# HARRIET RIDOLFO INTERVIEW WITH BEN

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Harriet: | I can see you. |  |
| Ben:  R1 | Great. Now have you got your video – great, excellent. Now it’s recording at the moment. |  |
| Harriet: | Right, fantastic. Ok so we can get started. |  |
| Ben:  R2 | Right, now I can’t make any guarantees about the quality of the recording or what’s going to happen after all this but we’ll just, you know, it seems to be my mike is working away and it’s telling me it’s recording. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes, I can see that up in the left hand corner so let’s, it’s exciting isn’t it. |  |
| Ben:  R3 | Have you used Zoom before? |  |
| Harriet: | I have joined in as a meeting. I’ve not set it up myself so I’ve not taught with it or anything like that but I’ve been in a Zoon meeting with someone before. |  |
| Ben:  R4 | Well I set that meeting up and sent you the invite in real time so as you can see it’s really good and even though we’ve got Skype we actually prefer Zoom. The other thing is if you’re on campus and you’ve got a decent connection Zoom is really good. As you can see, the value of the picture, the audio, it’s fantastic.  So, shoot away. |  |
| Harriet: | Right, ok well, because you’ve already been through this you can give me feedback at the end. So what I’d like to do, I’M Harriet Ridolfo and I’m on Zoom and meeting with you today as arranged to interview in relation to my research project which is critical organisational success factors for implementation of E-learning and from the information statement that I sent you, you will know that I’m conducting this research as part of my PhD in the School of Education at the University of New England and you’ll know that I’ve got ethics approval. Thank you for returning your form and I’m just looking over here to see.. I don’t blame you for not wanting the transcript, there’s a lot of things to go through, but I know that you’ve understood that you can withdraw at any time. You’ve agreed that the data gathered for the study will be created using a pseudonym. |  |
| Ben:  R5 | I know all this and I don’t care. You may feel free to quote me with or without a pseudonym, I give you absolute right to do whatever you like. |  |
| Harriet: | Thank you very much. So the first thing I’d like to ask you is if you could tell me a little bit about you, your role, I’ve got to ask a very rude question about your age only in terms of range – are you 39-49, 49-59 – |  |
| Ben:  R6 | Yes., 49-59. |  |
| Harriet: | That’s very good. That’s the best range to be in. Yes so I guess what I’m after, I am interested in your role at the university as well as what you’re studying and the fact that you’re doing it part-time. |  |
| Ben:  R7 | Well I’m not doing anything anymore, I’ve finished, I’ve graduated. |  |
| Harriet: | Well done. So you’ve got a PhD and a Masters – |  |
| Ben:  R8 | No, I’ve got a MAONS and an MIS |  |
| Harriet: | Fantastic, Congratulations. |  |
| Ben:  R9 | The MIS was the easiest thing, I mean it wasn’t easy, it was hard doing it but compared to doing the previous Masters it was a piece of cake. But I mean I’m 20-30 years later so it’s really, you know, online education has become as easy compared to how it used to be and access to research, access to publications is just so much simpler. There’s no comparison. |  |
| Harriet: | Mmm. Mmm. So I guess in that sense then could you tell me a little bit about your actual role at UNE? |  |
| Ben:  R10 | I manage the website for the library and I am the Primo administrator, I administer the primo discovery layer. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes, so you’re right in the information world, aren’t you. |  |
| Ben:  R11 | Yes. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes. So you’ve explained to me how long you’ve been studying online, could you tell me something about your experiences as an online learner? You mentioned that it’s become so easy so can you perhaps talk a little bit more about perhaps how it used to be, what you mean about it being easier and perhaps your experiences with CSU in terms of online learning. |  |
| Ben:  R12 | Ok. I have been involved in distance education for many years. I used to work at the Distance Education Centre at the university and I was there when we made the transition from course packs to CD Roms and the move to Moodle. Well we can go straight to Moodle but we’re on Moodle now. So I actually have a fairly good understanding of the process, I’m a published author in the field of University education, I’ve got a highly sighted article, The Adventures of Miranda in the Brave New World, which I did with Belinda Tynan, I’m published in biometrics and a medieval historian by training but my interest at the moment is the military history of the Huns, right, so I’m not a typical online learner. I’ve got to say that I am very atypical because when I use a tool such as your Primo discovery layer at CSU I’m the administrator of the system here. If I can’t use the system then there is absolutely no hope for me. So I know what it was like to be a distance education student in the past, I was studying on campus in a sense while I was working but I also serviced and met the needs of students, produced course packs as head of the word processing section, I was thoroughly familiar with every aspect of distance education as it was practised in the 1980s and 1990s and I dare say as it is practised now at UNE. I mean we support students every day. So I can say that the transformation in terms of the range of resources and their immediate availability has been a quantum leap. When I came to this library we had about 6,000 journals. We’d have 30,000 or so, most of these available online. There’s no comparison. I can do research that in the 80’s was taking me weeks in literally seconds. Literally yin an hour I can discover resources that would have taken me months – 6 months – to assemble the old ways. When I did my Masters you had to submit a library loan request, you’d get an article, that would take weeks. When you read that article and you maybe found it useful or maybe it wasn’t, you looked through the bibliography and at the end of the article you ordered another article, ad nauseum.  I went to England in ‘85/’86 and I would go to the Institute of Historical Research, lovely people, really good, at the University of London; I would order a thesis, it would come in a few days because we were in England and I would read that thesis and maybe there’d be something in it, maybe there wouldn’t be and I’d follow-up. Nowadays I can download that thesis, read it immediately, you know, the transformation, the conquest of time and space in distance education, is amazing. Now that doesn’t mean that there are still not a host of obstacles for distance education students. Isolation from the rest of the community, isolation from supervisors, problems in getting material, I mean they still exist. It’s a hard, long road to walk down and it will always be a long, hard road to walk down because you’re on your own and most distance education students are older – you know the whole thing, you’re actually representative of one of them. | L41-42 C9  L43-46 Complexity / barriers to students |
