# HARRIET RIDOLFO INTERVIEW WITH THERESA

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| Harriet: | Could you tell me about your role please? So, things like how long you’ve been in it, perhaps what are your major responsibilities? Who you report to, who reports to you, those sorts of things so I can get a feel for your current role as learning designer? |  |
| Theresa:  R1 | Yes, sure. Actually, my role now is the manager of the strategic learning initiative team. |  |
| Harriet: | Even better! |  |
| Theresa:  R2 | So I’m no longer a learning designer, but that’s as of the beginning of this year. And so in this role I manage a team of learning designer flavoured people. We have 10 people across three different roles – senior learning designer, learning designer and learning developer. |  |
| Harriet: | Mmm. |  |
| Theresa:  R3 | And then prior to that I was in a senior learning designer role but in my time at UNE I have been senior learning designer, a learning designer, a lecturer in #?#?# development, which are all conceptually extremely similar. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes, you’ve got immense amount of experience not only in doing the job but also overseeing other people which is what I’m so interested in so you’re even more perfect than I realised.  So that’s the current role, and how long have you been at UNE then? A while it sounds like. |  |
| Theresa:  R4 | Ah, 10 years. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes. Fantastic. And I’ve got to ask you a personal question in terms of age so just tell me if you’re between 29 and 39, 39 and 49 or maybe you’re younger than 29.. |  |
| Theresa:  R5 | No, I’m 37. |  |
| Harriet: | Lovely, thank you. And I’m not sure whether that’s going to have any bearing on my data analysis when I get to it but I think it will. So yes, quite a major role with quite a number of people that report to you because 10 people is quite a lot isn’t it. |  |
| Theresa:  R6 | Yeah, it’s a fairly big team. |  |
| Harriet: | And now that you’re the strategic manager is that in terms of across a faculty or across a university? Are you sort of responsible now for, if you like, moving – is it purely online or is it all learning? |  |
| Theresa:  R7 | So it’s a centralised role and I’m not sure how familiar with the split in learning design practices between centralised and school of faculty based. |  |
| Harriet: | I’m very familiar with all those issues around it, in theory. |  |
| Theresa:  R8 | Ok, great. Well anyway, so our team is a central team, we work in learning and teaching transformations directorate which means that we work on strategic projects rather than business as usual. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Theresa:  R9 | So we work on curriculum design projects, that’s probably enough of a – to strategically change the university teaching and learning practice rather than learning zone roles in school which are much more focussed on business as usual and developing capability around business as usual. |  |
| Harriet: | But do you feed into the business as usual people are guided by your overarching, you know, you talk about academic development, so if you en masse have decided a certain standard or quality issue would they then be guided by that? |  |
| Theresa:  R10 | Yeah, certainly we don’t operate in isolation and there’s certainly a lot of crossover and there’s a lot of cross-pollination. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep. Ok. So can I ask you about your experiences of – I’ve put E-learning – but online learning, in your own practice and in your own, I mean you’ve clearly got a lot of experience, can you tell me a bit about that? |  |
| Theresa:  R11 | Do you want to know about the things that I have done myself or do you want to know about my perceptions of the way that E-learning is done broadly? |  |
| Harriet: | Well I think bot but I guess what I’m trying to get at first is perhaps finding out from you a little bit about how you would possibly define online learning and perhaps some of your experiences in perhaps in the sense of quality E-learning so how I guess that top level and then it would be really interesting to dig down a little bit about exactly what you said – your perceptions of enablers to implementing and perhaps the perceptions of barriers. But don’t worry if it all mixes in because it’s a very messy area. |  |
| Theresa:  R12 | Yes, look I will, um, I have always struggled with the notion of designating something as online learning or E-learning. The E I have always struggled with because for me good learning is good learning, no matter where it happens. And I’ll probably talk in the enablers and barriers section more about that particular concept, but the nature of working at UNE with an 80%-ish online cohort just means that the majority of my work has happened in the online space but my goals have always been around facilitating good learning that just happens to be on the internet. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep, I hear you. |  |
| Theresa:  R13 | Do you want to know any more specifics about projects I’ve done in the past or? - |  |
| Harriet: | Do you know what, that would be lovely actually, yes. I know it’s really hard to be succinct but yes. That would be great. |  |
| Theresa:  R14 | Ok. So in the past a lot of people would agree that I was kind of a rogue innovator type. Um, and so I was very interested in things outside of the standard online learning practices and the paradigms that people use to talk about it. So I have done a lot of projects working with people around things like games based learning. Micro learning and things like that that, you know, explore non-standard platforms or I did work for a while in, how do I say, non-university supported systems but there was an element of finding the tools that met the learning need rather than trying to adapt a learning need to fit a tool, so that led me to explore various systems and so for a while I was, for instance, running an academic development program using WordPress instead of the university element or the Face to Face program, that type of thing. | L4-10 II / LMS |
| Harriet: | Mmm. That’s so interesting. |  |
