions to them. The reader therefore may have a sense of going from one overview to another and remaining somewhat detached from the issues at hand. The language is unfortunately sexist, although a quote from an Australian article is in nonsexist language. In the last chapter it is noted that academic teacher training has a very short history of some twenty years, but that in that time, if it has not become a discipline, it has developed a body of knowledge and skills which can be taught and on which further knowledge can be built.

Smith, Peter and Kelly, Mavis (eds.), *Distance Education and the Mainstream*. Croom Helm, London, New York, Sydney. 1987. 207 pp. Reviewed by Mark W. Waldron, Ph.D., University of Guelph

This book resulted from a conversation among colleagues at the Distance Education conference of the I.C.D.E. in Melbourne in 1985. It is a collection of articles by writers from Australia, the United Kingdom, Kenya, the United States and Canada. The topics cover a range of concerns with several writers addressing the idea of convergence in distance education, the theory that distance education and on-campus education are converging due to the common use of various teaching and learning technologies. A sub-theme of the text focuses on staff development and its relationship to distance education. Other topics include student experiences, new technologies and the effect upon industry.

Because of the variety of writers and topics covered, there is a lack of sequence and continuity from one chapter to another. The idea of convergence, while very intriguing, is only dealt with superficially in the first part of the text and played little, if any, role in later chapters of the book. The book reads as though it was organized by a committee, and it probably was!

It does, however, focus on many of the issues with respect to access and quality associated with distance education courses. For someone who is not aware of the complexities of distance education, this text is an easy-reading introduction. For those who are selecting a career in managing distance education programs or those who are developing a distance education course for the first time, this text provides a basic review of definitional and conceptual ideas. For those actively involved in all aspects of distance education, this collection would confirm what they already