| Harriet: | Yes, absolutely, yep. |  |
| Ben:  R13 | So it’s very difficult but it is so much easier than it used to be. We can do so much more, there are still things that it’s not possible to do, there’s still forms of scientific research that are very difficult to teach by distance but for humanities based research there’s absolutely no comparison. So my feeling is, and remember I’m incredibly atypical, I am in my late 50’s, I’m a published author, I work at a library IT department. Really I should be pretty well equipped to find information on my topic. So you have to make allowance for that. What I realised when I was working with CSU is how complicated things could be even if you had a good idea of what should be there and you had a good idea about how systems worked. The CSU interface, the CSU sort of collection of different tools, is not good. I could figure it out. It took me time. Your IT people are doing a great job, believe me, I understand what they’re doing, they’re trying to link all sorts of systems together but for an older student who’s maybe not so computer literate, or for a younger student who may think he or she is computer literate but in fact isn’t, it’s a daunting prospect.  Having said that, I had no real problem leaping over the administrative hurdles, I had no real problem studying it at CSU. I found the standard of online pedagogy very variable. | L9-13 II/LMS  L16-18 II/LMS  L21 CB / pedagogy |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Ben:  R14 | Some units made the best use of the technology, well not the best use of technology because pedagogically it was still fairly unadventurous. But where we were told we had to write so many postings, we had to engage with other students, we had to do continuous learning and continuous social engagements – those units, and there weren’t that many of them – were the best. From my point of view we learnt the most because it wasn’t a case of skim the notes, read the notes, try and remember what parts of the notes you cared to and then write three assignments. It was a case of continuing engagement. And that really made a difference. The units that I was expected and I would be marked on whether I completed these many assignments, whether I wrote material for the use of other students, where we commented on other students’ postings, those were by far the best learning experiences from my perspective. | L3-7 CB / pedagogy |
| Harriet: | Yep. |  |
| Ben:  R15 | I can’t stress that enough. You can go through the motions, you can just write three assignments and you learn a certain amount right, oh yes write three assignments. But when you have to continuously engage with other people and think about the material each week that produces a far superior learning experience to my mind. I found the lack of exams a blessing. I certainly don’t think it interfered with my learning because my experience is that when you learn something for an exam and you cram, three days later you couldn’t for the life of you remember it. So I thought that some of the pedagogy I got was very good, vert fit for purpose. Otherwise sometimes people were teaching effectively the same way they taught in the 12th century, only online. | L1-6 CB / pedagogy  L11-13 CB/ academic e-competence |
| Harriet: | Yes, absolutely. |  |
| Ben:  R16 | I say that I’ve read translations of Roger Bacon, a 12th century scientist in a sense, Roger Bacon discussing things in a seminar with his students, and he’s writing in Latin but he’s talking to his students the same way an academic at UNE might be talking to their students now. The only difference is that he’s face-to-face, he’s expecting them to do writing, he’s expecting them to read set texts, he’s teaching the same way we’re teaching online; and really, that was the 12th century, if we can’t have improved our pedagogy since then we’re not doing well. So I thought some of the units were good, some of the units not so good. There were none that were poor, objectively there were not that were poor. Some of the lecturers knew far less about modern libraries than they actually thought they did. I got a lecture on Primo, a system I administer, and I’m not going to mention who did it but he didn’t understand how the system worked, it was like “this isn’t serious” this is not actually how Primo works. Now fortunately I was listening to it and I wasn’t in a position to say hold on a moment, that’s not how the system works at all. Because it wasn’t how the system worked at all. Moments like that were quite rare at CSU I’m pleased to say, but there were problems with writing assignments. A continual issue among students was we didn’t know what we were supposed to say. | L12-13 Currency  L21-22 Currency / can’t say stuff to academics |
| Harriet: | Yes, ok. |  |
| Ben:  R17 | We have Rubricks, they’re supplied to us, we know what we’re supposed to say in a sense, we’re supposed to deal with this, this and this. But the markers tended to expect a certain answer. If you had a question ‘should we do A or B?’ there was only one right answer. It was B. If we argued for A then we were marked down. The theory is that you’re supposed to be an independent learner but in fact we weren’t expected to do that at all, we were expected to arrive at the set series of solutions to problems. And if your set of solutions to the problems were not the ones the marker expected then you were going to be marked down. And there was no room for a different interpretation of the question. They were expecting kind of a checklist. You were going to go A, B C, D and all that and if you didn’t get all those exactly the way they wanted the markers were going to penalise you. Some of the marking was very hasty. I got an annotation saying there should be four sentences in every paragraph, right. There were five sentences in the paragraph that the marker was referring to, right, so I’m thinking ‘have you really read this?’ have you counted the full stops? At one time I got told ‘read the recent literature’. Now everything I wrote in that assignment was recent literature but it was not the recent literature that I was expected to have sighted. | L3-L6 CB / pedagogy |
| Harriet: | Aha. Mmm. |  |