| Theresa:  R15 | But then I’ve also, as, I mean over the last, in the 10 years that I’ve been here we’ve really moved from a kind of pockets or silos approach where people just did what they were interested in at their pointed need to a much more strategic university wide approach, so my work in that time has shifted from individual work with small groups of interested academic staff to much more high level strategic work where we will, as universities say we’re going to redevelop a course or we’re going to have a major project to look at situated based learning in health and medicine or that sort of thing, so that’s been a shift in my work along the way. |  |
| Harriet: | That’s really interesting and you kind of condensed that really brilliantly. I think succinctness is fantastic and I think that comes from strong knowledge actually, I think when you can paraphrase or put something simply it’s because you really understand it so that’s really interesting. I’m sure we’ll sort of come back to that a little bit but I wonder if it would be useful to think about the idea of what your perceptions of enablers to implementing E-learning? And don’t worry if you go into the barriers because often the enablers and barriers are the same, they end up the same, so just talk as you want and I can sort it out [laughs] |  |
| Theresa:  R16 | Yeah, and look everything that I talk about could equally be applied to any type of change in learning teaching practice regardless of being E-learning or not. The really major one for me which is a perceived enabler because I haven’t seen this done effectively anywhere yet – is the systemic and structural fabric, I didn’t want to use that word but I can’t think of a better one off the top of my head. So the way that the, well, the sector, academia, the way that things are set up, the reward mechanisms, the way that we think about teaching and learning, the way that we privilege research, the way that we structure our enterprise agreements, all of these things are not, I mean they are at the moment significant barriers, but if they were addressed strategically at a university-wide or sector wide level so that people were enabled to really invest time and be rewarded appropriately for investing time in the development of the teaching practice that would be a huge thing. | L3-15 II / CULTURE |
| Harriet: | Yes. Wow. |  |
| Theresa:  R17 | I mean what we always get stuck in, when we on the ground are tasked with helping people change their practice we just look at all of these systemic factors and we know that we have no agency over changing them but we just have these same conversations over and over again and that would be such an enabler if a university was to actually step up and say we are going to fundamentally hardwire the value in the teaching and learning practice into our institution – that would be such a significant win. | L5-8 II / CULTURE |
| Harriet: | I hear you, Theresa, and I wonder if I can dig down a little but into some of the things around that sort of feed into that. And you’ve answered really all the questions in your overarching statement but, so I guess, so one of the things I would ask you is what policies or infrastructure and resources I guess even, are in place to support you then with your strategic direction of let’s say improving the online space because we’re talking about that 80%. I mean I’ve heard that you say that the problem is we haven’t got that – I like the word fabric – so then I’m coming back to you with that question really, what policies and infrastructures and resources perhaps are in place at UNE to support you? Or not? |  |
| Theresa:  R18 | Well that I’m struggling to think of an answer is probably telling isn’t it. |  |
| Harriet: | Yeah, absolutely. |  |
| Theresa:  R19 | Yeah, look I can’t offhand think of a policy that I would say this is a definite enabler versus something that we’ve learned to work with. I mean there are some small steps in the right direction, there is in the enterprise agreement something called a teaching focus role. There are small things like that. There’s obviously a willingness to invest in technological infrastructure because that’s a tangible thing that people can conceptualise without feeling too challenged. | L1-2 LM / POLICY  L3-7 B5 |
| Harriet: | Mmm hmm. |  |
| Theresa:  R20 | So #?#?# of online systems, aside there are least, you know, we have technological systems that allow us to do what we need to do. |  |
| Harriet: | Sure. So that’s interesting and I think you’ve already answered this when you were talking, again with your lovely overarching statement, so I guess I’m using online learning – do you think it aligns with the key practice aspects and issues in your organisation? I sort think I’ve heard you say no but - |  |
| Theresa:  R21 | Um, as in do I think the notion of E-learning aligns with the way that teaching and learning is practised? |  |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Theresa:  R22 | Um, largely no. I mean despite the fact that we bill ourselves as an online university and a leader in the online domain we recognise strategically because we were doing the kind of leading-edge innovator stuff 20, 30, 40 years ago and have largely not changed our practice since then we can see now that we are, I mean we’re moving market share to the provider to have significantly have larger pots of money to work with. Um, so yes, we still are stuck in a situation where a lot of people are approaching online learning with a face to face learning paradigm and trying to, even with the face to face leaning paradigm it is frequently a traditional model of lectures, essays, exams… I mean there are some amazing people doing some awesome things but at the moment it’s still pockets. We’re still really in the early days of being able to have really effective, strategic change across the university. | L7-11 II /CULTURE  L12-15 CB? |
| Harriet: | Yep. Fantastic response. I’m so glad I’ve met you, Theresa, you can’t imagine!  So you’ve mentioned about the centralised and then the school specific roles and I wondered what other people or resources are available really to support you in implementing that online learning? |  |
