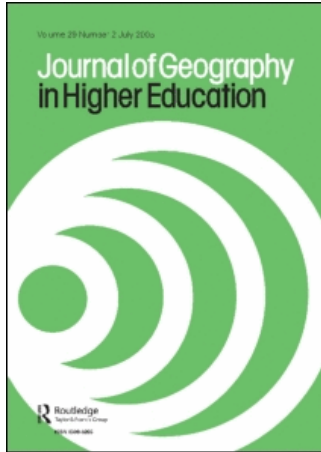


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## Journal of Geography in Higher Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713430794>

### The INLT Symposium: Brisbane 2006

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Online Publication Date: 01 January 2008

To cite this Article: Pawson, Eric (2008) 'The INLT Symposium: Brisbane 2006',

Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 32:1, 33 - 36

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/03098260701816735

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03098260701816735>

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## The INLT Symposium: Brisbane 2006

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This symposium contains seven papers written by members of the International Network of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in Geography (INLT), based on work undertaken before, during and after a workshop held in Brisbane. The workshop was designed to coincide with the 2006 regional meeting of the International Geographical Congress, drawing on the significant numbers of geographers from around the world who were to gather in the benign midwinter climate of that attractive Australian city.

It is more than 20 years since David Lodge, in *Small World* (1984), observed that:

The whole academic world seems to be on the move. Half the passengers on transatlantic flights these days are university teachers . . . that's the attraction of the conference circuit: it's a way of converting work into play, combining professionalism with tourism, and all at someone else's expense. Write a paper and see the world!

In the intervening years, the circuit has spread way beyond the North Atlantic, even if as Iain Hay (2008) observes in this issue, it still largely reflects the same old power geometries.

If, however, you are a workshop member of the INLT, it is not quite as laid back as the times enjoyed in the *Small World* of Morris Zapp, Philip Swallow and Fulvia Morgana. INLT workshops are intended to be convivial and collegial; the comments posted on the INLT webpage about this one seem to support that. They are designed to facilitate learning by combining it with a certain amount of leisure, if not levity. But they are also hard work, and demand a high level of commitment. There is not only the two days of roundtable and plenary discussions, held this time in Brisbane's downtown Mercure Hotel, but also the many months of both preparation and follow-up.

The 2006 symposium was modelled on the successful one held after the IGC in Glasgow in 2004 (Healey, 2006), which in turn had evolved from the format of the first, in Hawai'i,

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ISSN 0309-8265 Print/1466-1845 Online/08/010033-4 © 2008 Taylor & Francis  
DOI: 10.1080/03098260701816735



in 1999 (Healey *et al.*, 2000). Members of the INLT (membership of which is free, and whose listserv at <http://www.geog.canterbury.ac.nz/inlt> is open access) were asked if they wished to sign up late in 2005. In an attempt to widen access, and anticipating some of the views expressed by Hay (2008), money was sought to enable postgraduate students to participate and to attend the meeting in Brisbane. Thanks to support by the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, and separately by both its Editorial Board and its publisher, Taylor & Francis, enough money was raised to add six postgraduates to the tally. The total number of over 40 geographers (a slight increase on 2004) was then sorted by topic interest into eight groups. Thirty-five people came to the Brisbane workshop, the rest being distance participants.

The leaders of each group are those first named in the seven finalized papers that follow. In the first half of 2006, these leaders were responsible for getting a process of group interchange under way, and for ensuring that groups posted a draft outline paper on their topics on the internet about two months in advance of the Brisbane meeting. The topics were selected by INLT coordinators, past and present, and—as in 2004—we are grateful to the UK Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Geography, Geology and Environmental Sciences (GEES) for hosting an open web discussion, in the weeks leading up to the Brisbane workshop. This discussion provided one of two sources of material for group dialogue at the workshop. The second source was the reading and backgrounds of participants themselves, the topics having been chosen to encourage a sharing of experiences, and to enable everyone to have a personal, as well as an intellectual, source of expertise for contribution to debate.

The workshop itself passed very quickly; some sense of the occasion can be gained from words and photographs on the INLT web page. Much of the work followed on over the year afterwards, with by now widely dispersed groups having to finalize papers suitable for consideration for publication in this journal, as the *quid pro quo* for its generous support of the process. It is here that the reality, of combining the apparent fluidity of modern technologies with the tyrannies and distances upon which they thrive, hits home. It requires effort to be active in an international network, and to try to do more than “Write a paper and see the world!” There is a discipline in the INLT workshop process which insists that once back home, and subject to all the localized contingencies of everyday business, a focus on international linkages must be maintained if members are to act as teams able to capitalize on newly energizing experiences.