| Ben:  R18 | So for a student like me there is a problem in that I have my own opinions. I am actually an author in this field. So when we’re recommended to read things that are actually not best practice, that are in fact a bit naff, but you don’t refer to them, you’re marked down for that. You know, there’s an assumption that, and it’s perfectly reasonable in most cases, that if you’re writing on project management then this is this, this and this but there’s no understanding that some people might actually be experts in this field and that we might actually disagree with what the unit coordinator has said because the unit coordinator may not be an expert in this field. They may know enough about this field to write a unit but they’re not really experts in it. And I found at one stage that I was being marked down for not following a set of Rubricks that were very, very amateurish, you know. I work in a university. When the unit coordinators expect us to perform like a bright undergraduate when in fact some of us have got a Masters degree and 20 years’ experience, that’s a problem. I don’t want to go into that, right. | L8-12 currency  L13-18 CB / pedagogy |
| Harriet: | No, that’s absolutely fine Ben, I’m very grateful for your openness and response. It’s fascinating. |  |
| Ben:  R19 | But a lot of the people in the units I was doing worked in libraries. They were like me, they were middle-aged. They’d had various jobs and some of them were very smart people, and they felt they were being forced into a pigeonhole that was suitable for a learner, for someone who didn’t know libraries, you know, you’ve got to crawl before you can walk, and some of us we’re running. And yet the feeling is if you can run, if you can leap and sprint, no hold it! Crawl, I want you to crawl. Having said that, I have to emphasise that the CSU Masters degree was very good in my opinion. I liked it. Particularly the last units I did were really, really relevant to my work. Absolutely spot on for my work. But you get questions like “talk about cataloguing in the context of an O-pack”. Well sorry, I work in a university. No one has O-packs. We have discovery layers. The assignment says “tell me what you’re going to do about this” and I’m thinking well I can’t because I don’t do that. No one in the field does that any more, you know. If we were still using Virtua then yes. So that was wrenching a bit because the curricular often lags behind real world practice. | L1-6 not responding to expertise in the group – or something like that  L16-18 currency |
| Harriet: | Yes. Yep. |  |
| Ben:  R20 | And it was difficult to step out of what you knew and try and give an answer that you knew was expected of you because the curriculum in the assignment was written from a few years’ perspective ago. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep, absolutely. That’s interesting. So there wasn’t an opportunity to show your experiences and bring those – |  |
| Ben:  R21 | Yeah no, the feeling was that we couldn’t work out what was required of us. What was the right answer. |  |
| Harriet: | And do you think that relates in any way to being online or that was a straightforward sort of pedagogical problem that would have happened if it was face to face? |  |
| Ben:  R22 | Exactly. I don’t think online was the problem. It didn’t make it easier. I mean it didn’t help us have the conversations that we could have had in the tutorial environment, because we didn’t have a really good knowledge of the cut and thrust of a verbal debate in tutorials. We had one academic who managed these chat sessions but he actually couldn’t type. He lost control of the chat session very often because everyone was ten fingered except him. And so they would go …… and everyone would be hitting him with enquiries and he would be trying to tap out an answer and they were incoherent because he was just a hunt and peck typist. And he kept on making every sentence, because he was rushing to try and get it, every word was misspelt. We could understand what he was saying but the communication was at the edge of breaking down. A lot of other factors but that factor, it was the difference between what he wanted to achieve, what we wanted to achieve and what was possible using a chat interface. I mean it couldn’t be done. It could be done on something like this if Zoo was going to handle the bandwidth of 20 people talking all at once, you know, and really chat was the only option that was going to work because not everyone would have the sort of connection that would enable them to have this sort of conversation. Chats are low bandwidths but synchronous. | L4-13 CB / staff e-competence  L21 Complexity |
| Harriet: | Yes. So can I just sort of dig a little deeper around that because what I’d be quite interested in finding out is about your, I suppose your feeling about your own E-competence, and then your fellow students and then the actual lecturers because, you know, when I say to you E-competence does that mean anything to you and do you have an expectation when clearly you’re highly competent in technology use and pedagogy. So I’m just wondering what your thoughts are about that particularly lecturer and maybe others in terms of their E-competence or whether it is about, again, E-competence at all or maybe it was something else but any thoughts about that in terms of barriers or enablers? |  |
| Ben:  R23 | I think one of the problems academics have is that not all academics come equipped with the digital literacy skills that their students have. By and large academics in our system learn from learning. They learn to teach from observing others and when they come to teach online they transfer the pedogeological approach that they had face to face and they only learn enough technology to get by. Very few of them have the time to start to master technologies that are not directly relevant to their job. Now if you’re an education lecturer often you find yourself teaching students to use a whole lot of technologies which otherwise you’d never engage with but if you’re not actually in education it’s most likely that you don’t use a wide range of different technologies. Your awareness of the different technologies out there is quite limited and you kind of just learn enough to get you out of trouble. At a library we’re kind of horrified all the time by academics who don’t understand what a durable link is. They don’t understand what easy proxy is, they don’t understand the difference between on campus and off-campus. I mean, we can look at a link and go ‘that’s never going to work’, you’ve just taken an address bar and you’ve pasted it into Moodle and yet you think that will work. It’s not going to work. And that’s not because academics are stupid people, they’re very highly intelligent people by and large, it’s because they only know enough to get by, with some spectacular exceptions there – | L1-3 CB / e-competence  L7-15 CB |