| Theresa:  R23 | Well, that’s, yeah, I can describe how things are structures at UNE. And so within our team we’ve got the 10 learning designer flavour of people, we also have a media team who are able to help develop online learning artefacts so they’re able to develop multimedia things, adaptive learning packages and then we’ve got a project management team who are essential for keeping us all ?#?#? so they’re the really good enablers and their immediate instances being able to have that multi team structure, and then, oh here you go, leadership – a significant enabler is effective leadership. So all of our centralised team is under the Pro Vice Chancellor Academic Innovation and he has been a really effective leader for the last couple of years that he’s been here and really fundamentally understands good learning practice and online learning and technology so he has some really key importance and he’s been able to, we’ve made more progress in the last couple of years with his leadership than we had previously. And then out in the schools there are each school has its own little set up. It’s generally around one or two learning design roles per faculty and then they have a role called an educational support officer which is a lower level technical role that will often help to build units in the learning management system, set up quizzes, help troubleshoot, that kind of thing. I’m just trying to think offhand – no there’s not a consistent approach to how the roles are structured across faculties but yes., there would be between one and two learning design roles and then a few of the educational support officer roles. One or two faculties might also have a senior learning designer. Don’t quote me. | L10-14 LM / E-LEARNING KNOWLEDGE  L22-23 MPTP? |
| Harriet: | No, that’s ok. So it sounds to me like you’ve got - |  |
| Theresa:  R24 | They all have reporting structures within their faculties so the overarching governance over all learning designs. We work together as colleagues and, but yes, there’s no overarching governance or learning design in the university. | L2-4 MPTP |
| Harriet: | That’s interesting. So you mentioned that the, it sounds like a transformational leader, you said that you report to, and do you thin part of that is supporting the development of effective teams? I’m just thinking about, sorry let me go back, I’m just thinking about how the organisation, how UNE sort of creates and acquires and manages and transfers that knowledge about online learning and its sounding to me like because you’re all in these teams but you collaborate you kind of cross-fertilise ideas, is that? |  |
| Theresa:  R25 | Yes, it’s very much an organic thing more than a strategic thing. I mean we’ve had an awkward history with, and this is every university would tell you this, where there are shifts between centralisation and then decentralisation and so people will often find themselves moved into a central directorate; at schools I’ve been in and out and people have various feelings about that so yes, it’s kind of an uncomfortable history around how these things are structured but yes, any kind of really high level overarching coherence of learning design has been a very organic ground level peer led thing rather than a strategic thing. | L1-5 II |
| Harriet: | Yep. That’s so interesting. And do the same leaders who are kind of guiding or communicating, do they tend to engage and communicate with those who are affected or are they more likely to engage with their immediate subordinates and then it get spread by those second tier people? |  |
| Theresa:  R26 | Um, it probably happens in multiple layers but we have flagged as an institution that communication is a real issue that we have, we don’t have good way of communicating, we don’t have a good paradigm of thinking about communication, so that’s been a tricky ongoing thing. So the PVCI that we have now has made much more of an effort to engage with people on the ground and go out to faculties and meet with people but there’s still an element of being quite removed because um, we’re fairly virtual in terms of our own arrangements so I don’t report to the PVCIR, I’ve got two layers in between myself and them so there’s three or four levels of separation between the senior leadership and the people on the ground and you know, senior leadership calendars are such that a lot of the comms work does end up being done by people on the ground organically. | LM /communication L6-13 |
| Harriet: | Mm. Yep. |  |
| Theresa:  R27 | So communication is the thing we have not cracked yet. |  |
| Harriet: | It’s a tricky area for sure, for sure. So it’s funny because my next question was going to be about how the decisions of organisation leaders affect online implementation and you’ve mentioned that really, you’ve answered that, but I guess if I could just dig in a little bit deeper about that so I suppose with some of those leaders that we’ve talked about do they have the resources actually to implement quality learning and quality online learning? So for example the IT infrastructure, the new personnel, is that an aspect as well? |  |
| Theresa:  R28 | Um, I mean the budget line falls under, not for the whole university because the faculties are separate kingdoms unto themselves so what the faculties chose to do is a different pot of money but yes, the budget for those things you’ve described does fall under our portfolio. Having said that we recognise that the budget is not big enough. So the PVCR will frequently quite things like Deakin and Swinburne have teams of 50 or 60 learning designers and we’ve got 10 in our neck of the woods and then there might be another five out in faculties. I mean it depends on what you want to consider to be a learning design role, if you want something that literally has the task of learning design we have 10 or fewer. But the adjacent roles have learning developers and educational support officers and then people like me who are then in the leadership of that, it depends on how literally you want to interpret semantics. So it’s weird. We can see that the people who are making significant change in the sector have vastly larger budgets and resourcing capability than we do. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep. Yep. And do you think that your leaders understand that? Well sort of the people above you, I know you’re a leader, sorry – |  |