The papers that have been written up from this process each try to highlight what can be uncovered, from such networking, about topics of wide concern, as well as to identify ways of improving practices. In the first paper, ‘None of Us Sets Out to Hurt People’, Bill Boyd and his colleagues consider the state of ethics learning in the discipline. They find that provision for this is relatively weak at both undergraduate and graduate level, resulting in the ‘disengaged graduate’. This person stands in contrast to the expectations of sets of graduate attributes that highlight the need for the highest standards of ethical behaviour. The authors then explore the barriers to, as well as more productive pathways towards, the production of ‘The Ethical Geographer’, someone in whom ethical practice is embedded as the result of ongoing considered reflection.

The second and third papers are about active and inquiry-based learning. In ‘Experimenting with Active Learning in Geography’, Regina Scheyvens and her group try to dispel the myths that fuel resistance to it. They identify these myths and seek to counter them not only through provision of worked examples but by using the voices of

The logo consists of the word "SYMPOSIUM" in a bold, sans-serif font, enclosed within a thick, black, horizontally-oriented oval border.

students who have benefited from the deeper learning that can result. They follow this with some guidelines for successful integration of active learning into teaching. The same interest in highlighting good practice and exemplification is evident in 'Where Might Sand Dunes Be on Mars?', the title of the paper on inquiry-based learning from the team led by Rachel Spronken-Smith. They see inquiry-based learning as a subset of active learning, with a focus on question-driven, student-centred methods. IBL is more than a means of stimulating student curiosity and engagement, providing as it does a research orientation that enables facilitation of closer links between teaching and research in higher education. There are benefits for staff as co-learners as well as for students, benefits which are, however, likely to accumulate with exposure.

The next two papers both focus on specific spaces of learning, namely those accessible to community-based pedagogies and those of the postgraduate student. In 'Community Engagement for Student Learning in Geography', members working with Sarah Bednarz have sought to extend understandings of this type of active learning, and to define the widely ranging styles of community engagement (and the various terms used to describe these) in different institutions and countries. This is not a teaching strategy without risk, as they make clear, but it is one that offers considerable potential to enhance teaching and learning, as well as to broaden horizons and maintain student commitment. If it is a growing area of interest, so too is that of taught Master's courses, with everything that these bring in their wake, in terms of increasingly diverse postgraduate student intakes. Lindsey McEwen and her colleagues consider this in 'Strength in Diversity: Enhancing Learning in Vocationally Orientated Master's Level Courses'. They discuss the meanings of 'postgraduateness' and 'diversity', and are particularly concerned to draw out ways of capitalizing on diversity as departments find themselves with greater numbers of postgraduates from non-traditional and international backgrounds. They argue with a series of practice examples that this can best be done by bringing diversity explicitly into learning design.

The last two papers have particular resonance in a set produced by means of cooperation through an international network. David Higgitt and his co-workers, in 'Developing and Enhancing International Collaborative Learning', provide an assessment of the range of international collaborative practices and projects in universities and seek to subject these to a critical gaze. They contend that, despite the apparent seductiveness of such activities, discipline-specific evaluations of pedagogical benefit and learner outcomes require more attention than they usually receive. They consider ways in which collaborative initiatives can be established, managed and enhanced. The theme of newly emerging spaces for learning and teaching geography is carried further by Kenny Lynch and his team. In 'E-learning for Geography's Teaching and Learning Spaces' they explore the breadth of the range of e-learning approaches, such as virtual communities of learners, mobile learning and podcasting. They also emphasize the importance of effective practice with e-learning, but argue that geographical teaching needs to be versatile to reflect the evolution of learning contexts, as well as of student and employer expectations.

At the end of the Brisbane workshop, a discussion was held about future meetings, and how to develop the INLT further to meet some of the challenges laid out by Iain Hay in his JGHE lecture (Hay, 2008). There was enthusiasm for a workshop at the International Geographical Congress in Tunis, in August 2008, using a less intensive plan that might simultaneously encourage as well as widen participation. It was decided that an international swapshop, drawing on a format that has worked well in sharing ideas about



active learning (Healey & Roberts, 2004) and sustainability education (Roberts & Roberts, 2007), would hold promise for the next stage of evolution of the INLT as it seeks to extend to ever more inter-national spaces.

### Acknowledgements

The INLT is grateful to the *Journal*, its Editorial Board, and its publishers, Taylor & Francis, for financial backing of the Brisbane workshop. The Director of the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for GEES at the University of Plymouth, Professor Brian Chalkley, and his colleagues, Helen King, Wendy Miller and Mike Sanders, provided vital administrative and online services. A group consisting of Mick Healey, Brian Chalkley, Iain Hay and Michael Solem supported the author as organizer. On-site arrangements depended on the professionalism of Katie Hogg at the Mercure Hotel in Brisbane. Teams from the *Journal's* Editorial Board oversaw the process of reviewing papers, and checking resubmissions. The editors of the *Journal* responded, usually, when guidance and encouragement was needed. The biggest thanks, however, should go to team leaders for leading the production of papers which we hope are of much wider interest, even if in some cases the occasional reminder was required.

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