| Harriet: | Yes, yep. So do you, sorry, after you – |  |
| Ben:  R24 | One of the problems is that every university has programs to teach people how to teach technology. But what happens is that every time the same switched on people attend. So we get an endless stream of clever, clever, and ever clever people that we’ve communicated with but the vast mass don’t really learn very quickly and that’s almost a given. And how you overcome that is an unanswered question. A lot of different models but none of them have actually succeeded. Belinda Tynan and I wrote a paper, we put a chapter into IGI which is a terrible publisher, I certainly recommend you never publish in that. And we talked about how you might recruit academics to act as champions in their own departments where 2.0 technology is because that’s really the only way you can do it, you have to buy an individual, you have to cultivate them, you have to encourage and they have to become exemplars for their colleagues. But the only way that things are achieved is by letting the academics die or retire and getting newer, younger academics. | L1-6 B8 Teacher – efficacy  L10-17 LM / workload (& culture change) |
| Harriet: | Yes, that’s wonderful., I’d be interested in your thoughts in terms of things like policy or directives or leadership in relation to some of those things you’re talking about, do you have thoughts about how that can impact effect help in terms of online learning? You know, the organisation’s views and – |  |
| Ben:  R25 | UNE is undergoing a process of transformation. There’s a 2025 plan, we’ve got a pro-vice chancellor academic innovation. So we are in the middle of the red hot, white hot transformative process to bring ourselves into the 21st century. No hope. We have a problem in that academics have been through this before. Jonathon and his team are breathing fire, they come to work in asbestos suits, they don’t have any problem. They will continue to teach the way they’ve always taught, with some rare exceptions, and the rare exceptions are doing a marvellous job. Most academics do a pretty good job, let’s not be wrong about that. But the reality is that a university that seeks to transform itself must put in place a complete policy environment that rewards exemplary behaviour and they must avoid soft options and one of the soft options is we only evaluate units if someone is going for promotion. | L1-5 II / culture (& change fatigue)  L11-15 LM / policy |
| Harriet: | Yep. I feel like you and I are right on the same page, it’s just fascinating. |  |
| Ben:  R26 | We have to reward exemplary teaching, we have to change the research teaching balance because at the moment if you want a promotion you push ahead with your research – | L1-3 II/culture or org structure |
| Harriet: | Absolutely. Learning and teaching isn’t rated in the same way. |  |
| Ben:  R27 | And we need to think seriously about the incentives we give academics. Open education resources is a classic example. There is actually no reason why an ambitious academic would write no ER when they might get a non-traditional research output but for all the ARC, but really, write articles. Don’t write a book because in a lot of disciplines books count literally for nothing. You know., if it’s not in the citation database like science or #?#? well don’t bother. I mean I don’t want to get into the whole issue but you can understand that that is a major problem. The other issue is that we have models of pedagogy that are popular with educationalists and I certainly would refer you to The Adventures of Miranda in the Brave New World, Barnes and Tynan. Because that’s got about 150 citations, it began a little bit of a debate in Australia about online pedagogy 2.0 and yet I would have to say that the vision it presents is much more palatable to educationalists than to students. We want students to become self-directed learners. We want them to YouTube clips, we want them to use all this technology, we want engage in their discipline in all sorts of exciting ways. They’re not interested in that. By and large, they want to do three assignments, sit their exam and get their unit down. |  |
| Harriet: | [Laughs] Yes, yep. |  |
| Ben:  R28 | So what Belinda and I wrote was completely valid from the point of view of how you might build a constructivist vision, a constructivist university web 2.0, it’s actually not what the majority of our students want. They have an instrumentalist approach, they want to get their qualifications and they want to go home. So you’ve got to strike a balance between the brave new world and what the student wants. That students want may not be what they need. So, I mean, we can’t teach some things in a fully constructivist way, you can’t say “you guys you construct your own vision of evolution, your own vision of how we should name plants and animals”. I’m sorry, that’s not going to work. We night ask people to be a constructivist educationalist or a philosopher or a sociologist or whatever – that’s all completely valid. Every historian constructs his own model of the past, without exception. But in some disciplines that sort of educational approach is just not useful at all, at least at the undergraduate level. So it’s horses for courses and that’s a real problem because how do you build a policy environment that meets the different needs of every discipline, and quite different. How do you reward excellence but the excellence has to be appropriate for that particular field of study. Now obviously every university, every government, rewards high flyers through prizes, awards, grants etc but in fact you can’t win the revolution one bespoke project at a time because after the money is gone that’s it and we’re not very good at embedding best practice in day to day pedagogy. We build prestige projects, prestige programs, and then we don’t deal with the day to day teaching because that’s all too hard,. And in fact it’s not scalable. You can’t scale up best practice to every unit. You can’t build the equivalent of a CD Rom for every unit. We, like every other university, went through that stage. UNE produced OzSoils, it was a magnificent CD Rom. Really good. About soil formation on the Australian continent which is quite different to elsewhere, or at least we’re told it is quite different to elsewhere, I imagine South Africa would say ‘yeah, right’.. but it was an excellent resource but it just was not scalable. We couldn’t produce a CD Rom for every unit, and even if we could it may not be appropriate. You don’t need to learn the history of Rome from a CD Rom. It might be useful but the way ancient history is taught, the way the #?#?# is practised it is probably better to get people to read documents rather than watching videos. | L2-8 Complexity / mental model of students  L17-21 LM / policy  L26-29 LM difficulty of translating projects to BAU |