| Theresa:  R29 | No that’s fine, I know there’s layers. I don’t have a budget, I don’t get any say in what goes on. Yeah, it’s interesting because in the second half of last year we had a new Vice Chancellor and she’s been taking a very proactive authoritative leadership style of implementing a quite ambitious strategic vision around teaching and learning so one of the projects that we have on the radar, well *the* project that we have on the radar for this year is now redesigning all courses in the USC to adhere to an articulated principle. Which is good, like if this happens it would be amazing. But it’s extremely ambitious. But we know that the VC, even though she’s an effective leader, she doesn’t have a sophisticated understanding of teaching and learning and so some of the things that she will say in the pursuit of this strategic directive are things like just for an example she’ll say ‘we will stop giving lectures, we will have no lectures by the end of next year’ without understanding the complexity of that statement and what - |  |
| Harriet: | Yeah, sorry, I just know where you’re coming from so I couldn’t help myself giggle at thinking about how you would think about that statement – sorry I didn’t mean to interrupt you but - |  |
| Theresa:  R30 | No, no that’s fine. So the people in our line of work are fully aware that someone who stands at the front of a room and reads all out from a PowerPoint for an hour is poor pedagogical practice. Ah, but there are other considerations like the concept of somebody delivering a well-designed scripted talk is a valid practice – I mean TED Talks are popular for a reason. They engage people in effective learning. So it’s not as easy as saying no lectures. Not to mention the fact that our entire physical infrastructure and a lot of our own ?#?# infrastructure is set up around the concept of a lecture and our HR structures and the way that, for instance, casual academics are paid based on the notion of the lecture, there’s a lot of complexities around it that make it so that high level motherhood statements need to be then translated down, so while we appreciate that we’ve got the leader who’s a very strong leader with a clearly articulated vision who is motivating people to make change, um when those leaders don’t have a sophisticated understanding of teaching and learning there are a lot of nuances at play that then filter down to the practices of the people like us who are tasked with implementing. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep. Wow. Ok., I’ve got so many other things I want to ask you, so you’ve mentioned so many things there which as we sort of both said, you know, the enablers and barriers are kind of one and the same in a way, in a way that if they’re done well they’re an enabler and if they’re done badly they’re a barrier. |  |
| Theresa:  R31 | I men one of the barriers that I wanted to talk about that I’ve mentioned but probably bears repeating a bit more is the notion of the E and the barriers that that presents because it locks us down to a certain paradigm and a certain way of thinking. Um, which affects not only practice but it affects the way that we procure technology for instance. It affects the systems that we choose and the features that we ask those systems to have and it just feeds into a narrative of othering in a situation where people are already not amazing at conceptual transfer in general so yeah, I just think the use of the term E-learning as a designated otherness makes it really difficult from a paradigm perspective to make the conversation about effective learning practice. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep. Yep, yep, absolutely I hear you. |  |
| Theresa:  R32 | So now you can ask your question. |  |
| Harriet: | No, I’m happy for you to go on, I suppose I wanted to, one things we haven’t perhaps explored, and it may not be relevant at UNE, but I wondered about the sort of academic as an enabler or a barrier and you mentioned obviously there are some fantastic people doing fantastic things and it made me think about perhaps those academics who may be resistant and what it is and I wondered if you had some thoughts about that which I’m sure you have but I also was going to ask about the, and I’m going to use the E word again and if you’ve come up with a better one I’d be so grateful because that’s part of what I’m thinking about but I’m going to use a really crude term of E-competence. So do you have thoughts around those, if you like, a general idea that academics should have a, what E-competence means to deliver effectively online, bearing in mind that I hear you about that you know, you’re either delivering quality teaching or you’re not, I get that, but I’m just wondering in that sense ‘cause it’s something that seems to come up as seen as sort of separate. |  |
| Theresa:  R33 | Yes. Alright so one of the , alright so the first part of the question around resistance, one things that would really massively enable it is to require academics to have teaching qualifications or you know, in some way equip them to do the role that they’re actually employed to do rather than have a PhD, or reconfigure the way that we think about teaching and start teachings in teams so that an academic can be positioned as a subject matter expert and those of us who have pedagogical expertise can work in a teaching team rather than removed in the way that they currently do. But around E-competence, one of the really #?#?# narrative has been around the notion of, you hear it expressed as digital natives, you hear it expresses as people calling themselves ?#?#? and laughing, um, the idea that because we are so, as a society that other technology so significantly we attribute it somehow to youth as a magical wizardry, that narrative that people so internalise and it becomes a part of their identity, really impacts their ability to engage with effective online practice. | L2-9 II  L10-18 Identity |
| Harriet: | Yep. Wow. |  |
| Theresa:  R34 | And no matter how much evidence there is that says digital leaders are not actually a thing, it’s just people have really internalised these things as part of their identity and so there are a lot of people who if they were able to move past that narrative would have significantly more competence than they believe they do. | L1-5 Identity |
