A Lecturer’s Toolbox: A ‘Just-in-Time’ Approach for a High Quality First Year Student Experience

Pacific Rim, First Year in Higher Education Conference 2009, Townsville

Claire Macken
Lecturer, School of Law
Joint Appointee, Faculty of Business and Law/ Institute of Teaching and Learning
Deakin University, Victoria
claire.macken@deakin.edu.au
The Unit.

- **MLL110 Law, Society & Civil Rights (Introduction to Law)**
  - Me – Unit Chair / lecturer

- **450 students**
  - 200 face-to-face at my campus + 250 in 2 other campuses and also offered online for off-campus

- **Mostly school-leaver students** (‘high achievers’(?))

- **Monday lecture 12-2pm**

- And ... Friday lectures 4-6pm. 😞
Setting the Scene: Around the year 2005
News from our previous fronts...

“This has been the worst teaching experience of my entire life. I dreaded Fridays.” – former MLL 110 lecturer

Student legend has it that in one MLL110 lecture, the lecturer crouched down on the floor sobbing, whilst students threw paper planes and pens towards the lecturer.

In 2006, a (former) law academic resigned from the Law School and gave away teaching because of MLL110.

Student Evaluation— Q5 ‘Was this Unit Well Taught’? (Burwood)
2005 – 1.88/5.00 (lowest in the University)
2006 – 2.76 (different lecturer / mean: 3.8)
2007 – 2.80 (different lecturer)
(End of 2007)
“Claire, we would like you to lecture MLL110 Law Society and Civil Rights”.
Captain Von Trapp: I don't know how much the abbess told you. You are the twelfth governess. ... I trust you will be an improvement on the last one. She stayed only two hours.

Maria: What's wrong with the children, sir?

Captain Von Trapp: Nothing is wrong with the children, only the governesses ... **The Sound of Music**
My Battleplan

Subject knowledge.
Teaching Skills / Implement transition program.
Personality (the ‘right’ person for the job?).
Interpersonal Relationships.
Research/Teaching Nexus.
- the 5 common attributes of excellent university lecturers (Kane et al p.292)

= Student engagement (method)
= enhanced learning (objective)
= ‘just-in-time’ approach for high quality student learning
Based on transition objectives
Now articulated in *inter alia*, Kift’s six interconnecting transition principles ...

**My interpretation of the Kift Transition Pedagogy**
And beginning with a ‘snapshot’ of a 1st year student from the literature (Krause et al, 2005):

- Conditional & uncertain to start
- Needs to juggle work & study
- Enjoys intellectual challenge etc

- but further informed by considerations of student diversity
... and in the context of a complementary institutional transition program:

### Deakin University's 12 month transition plan for commencing on campus students

#### Trimester 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Welcome</th>
<th>Settling in</th>
<th>Consolidating</th>
<th>Finishing strongly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networks/belonging</td>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>welcome</td>
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<td>Int1</td>
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<td>Academic engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>learning at Deakin</td>
<td>reconnect</td>
<td>assessment feedback</td>
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<td>Career</td>
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<td>enrolment support</td>
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<td>At risk</td>
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<td>attendance</td>
<td>assessment follow up</td>
<td>exit interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal needs</td>
<td>fit, financial and feeling good</td>
<td>contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred</td>
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<td>contact</td>
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#### Trimesters 2 and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Welcome and enrolment</th>
<th>Settling in / starting anew</th>
<th>Consolidating</th>
<th>Finishing strongly</th>
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Stage One – Orientation to Week 3

overwhelmed, lots of info!, stress, anxiety, tension, but a positive outlook, enthusiastic! (Krause et al, 2006)
And from now (throughout Trimester!)

Fun Fridays
in MLL110 Law, Society and Civil Rights!

Learner-centered approaches to learning law
and until week 6 of Trimester ...

‘FYI’ First Year Information email
(based on Infoflow)

From: Claire Macken [claire.macken@deakin.edu.au]
To: Recipient list suppressed:
Cc: 
Subject: FYI: Welcome to Week Two, First Year Law at Deakin

FYI - First Year Law Information

2- minutes of hints, tips & ideas for MLL110 Law, Society & Civil Rights delivered direct to your email inbox once-a-week from Claire Macken!

Hi everyone at the Burwood campus in MLL110,

Well this week we are starting to work on the skills of legal research and writing. Don't forget to bring the essay Friday! - we are all going to get started on the essay, to be continued in tutorials in week two. The essay ques' from DSO in the ASSESSMENT icon: www.deakin.edu.au/dso
Stage Two—Weeks 4 - 10

loss of momentum, frustrated, a ‘failure’, challenging their identity, what they are doing (Eijkman, 2002), feelings of inadequacy, difficulty in juggling work and study (Hillman 2005), consider withdrawing from course.
And ... keeping it interesting

Interesting lectures, engaging materials, quality explanations, clear student expectations, relevance of unit to law degree – consistently & often

At this time of Semester ...
You might be wondering
What Law Society & Civil Rights is all about ...

Civil Case
Macken v Macken (plaintiff) v (defendant)
These are “litigants” suing each other
“v” is pronounced “and”

Criminal Case
R v Macken (Regina) v (accused/defendant)
This is a prosecution by the Crown/State/Regina or “R” against an individual
“v” is pronounced “against”
with quality assessment to drive student learning
- Developing criterion-referenced marking guides
Sample annotated essays (fail – HD)
Clearly articulated expectations
Liaison librarians on each campus take lectures on legal research skills
‘Three’ forms of feedback: Self-reflection, individual, group – early enough for improvement
Stage Three – Weeks 11 – end of trimester

concern for end-of-trimester assessments, a need for a strong sense of purpose and belief in own abilities (Asmar et al, 2000)
The alternative to just-in-time?

An ‘info’ dump ...!

Work it out for yourself...
Roll Up! News from our student evaluations Sem 1 2008

“Absolutely loved *Law Society and Civil Rights*. Great lectures and tutorials. Very happy with the standard of this unit.”

“This is an essential introduction to a daunting new environment and is handled very well by all the staff, who are approachable and friendly... the atmosphere and the support were the best aspects by far.”

“*Law, Society and Civil Rights* is always the highlight of my week. Thankyou!”

**SETU – Q5 ‘Was this Unit Well Taught’?**
(Burwood)

2005 – 1.88
(29.6% agree unit is well taught)

2006 – 2.76
(different lecturer)

2007 – 2.80
(different lecturer)

2008 – 4.50,
(94.6% agree unit is well taught)

2009 -?
The Deakin first year transition program in law was also in

Where does a lecturer draw the line?

And what is my role?

<phone call>

Claire, I’ve decided to end it all...
3 Key Lessons Learnt

1. **Just-in-Time!**
   Transition must be integrated and include social, academic and personal support at discipline-level, underpinned by institutional models & support.

2. **Pocket-books of Engagement**
   ‘Tucked away’ teaching strategies, only pulled out for the purpose of student learning.

3. **Courage**
   Step out of your old lecturing shoes for a moment!
   “To master anything ... Requires effort. But it does not require unpleasant effort, drudgery. The main task of any teacher is to make a subject interesting.” (Ramsden page 94 quoting Sayer 1943: 9)
Clarifications? Ideas? Questions?