

From Neil Haigh , University of Auckland, neil.haigh@aut.ac.nz

In my commentary, I touched briefly on three considerations that surfaced in my mind during the day: history, conversation and rhetoric.

Archimedes stated *If you would understand anything, observe its beginning and its development*. The statement is relevant to our shared interest in (researching) undergraduate research and inquiry as being a researcher requires us to put on the hat of *the historian*. We need to relate our research to past research and scholarship when making the case for further research, when deciding how we might undertake the research and when identifying the contribution we have made to research-based knowledge. These understandings are a necessary part of an undergraduate curriculum on becoming a researcher.

Mick's helpful scene-setting account of the history of the undergraduate research and inquiry 'movement' and the emergence of associated organizations prompted nostalgic recollections of my earliest experiences of engaging undergraduate students in research and inquiry. It also evoked the thought that there may be a longer history of related initiatives to recount and draw on than may sometimes be acknowledged. The discourse may be middle-aged rather than youthful.

In the mid 1970's, I taught an undergraduate course on adolescent development and behaviour. As a component of the programme, the students undertook a research project. There was no institutional policy or persuasive body of scholarship that prompted me to include this task. However, I did have a rationale for it. The task aligned with my notion that the students and I were involved in an *intellectual weaning* process. As I also believed that the attributes and capabilities of someone who is fully weaned intellectually are those of a competent researcher, I felt that the sooner student got underway with becoming researchers the better. However, I didn't take it for granted that students would appreciate this rationale. I can recall frequent conversations with them about the purpose as well as the nature of the task.

Which brings me to the significance of such talk. Given my longstanding interest in everyday *conversation* and its place in professional learning and development (Haigh, 2005) I appreciated the emphasis that Alan and Mick placed on conversation rather than "lectures and the odd question" The obvious benefits of that emphasis is a salutary reminder that amidst the talk that is associated with the development of institutional policies and practices, the espousal or selling of policies – and shared decision-making about implementation of policy, conversation should have a prominent place. Defining features of conversation such as the parity of opportunity for all participants to steer and shape the talk, the place of story-telling and the permissiveness and risk-taking that is sometimes associated with the subject matter are beneficial when we engage in these activities. They certainly increase the likelihood that our colleagues will come to endorse our agenda for undergraduate research and inquiry. When conversation is devalued or short-changed, it is likely to be a longer and bumpier road to that end.

At the same time I don't discount the place of institutional/policy *rhetoric* despite the negative connotations often attached to the term. Well conceived and expressed rhetoric can be a source of education, as well as leverage. We noted the significance of choice of words during the day.

Certainly I feel advantaged by being able to refer students and colleagues to legislation in New Zealand that now mandates becoming intellectual independent as the overarching purpose for education in a NZ university and the requirement for an interdependence of teaching learning and research . Again, however, rhetoric that is unaccompanied by conversation is an inadequate lever.

Haigh, N. (2005). Everyday conversation as a context for professional learning and development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 10, 1, 3-16.