| Harriet: | Yep. That’s interesting. So how you do you think that manifests that same idea around you know, dismissing the consequences, and I hear you totally about the digital native, that myth. In that case if I can ask you to think about for your students then, again using that phrase E-competent, do you think your students are? |  |
| Theresa:  R35 | Well, this is the other side of the coin here, is that it harms, that narrative is harmful for all age groups. Um, and so I mean we have a majority mature age cohort so we’re not dealing solely with the 18 year old school leavers that many universities are but even for those people they’re actually a lot of people who have competence in a specific way online and so they will be accustomed to using social media in a certain way to connect with their peers and family and they might be accustomed to using certain apps on their phone but when they enter the online learning space they really struggle because they don’t have, it’s not some kind of magical wizardry that’s hardwired regarding technology, it’s just they have competence in a certain domain that fills a certain need for them and when they enter a different domain they don’t have the level of competence that a digital native ?#?#? would expect them to have. And similarly, the older students who will often use that same narrative, “oh you know I’m such a luddite, I don’t do technology, I’m not a …” they’re often far more capable than they believe they are. | L2-17 e-competence / student |
| Harriet: | Yes there’s a lot of labelling isn’t there. And one of the things I’m struggling with and hopefully when I get further down because I find that every time I learn something or I go back and re-write what I started off with, is the language. I’ve really picked up the language that we use and it seems to mee that learning designers, education designers, that interesting group of people we’re talking about, are often what I call translators of technology. |  |
| Theresa:  R36 | Yes. I definitely identify with being a translator of everything in all sorts of ways. Actually perhaps this is an interesting thing to now. So I’m also a PhD student. My PhD is in organisational learning and culture. Because I got to a point where I realised I was just getting so frustrated with why are projects failing so often, you know, you have these, we would do these projects and we’d either implement the online leaning but then it would get killed for whatever reason after a while or we’d implement it and it’d only have a really small impact or it just wouldn’t be able to be implemented because of institutional factors and I got so frustrated and then I realised that the problem wasn’t the teaching and learning, the problem wasn’t the technology, the problems we were having were all around organisational culture and organisational learning and the ways that we engage with each other, the ways that we talk about things, our mental models of the world, the things that we value and our behaviours, all of these sorts of things. So I went on a complete tangent, completely out of the education system belief, and yeah, that’s where my research has ended up in the pursuit of trying to make positive change in teaching and learning practice. So I’m not sure if that’s an interesting tangent for you to note. |  |
| Harriet: | Well I’ve gone quiet because that’s exactly, not exactly the same, but that’s how I came to start my PhD was around the frustration of managing projects, I suppose all my career it seems to be that we’re dealing with technology and we never are, we’re always dealing with the people. And whilst I’m looking at implementing, and I’m calling it E-learning at the moment, I think it’s going to end up, don’t quote me because you know what it’s like, I think it’s going to end up about sustainable change actually. |  |
| Theresa:  R37 | Yep. Yep. I think there’s different expressions of the acknowledgement of the complexity of the thing at hand. But yeah, just a sideline, I’m always interested, I wonder what percentage of PhDs are like PhD as catharsis. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes! And how far along are you, Theresa? |  |
| Theresa:  R38 | I’m just about to do confirmation next month. I’m actually doing, there’s a program here called PhD-I which is probably more closely resembles a professional doctorate but rather than being purely theoretical and researched like a thesis it’s the bulk of the work is a portfolio of implementing the workplace project. |  |
| Harriet: | What a fantastic idea, that must be perfect for you. |  |
| Theresa:  R39 | Yeah, because I spent about five years trying and failing to do a traditional PhD and I just, I couldn’t do it. So yeah, this has worked out really well for me. It allows me to actually do, my project is around doing some intervention around ?#?#? versional learning and culture, according to Role Corp, an organisational designer. |  |
| Harriet: | Yeah, love it. |  |
| Theresa:  R40 | It’s our importance as a learning designer that just turns their attention to designing organisational learning instead of designing pedagogical learning. |  |
| Harriet: | Yeah, that’s so interesting. So we’re digressing aren’t we but it’s huge. I hope you don’t mind. |  |
| Theresa:  R41 | Well yeah, it’s all the expression and complexity the things at hand. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes and I mean, it just occurred to me sort of going off on a tangent there when I was asking you about I suppose academics level of competence, E-competence, students’ level of E-competence and then your own in the sense of if someone said to you well what do you think E-competence is (a) do you feel that you’ve got it and what would you translate that as, you know because is it actually about skills or is it a disposition? Because you mentioned a little bit about, you know the things we tell ourselves - |  |
| Theresa:  R42 | Mm. I’d be very much a disposition thing rather than skills. It’s very closely linked to a growth mindset so you know, saying “I can’t do technology, I’m a luddite’, I never get any of that, it’s a very affixed mindset way of speaking. Um, whereas approaching a new concept or area going ‘hmm I don’t know anything about this but I think I can learn’ is much more in a growth mindset so I think it’s very much about a disposition rather that skillset. | L1-7 Identity? |