| Harriet: | Yes. Yes. Yes. So can I just go back to around the policy of leadership and things like that – so what I think I’m hearing is you alluding to we’re a sort of tight loose organisation and often the academic is loyal to their tribe before the university – |  |
| Ben:  R29 | The university is not a single unified organisation, it’s a series of tribes of rival letterheads, you know. | L1-2 II |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Ben:  R30 | The problem is that vice chancellors are like Russian Tsars. The only distinction is you can’t assassinate the vice chancellor. But the Tsar is an autocrat, controls all of Russia. And in fact he can’t control anything that’s happening in Siberia. He can give orders but by the time they filter down, and this is the problem, we have all powerful vice chancellors but there’s only so far they can change things. And one of the problems is that vice chancellors, pro-vice chancellors, they tend to have a top down model. I will make all the changes. I will transform things. And then they discover that they can’t. Policy has to be built and by the time your policy goes through academic board and sub-committees it’s watered down, or you have policies that are vague, contradictory, very often contradictory, and policies that people ignore. It’s so easy to ignore a policy when you work at a university. | L1-5 II / tight loose |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Ben:  R31 | And these are the problems. Universities are extraordinarily bad at change management. They tend to revert to top down approaches. They pretend to consult us. We pretend to listen and we pretend to feed back to them what they want to hear because we know that they’re not listening. Now management is often a situation where you know where you’re going and you know damn well that no one in the organisation other than you is interested in getting there. That’s reality. | L1-5 II / change management (or better in LM?) |
| Harriet: | Yep. |  |
| Ben:  R32 | But you have to try to bring people along. You have to make a real effort to listen. Now one of the major problems is we talk about listening but we never actually listen. I might have a vision of how I want to go but if I’m not listening to people we’ll never get there. And if I'm not talking to people and convincing them they’re coming behind us but they’re not pushing with me. Leadership is something that universities are very, very poor at. And also sexist. And also kind of racist. We’re a microcosm of Australian society but our management philosophies in universities are very Australian, and Australia is a very, very bad place in terms of management culture. Our management culture in this company is terrible. You can look at somewhere in Scandinavia or Germany or places like that and you just go, everything is oppositional. You know, workers versus bosses. Everything is zero sum game rather than a win. And that’s kind of Australian rugged individualism, we’re not rugged individuals in a sense, we tent to form into our tribal allegiances and silos and that. I don’t know how valuable these observations are, obviously, they’re just my feelings, but if you want a successful policy environment the universities have to make hard decisions. They may have to make really hard decisions, to make realistic decisions sometimes they will have to settle for being 20% better across the board rather than having pockets of excellence and as you know, pockets of excellence are incredibly seductive. | L7-12 II / culture  L15-18 / II / structure  L19-24 LM |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Ben:  R33 | We have this great team here, we have this great program here, we have this great centre here. We’re pouring money into that and we’ll pour money into that because we can see results, rather than pour money elsewhere where we’ll only see a little improvement. And that’s a major problem. We cannot fund improvement across the board but if we don’t settle for small improvement across the board we’ll never get it. I mean it’s hard because you know, a university is a big organisation, it’s got lots of different tribes and some of the tribes are going really well but you wouldn’t know. You literally wouldn’t know what achievements are being made in one part of the university because we never talk about them. We never talk about achievements in teaching, day to day teaching, we might talk about someone getting an award but we don’t talk about incremental progress. And incremental progress in teaching is possibly more important than the big bangs, the big research achievements and the person winning the award here and there. I mean really I think it all boils down to being realistic, accepting that digital dominance and excellence, the great ideas that let’s try and raise everyone up or as many people as possible. Policy making has to be right and there are very few universities that are good at policy and most universities are beginning to hide their policies behind firewalls and that really worries me. I mean they say that this is because other people don’t get a competitive advantage. They don’t find out what’s happening and then use that against us or whatever but in fact it leads to sloppy policy, it leads to sloppy thinking and it also is quite counter intuitive. The only way people learn is generally by looking at other people and gaining insight from them. The whole sector is looking inwards, hiding, you know, it’s putting walls up, it doesn’t want to talk about its policy. When in fact the only way we can learn is by talking to each other. The library association is one of the most secretive organisations on the planet. I mean you really cannot get up to date information about the Australian university libraries from the site. It’s locked down. I have never encountered so much beaurocracy, so much risk aversion, so much desire not to say things, as when I’m working with people from ?#?#?# Other ?#?#? things, because it’s a beaurocracy and it doesn’t want, information can’t get out, information that might be dangerous like the number of students you’ve got coming – you know, how is this information dangerous? How many people are borrowing the books? If that information falls into the wrong hands – | L5-12 II  L18-20 CB  L20-26 LM / policy |
| Harriet: | [Laughs] |  |
| Ben:  R34 | And universities as a whole are like that. And an interesting thing is that universities are on the defensive all the time. I mean clearly the Australian government has a lot to answer for. Sorry, you poor thing, you’re getting talked at all this time. We know that we’re under pressure to reduce our number of professional staff but at the same time Canberra expects more and more reporting. | L4-7 C9 External |