| Harriet: | Mm. yeah, I mean I absolutely agree and I wonder going back to the concept of the student experience which is why we’re all here, designing learning activities that promote that growth mindset feels to me like the most valuable thing we can pass on or support. |  |
| Theresa:  R43 | Yep. Yeah, there’s a lot of that around and things like resilience. But yeah, I found fairly early on when I started implementing projects because I was doing more kind of innovative left field stuff I found – I didn’t understand at the time why people weren’t engaging, students weren’t engaging, and at the time my students were academics. Um, so compounding factors, but you know, conceptually everyone in the industry said wow, this is some really great pedagogical design but the end users weren’t engaging and it took me a long time to understand that you know the concept of the zone of proximal development? I studied in the term zone of “what the fuck” [laughs] because the things that I was designing were just so far removed from people’s frame of reference that they couldn’t make the leap to engage. You know, I wasn’t designing things that fit in their zone of proximal development, that challenged them a little but not enough that they felt unable to meet that challenge. So yeah, I think that’s a key thing in thinking about students, is that acknowledging these complex factors is progress in a way that we think about designing stuff but then implementing it if we tomorrow went and created whole programs that were just about developing growth mindsets and resilience and things, um, that would be rally difficult for people because it’s so far removed from their frame of reference of what higher education is. | L13-20 Identity? |
| Harriet: | Yes they’d be saying where’s the content, you haven’t told me anything. Yeah. Yeah, that’s, I think that, so maybe many of those academics have come from such a traditional space themselves and also, and this is a gross sweeping generalisation, but you do get a type of academic who’s obviously very bright and very introvertive and very insular who probably went to a very old fashioned lecture and it worked for them, or they think it worked for them, or in spite of it it worked, and that’s their model and then you’ve also got young PhD academics who actually have never been in an interactive type environment for learning and perhaps have never even taught in a traditional sense, and you’re trying to put them in an online space where even if they had some idea of what it was like to talk to a group of people and see the whites of their eyes they could then have some idea of what they were trying to do. |  |
| Theresa:  R44 | Yeah. And this is an interesting point about how the profession of ?#?#? actually came to be because I think they at least recognise what you’ve just described is an issue, you know, people have, their entire life has been based on a certain paradigm of higher education and when they come into a different environment they don’t know what to do. And so it seems the solution was to develop this role of learning designer who are people who have pedagogical expertise who will come in and help bridge the gap. But I think now that’s an overly simplistic solution and doesn’t acknowledge the complexity of people’s identity and how they feel about change and their mindset and, you know, so - | L3-11 Identity / traditional paradigm |
| Harriet: | Yes, it’s dealing with this, I always think of the iceberg. It’s sort of looking at the tip and not all the stuff is going underneath. |  |
| Theresa:  R45 | My biggest problem in approaching a PhD for instance is trying to narrow down because they want you to narrow down your focus and I’m like “but the complexities”! Sorry if I’ve thrown spanners into your interview data. |  |
| Harriet: | No, it’s fascinating. I might be ringing you up more for therapy. No, because it is so complex and I think there’s a, you know, there’s that situation where the learning designer and I’m sort of talking about the business as usual education designer/learning designer, is there to help and they get given a really hard time, and because somehow instead of being the knight in shining armour, which they are, they are turned into the problem by the academic because anything that comes up the academic has a problem there’s something new and they can’t deal with it and the poor learning designer or education designer is really the meat in the sandwich. You know, and it becomes terribly frustrating. |  |
| Theresa:  R46 | It is. And my understanding, because I’ve been in that position and I did not enjoy it, is that learning design in schools, and to some extent even central, it often becomes a glorified technical support role because people aren’t challenged by technology. Academics have no problem with saying I can’t do technology so this person will help me. But it really challenges their identity to say, ‘I’m not good at teaching and learning is this person will help me’. | L4-7 Identity |
| Harriet: | Mm.. |  |
| Theresa:  R47 | Yeah it’s a difficult thing and the learning designers do end up being the meat in the sandwich and working hard to try and find ways to build relationships with staff in the domain that staff don’t find challenging. | L1-4 MPT / |
| Harriet: | Yes and I mean I wonder what your thoughts are around that statement provided here, bandied about both ways when it suits, ‘well it’s not just about content, hang on it’s all about the content’. [laughs] From the same person at different times. |  |
| Theresa:  R48 | Yeah. I mean we’re in a somewhat awkward situation in that the entire sector of academia is built on content, disciplines, that’s where people gain their expertise, that’s the dominant organisational feature for the entirety of out structure and so to say it’s not all about content is conceptually true from a pedagogical point of view but structurally our entire existence is predicated on content. | L1-6 II |
| Harriet: | Yeah, and one of the things we’ve explored is about incentive and that made me wonder what your thoughts around, you mentioned content and promotion is based on research, where’s that incentive for somebody, you know, we’re always hearing about workload ‘I don’t have the time’ you know, how big a factor is that? Thinking about implicit, explicit, incentive/ To get people to explore thinking about how they’re teaching, thinking about what they’re teaching, in this kind of fabric but in the university sector? |  |
| Theresa:  R49 | It’s huge. It’s a huge issue. Because fundamentally we’re all relying on the goodwill of the small percentage of academics who are driven intrinsically enough by wanting to do effective teaching and learning because there’s no way for them, I mean you hear people use phrases like ‘career suicide’, even the notion that the concept of buying out your teaching so if it has a grant or if they take on a role as course convenor or head of school or things like that, that time is bought for them by removing their teaching, it is never bought from them by removing their research. | L1-5 II / culture |
| Harriet: | Yes. |  |
| Theresa:  R50 | And when you suggest things like that people look at you sideways. We’ve tried to second academics centrally as subject matter experts to work with us on certain projects and they refuse to do it, they’re like this would be career suicide. Because even if we changed within our organisation someone’s ability to move between organisations is based on their research performance. So it’s huge, and then you get those academics who are keenly focussed on it and put in their own time and effort and they end up burning out, or experiencing push back from their peers because if they do research in the scholarship of teaching and learning it’s considered less ?#? | L4-6 II / culture |
| Harriet: | Yes. Yep. |  |
| Theresa:  R51 | Re promotion, even though you can base your promotion application to an extent on your teaching practice it is largely based on student reviews, which we know is a very problematic practice to begin with. The ability to include a really meaningful account of you engaging in developing your teaching learning practice is just not there in promotion. | L4 – 6 II / culture |
| Harriet: | Yeah. And I mean when you look at the individual if you look at maybe a fairly new academic who’s doing all the right things, totally on board, really wants to do well, it ends up as being survival doesn’t it. They’ve got to work out the way because there is so much potential for burn out. I mean one can understand some of their choices. |  |
| Theresa:  R52 | Yeah, absolutely. We’ve got heaps of empathy for the systems that people are working in and now when we’ve got leadership saying ‘right we’re going to redesign all of our courses’ and then we are saying ‘cool, are you actually structuring workloads such that people have time to engage in this?’. It’s a real elephant in the room, in that everyone wants to see change but taking a systems level view towards that change might require something that we have not effectively addressed yet. | L2-8 LM / workload |
| Harriet: | And do you find that your learning and teaching leaders in the sense of a strategic level or even sort of Dean level are often not really qualified in the same sense that if you had a leader in research or, so there’s almost this view that any academic can head up a learning and teaching strategy or a project whereas if you said we’ll get Theresa to head up the research strategy you know, it’s a real double standard. |  |
| Theresa:  R53 | It’s hideous. And then one could even suggest that perhaps university leadership could be trained in leadership, rather than trained in the research, just a suggestion… Yeah, there’s this notion of the unquestionable research expertise and then the complete inability to then transfer those concepts to any other domain and transfer those concepts to any other domain. | L3-L6 II / culture |
| Harriet: | Yep. |  |
| Theresa:  R54 | There’s lack of recognition of the irony there. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes. Yep. Absolutely. And you’ve got people chairing meetings that shouldn’t be chairing a meeting. |  |
| Theresa:  R55 | Oh yes. |  |
| Harriet: | Yep. And they’re making the decisions. And of course there’s that what I call the tribe, so the academic is always loyal to their tribe, not their organisation. So the organisational stuff, and I’m being really flippant here, the organisational stuff is a nuisance and almost in for a dig to say that you believe that we should all pull together to do X, it’s almost a little bit as though some academics would see that as those of us who might think that way is obviously being a little bit stupid really because they’re sort of superior and they can see the truth [laughs]. |  |
| Theresa:  R56 | Yeah there’s a lot of entrenched cultural stuff which is why I’ve ended up in the research area that I have. |  |
| Harriet: | And do you have lots of different backgrounds and nationalities in your profile of your staff? Is it quite, so are there lots of different cultures in terms of coming from different countries, having a different view of that kind of relationship perhaps between the student and the academic and the learning designer and the academic? Is there are, so - |  |
| Theresa:  R57 | Um I can’t, I’m not across our demographic profile enough, I mean anecdotally I can observe that there are many different cultural backgrounds amongst academics, the one thing I do know is that we have the oldest academic staff profile of any university in Australia. |  |
| Harriet: | Wow. |  |
| Theresa:  R58 | So I can’t speak to cultural backgrounds but in terms of age our academic workforce is specifically the oldest in the country, so we have a much larger percentage of academics who are nearing retirement and thus much more likely to have experienced an extremely traditional approach to teaching and learning and concepts around what higher education is and who it’s for. | L1-6 II/ culture |
| Harriet: | And does that affect, that must, I mean how is the succession planning going with you know - |  |
| Theresa:  R59 | Well… succession planning is something we should probably think about but yeah, I don’t know, I’m not privy to the ways that faculties are or aren’t thinking about that. |  |
| Harriet: | Well look, this has just been so fantastic, now I’m going to ask is there something you wish I had asked you? |  |
| Theresa:  R60 | I think I got most of my bugbears out there. Ummm.. so no, I think we’ve had a really interesting and #??# discussion. |  |