| Harriet: | Oh yes, yes. |  |
| Ben:  R35 | So what we do is we have to put on more staff. ERA – Excellence for Research in Australia – has absolutely devastated institutional repositories. We now have institutional repositories. People have to put in their published output and things like that, it’s all very good but those institutional repositories contain almost no grey literature because that’s not what ARC is looking at. So our dreams of collecting grey literature are gone. At small universities like UNE we don’t collect grey literature. And yet that was one of the major reasons why institutional repositories were created. But I’m getting off online pedagogy. But yeah, I mean I think things are getting better but the way forward is going to be extremely slow and I don’t believe that most universities have got solutions. Sometimes you get an evangelist that comes in and says ‘every student’s going to have a Mac’ and they discover that every student having a Mac or iPad doesn’t give every student a textbook because most textbooks are only available in paper. Noe people don’t realise the realities. Something like UNE has been talking for years about open textbooks, about open education resources, about replacing the current situation where a lot of text students can’t afford to buy textbooks or won’t buy textbooks but they haven’t put any policy environment in place that would encourage that wort of transition. Effectively academics can prescribe whatever textbook they like. And you can talk about open textbooks, you can talk about getting rid of the textbook all you like, but unless you put in a policy environment that drives that transition you won’t achieve anything. We’ve got to the stage now that we could probably say realistically aim to replace 5% of every textbook with an E-book every year from now on. And maybe in 10 years we’d have half of our textbooks gone. But that will take money. At the moment universities can prescribe textbooks and it’s actually fairly cheap. They just prescribe the book and students buy the books. If we want to get rid of textbooks, and there are so many reasons why we might want to get rid of textbooks and replace them with E-books then we have to spend money. And we’re also going to have to make policy decisions that are going to be universal and popular. Now we can’t say to a medical student you don’t have a textbook, because medical schools require textbooks. We work with Newcastle, Newcastle’s curriculum, there are certain curricula that you’ve got to follow to be accredited. So in some disciplines like nursing, not so much, but certainly in medicine and law, textbooks are going to be around for a while, but in something like history or philosophy or education there is no such requirement. And we put into the assembled textbooks on the fly in a sense by using different readings and, you know, but there’s no policy incentive to do that. Without that sort of incentive you’re continually talking about open access and you’re continually talking about this, that and the other thing, and nothing will happen. And once you put in policy you’ve also got to enforce it. We have a policy that every academic must deposit their output deposits in the institutional repository as soon as possible. Well, what happens if you don’t? Nothing actually. You can be the Dean and not put all your resources in the institutional repository and nothing’s going to happen to you. So if we want to improve our online teaching, we want to improve our pedagogy, we have to write policies and enforce them. We have to think very hard about what’s realistic, we have to gain support at the academic board level, you know the whole elaborate hierarchy about universities make decisions. It’s not enough for the Vice Chancellor to say this or his speeches or say this is what I want, they’ve got to start at the bottom and talk with heads of schools and then get that policy change happening and then give those policies teeth. | L32-37 II / policy  L54-63 LM / policy |
| Harriet: | So one of the things that I find from a practical level in my own experience and something that I’m trying to dig a little bit deeper in is sometimes as you mentioned there might be wonderful projects and money and grants but often that focusses on the technology and the big gap that I see is actually supporting the processes and the people that have to make the change. And that seems to be neglected hugely. So whether that’ sin a really basic form of giving somebody some workload or actually not just giving them some professional development and leaving them but actually, the actual process. So we’re putting in, I’m putting together some minimum standards around our learning fac 4 and communication with students, very sort of minimum, you know, but the support needed to help people with that is glossed over, and really that’s the most important part because the academics, as you say they’re bright, they get what’s trying to happen, but there may be two or three things that they can’t actually practically do or they don’t know how to use this tool or they just need that support in the process. What are your thoughts on that? |  |
| Ben:  R36 | Well I mean you’ve said exactly what I’ve been thinking and I think a lot of people. First of all we’re dazzled by technology. We’re dazzled by the brightest and these things that appear so exciting are often flashes in the pan, they’re not the technology we need. But the major problem is resources are not cheap and people are not cheap. One level 6, it’s not a very high level, their wage is $73,000 - $84,000 at UNE, they’ve got 33% on costs, so you’re looking at $110,000 roughly for every person. How many people can that one learning designer, one technologist, support? And that’s why it’s so tempting to go for the prestige project rather than create a staff of 20 people because your 20 people might just have an impact but those 20 people need two or three supervisors and they need a supervisor over them. So you’re talking about 24 people, and you’re talking about some people at the top costing $150,000 per annum and maybe $200,000 per annum plus the computers, everything. So it’s very expensive to try and make change that way. And it is actually the only way. Universities also don’t think outside the box. We put Echo 360 systems in when YouTube would do the job. | L10-13 B5 District |
| Harriet: | Yes. We could talk all night I think, Ben. Very interesting. |  |
| Ben:  R37 | But have a look at the Adventures of Miranda and the other article, I’ll see if I can get a copy of that because it might be fairly difficult, about Web 2.0 and academic development. Because the thing is that institutions want control Many academics are worried. I put up a YouTube video, it’s not so good, what do I do about it? Well the thing is kids do this all the time. They just take the damn thing down. We don’t have that sort of attitude. We worry, we’re risk averse, when in fact a 14 year old boy or a 15 year old girl is doing this stuff and not caring because they’ll just take it down. And we have to strike a balance between what’s acceptable in terms of professional quality, in terms of audio and all that, and what sort of risk we’re willing to go. Because there’s always risk in experimentation. I mean universities so far haven’t engaged with that sort of issue. They’re worried. They don’t know how to write standards, how do you write standards about what’s broadcast quality? Unless you actually know something about the field the standards you’re going to write are pretty useless. And so that’s an issue. There is no one in the university outside one or two technicians in the audio-visual unit who could actually make a stab at that, and even then their suggestions might be useless in a Web 2.2 world. | L8-13 & LSU3 |
| Harriet: | Mmm. Mmmm, mmm.. |  |
| Ben:  R38 | We’ll leave it there because first of all I don’t know how that recording is going to work so I’m going to try and get it to you but it’s going to be massive, but I think you probably understand where I’m coming from. |  |
| Harriet: | Totally. It’s been fascinating. I mean all the stuff I’m reading, and you’ve got to be careful that you’re not just reading the things that agree with what you’re saying, I mean that’s the big thing about research isn’t it. But I guess although I’ve been in academia quite a while, in terms of research I’m very new to that in that sense. So part of me is sort of very excited that I’m bringing some of my knowledge and it doesn’t seem to be ridiculous compared to, because I think when you’re very new to research you can feel very overwhelmed by people who publish and very respectful and you almost feel like what can I bring, do I know anything. So on the one hand I’m happy that the things that I’ve been thinking about and I’m finding out about are connecting and coming together, in terms of themes and things like that. And then on the other hand, I can see how I’m still going out and out and out and trying to get it together. |  |
| Ben:  R39 | That’s inevitable in any high degree project and it’s perfectly normal and if you’re aware of it and you’ve got to stop[ because, you know. My advice because you are at UNE is I would talk to Jonathon our Pro-Vice Chancellor AI and the people around him. I don’t always agree with what Jonathon is doing. I certainly support him. I think we need a change. We really desperately need a change. And it’s a pity you’re a distance student at another university because if you were at UNE you’d probably feel a vibe about what the issues are at UNE just by going to ?#?# and having a coffee, just by talking to other students, just by talking to other people, you would understand in a way that no amount of reading can do. Because all our published research is fiction. No one will ever write ‘this is how we ballsed up big time’. No one ever writes about failure. And no university ever tells the truth about it’s history and its disasters. And when you talk to a senior person at any institution they will always give you the garnished truth. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes, And actually one of the things I’m learning from the sort of theory education reform, leading people like Fullen, is how the learning is doing. We’ve got to be doing the learning and making mistakes and carrying on. We can’t say this is what we’re going to do, do it and then do something else. It’s sort of this rolling and sort of celebrating the failures, learning and moving on but constantly. It seems to be where we need to be if we really can respond to the speed of change. And I said that very inarticulately because I’m just at the stage where I’m sort of pulling that together and it’s making sense to me but when you were talking about going off and doing little pockets of projects because they’re exciting, I see that so much and in fact a lot of the resources and a WiKi that I put together with colleagues was around the problem of projects, people perhaps producing wonderful resources, disappearing and nobody knowing where they are for example. So although I’m not being articulate I haven’t quite got there yet but I’m picking up that very much. |  |
| Ben:  R40 | I really don’t want to keep you for too long but the thing is that when we were doing CDRoms over at TLC we’d already encountered that. I’m going back to 2000. People would produce a CD Rom, they’d get funding to do it, it would be superb then two years later it was out of date. |  |
| Harriet: | Out of date. And I think we used to say something like 70 hours to one hour of production. And it’s almost impossible to say that in the kind of Web 2 world. You can’t equate how long is something going to take, it’s very difficult to estimate that isn’t it. |  |
| Ben:  R41 | Well the issue with CD Roms is it’s 70-100 hours per hour of learning and that’s some cost that you never get back. You have to start from scratch in a sense. Whereas the Web 2.0 world is a continuous world of reinvention, of tinkering around the edges, take that there and put that up, and you will find that the amount of preparation per hour of teaching should drop savagely. You should be looking at 5-10 hours per hour of teaching. If I’m going to do an online talk, and bear in mind the head and shoulder screen talking is not cutting edge pedagogy but it has its place. You’re looking at 3-4 hours per hour of content. And sometimes you’re looking down to almost a one to one when you’re having chats, online conversations that don’t have to be scripted. And yet these can produce results which you can reuse, and this is the power of Web 2.0 is because everything doesn’t have to be polished, everything doesn’t have to be fixed in stone, everything doesn’t have to be for the ages. That’s the real problem we have when we produce education material, is we think this has to last forever when in fact it’s life expectancy is 24 months. | L3-18 Complexity / e-learning characteristics |
| Harriet: | Yes. Yeah. |  |
| Ben:  R42 | So that’s transformation in thinking and that’s a really big transformation. You know the lifetime of a medical fact is? 25 years. You look in a textbook on medicine and half those facts will be out of date in 50 years, you know, they’ll be nonsense. How you treat a heart attack – |  |