| Harriet: | We have, and you probably don’t think you have but you have answered the things – well I’m not looking for answers in a way, I’m looking for people’s perceptions but what I mean is the various topics that I needed to get some insight into we have covered. It’s all worked really well for me, I’m really grateful, I’ve got lots of lovely, lovely material there. And so I am really grateful., I’m just looking through my notes and seeing is there anything that I missed.. I guess if I think of something would it be ok if I emailed you and - |  |
| Theresa:  R61 | Oh totally, any time that’s fine. |  |
| Harriet: | That’s great. And look Theresa, if there’s someone you want to talk to about anything please feel free to ask me. |  |
| Theresa:  R62 | I will do. That’s one thing we didn’t cover in this is what your background is and where you’re, how you’ve arrived at where you’re at. |  |
| Harriet: | So I work at Charles Sturt University and I think we’ve got lots of similarities with UNE in terms of our staff profile, our student profile, I think we’ve got more campuses than you, so we’re multi-campus where you’re more, we’re rural, we’ve got all those challenges that I think we’re probably facing all the same challenges. And I am sub-Dean learning and teaching in the faculty of arts and education which is hilarious for me to think that I’m in this position because I’m English, I worked in academia in the UK but there we sort of had to do two out of three things, you know, you have your research, your teaching and your management and I always had done teaching and management, never done the research bit. So right from early on I was always managing side projects, I was course director or first year tutor working those things out and I was involved in setting up our first online degree wo I worked at Bournemouth University and we did that in partnership with a university in Leeds. So my background is information systems and business but I was always as interested in how you taught as what you were teaching I think because I always taught very different profiles so yes I had a lot of the classic 18 year olds but I was always teaching business people and I also worked for a time in training a lot in terms of sort of effective communication skills and technological skills for people who were operating the language other than their mother tongue so you can imagine in Europe so many people, you might have a German project manage who’s working in China with a whole group of people and they both have to operate in English, all those sorts of, so a lot of perhaps thinking about ways to help people learn things when you’re actually dealing with people who are way superior to you in the food chain if you like, and doing jobs that you’re not ever going to have but you’re supporting them in a certain way and I think that was really eye opening in terms of how can I help, you know, some of those things. So when I came to CSU and I ran away to Australia I was and ED in CSU and then I became an ED manager so that’s why I totally, and it was interesting because when I looked at the job market I thought I can’t get a job if I haven’t got a PhD but actually then I found that lots of people are lecturers without PhDs. And now I’m the sub-Dean learning and teaching and when I applied I wasn’t sure that I had a hope in hell really but what I actually was interesting on the job description was you either needed a PhD or experience with managing learning and teaching projects and they obviously recognised the need for the operations side which isn’t always the case so I’m probably the only sub-Dean in the university that doesn’t have a PhD, which is quite interesting. |  |
| Theresa:  R63 | Yeah, it’s an interesting thing that, isn’t it. I mean we all feel compelled to do a PhD because that’s the single mark of credibility but if you asked me is a PhD directly relevant to your work the answer is no. |  |
| Harriet: | Exactly. And I think from my perspective I had to say to myself I probably won’t get promotion, I’m too late in the day but I’m interested and it’s of interest and that’s the way I’ve got to think about it because if I think there’s a danger of thinking this is going to make a difference. Because then you could pin all your hopes on it and you know, not get anywhere. We’ve really got off track but - |  |
| Theresa:  R64 | That’s fine, that’s great, and good to know that we have lot of similarities in where we’ve come from and we’ve arrived at. |  |
| Harriet: | Isn’t it interesting, it’s really interesting. Theresa, thank you, I’m really grateful. I might even come back to you and say help, I want to find another person to interview because it’s – I’m doing purposeful sampling so I’m looking for people who know around this aera. |  |
| Theresa:  R65 | Ok. |  |
| Harriet: | So I’m looking at the website and thinking that person looks interesting and, but I do find in this area – learning and teaching, educational design lens – people are very interesting. There’s still not somebody who’s just gone to university, done learning design and then here they are, they’ve often got a lot of things that the bring to the party I think because if they’re successful they’ve got to have pretty good interpersonal skills on top of everything else. |  |
| Theresa:  R66 | Mm hmm. |  |
| Harriet: | So pretty well rounded human beings usually. |  |
| Theresa:  R67 | Yeah. Are you involved in or aware of the Ascilite Tele Advisors gig? No? because they’re under the Ascilite banner, that being the bread and butter conference E-learning type, the special interest group that’s a community of practice for everyone who’s in some type of learning design and relate role. Anyway, it’s great to find a bunch of similar types of people in one go. |  |
| Harriet: | Oh thank you. I must get off the phone, I’ve got to go and run a meeting now which I don’t want to do, I’d much rather carry on talking to you. Theresa, thank you. |  |
| Theresa:  R68 | No worries. It was great to chat and meet you. |  |
| Harriet: | Yes it was and hopefully if I actually get to UNE I’ll look you up and, that would be great. |  |
| Theresa:  R69 | Yes, sure. |  |
| Harriet: | Thank you so much. Take care, have a great day. |  |
| Theresa:  R70 | No worries. See ya. You too. Bye. |  |
| Harriet: | Bye |  |