| Harriet: | Well I had a knee replacement earlier this year and I was having it on the Friday and was home on the Monday afternoon and it won’t be long before it’ll be day surgery and yet my father when he had knee surgery I can’t remember how long he was in hospital but when he had it five years later his second one was shorter and then here we are again, and really knee replacement is – the distance travelled is just phenomenal. And in fact when the surgeon came around and said come on get up, and I said are you having a laugh and the whole concept of no you don’t lie in the bed and rest, you’re up and moving and getting on your bike, so that’s the kind of example – |  |
| Ben:  R43 | You have to write a pedagogy, you have to take into account pedagogy has to be that changeable, has to be, we have to be prepared to write and rewrite and change information we are giving to our students because when I did ancient history at UNE in the early 80’s our textbook was Bury and Niece. Bury wrote in the late 19th, early 20th century, this was 80 years later, his take on antiquity was in #?#?# textbook, you know, it’s insane, but this was the best textbook they could find Bury and Niece, classic. Useless. It wasn’t useless to the undergraduate, but it wasn’t the best textbook that could have been written in terms of the understanding that they had in the 1980s and it would certainly be completely useless in the 21st century. I mean textbooks themselves are a shuddering dinosaur. They are years behind the states of play in any discipline. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes I know when I’ve been involve in information systems sometimes we have to decide to help the students learn an older language or an older version because there wasn’t a textbook to support them. Absolutely. That’s a tough choice. Ben I am really aware that you’ve given me so much of your time and everything you’ve said has been really useful and this is a semi structured interview, so I have some questions that I was going to ask you – |  |
| Ben:  R44 | Yes, let’s do those. |  |
| Harriet: | No you’ve answered them because everything you’ve gone on to say has fitted so you’ve probably seen me looking down so you’ve answered the questions I wanted and they were really about the enablers and barriers to online learning, how the organisation leaders affect that, your own experiences, your own perception of your own capability in terms of E-competence, your personal experience at CSU and you’ve even talked about what I call the triangle where the knowledge of the academic, the knowledge of the student, supporting the student, supporting academics, so you have covered everything I was going to ask you. So that’s fabulous, this was the easiest interview ever, I didn’t have to prompt at all so I’m really grateful. |  |
| Ben:  R45 | Ok well the main thing is we’ll call it quits here and I will see if I can get the recording to you. |  |
| Harriet: | Now we have something Cloudstore so I can see, so you can send back a token to move large files about. |  |
| Ben:  R46 | Yes, no we’ve got Cloudstore there’s going o be no problem once I get this file down onto my hard drive, we’re fine. So we’ll call it quite here so I’ll stop the recording now and I’ll be in contact on Monday. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes, absolutely. And when I do come to UNE I’ll look you up. |  |
| Ben:  R47 | Yes, but remember please, talking to the people in learning support. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes definitely. I’ve got four user groups so one is academics, one is students, one is learning designers, learning support and the other one is what I call local leaders but I need a better title, which is people who are responsible for maybe implementing across a school or discipline, not just online learning for their own sake. So those are the four user groups but I haven’t come up with a better name for the “local leaders”. |  |
| Ben:  R48 | Decision makers or gatekeepers or influencers – |  |
| Harriet: | Yes absolutely, so Ben thank you so much I’ve really enjoyed it. |  |
| Ben:  R49 | Anything that we can do to help. There is a librarian assigned to you. |  |
| Harriet: | Yeah they’re so helpful. |  |
| Ben:  R50 | Don’t forget the online PCs, our institutional repository has got stuff, I’m just giving you the tour because there is an unbelievable mass of material. UNE hasn’t locked its site down yet, it’s only a matter of time, but you should harvest policy documents and statements, the strategic plan, university 2025, that’s absolutely crucial to understanding what the university wants to do. People in Jonathon’s office should be willing to help you about gathering that policy material, that documentation that tells you the framework and the perspective that you need to understand. How people like me are telling you one picture – and don’t forget marketing and public affairs. They should be able to give you material on press releases, a few years ago we had Jim Barber who was a leading online educator, we had UNE open which is a big project to produce a serious of loops that would be feeders for UNE courses. That was a complete failure by the way. |  |
| Harriet: | Yeah, I think we did the same thing and found the same actually. |  |
| Ben:  R51 | But we have a long track record in thinking about this. We’ve got the bespoke units. You need to educate yourself about UNE’s transformation because we are trying to rewrite a script for being a university. |  |
| Harriet: | Wow. That is fascinating. What is a university what, -- deep. |  |
| Ben:  R52 | Every assumption you can make about a university we want to change; about course ways, about pathways, how long is a trimester? When can you take your exam? Can you take the exam in the first week? Can we say these are your assessment events, do them any time in the next 15 weeks and then go and sit an exam. Sit an exam tomorrow. You know, that’s the sort of questions we’re asking about. These are big questions – |  |
| Harriet: | Huge questions. Huge. |  |
| Ben:  R53 | And to understand the different, to understand UNE’s path you need to understand these questions because this is the first time people at UNE have asked these questions. Whether we’re going to get an answer or not we don’t know, but these are *big* fundamental questions, and the fact that this institution is thinking about them is really exciting. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes. Yep, yep. |  |
| Ben:  R54 | Ok! |  |
| Harriet: | Thanks very much. I look forward to hearing from you. So shall I just log out, wait for you to switch off? |  |
| Ben:  R55 | Yes and I’ve just received notification “do you want to stop Cloud recording? If yes receive an email notification when a Cloud recording is ready” so that’s great. Ok, see you. |  |
| Harriet: | That’s great. Thank you, bye. |  |