
President's Report to PESA 2005

Welcome

Welcome to our first-ever full PESA conference outside Australia and New Zealand. The initial suggestion of Hong Kong as a venue was tentative, but at the time of writing this report, preparation for the event is well under way with 55 papers submitted for presentation this year. My thanks go to Derek and the team in Hong Kong for sustaining the current momentum of the society, for collating and vetting the programme, and for pulling together what promises to be another of our 'best ever' efforts. It is encouraging for the society to have things so well organised, and as a result to have such strong support for the conferences – from members, from contributors and from other interested participants.

Although it seems not long ago since last year's report, a lot has happened in the society over that time. Our exec has been in frequent communication, current projects have all been moved along, and the society is looking sustainably stronger as a result. A brief synopsis of developments follows:

Incorporation

Since last year's decision that the society be registered as an incorporated society, PESA is now incorporated under WA legislation, operating under the set of rules passed at last year's general meeting in Melbourne and posted on our website. Incorporation of an association means that it becomes a legal entity, separate from the members, so that individual members and officers are afforded a degree of liability protection for debts and liabilities of the association. Since incorporation, the society applied for and was awarded tax-exempt status; so all our income is now net of any tax. Organisations may be exempt from paying income tax if they fit within certain categories, including: community service organisations, cultural organisations, friendly societies, resource development organisations, and particularly in our case, educational organisations. With the new formal structure and the acknowledgement of tax exemption, the society undertakes certain responsibilities, including a formal audit of our financial accounts each year, and an annual report to Inland Revenue about our affairs. My thanks to Bruce for handling administration and managing communication with the powers-that-be in these matters over the last year.

Special member subsidies for 2005 conference

Because of the extra expense for our regulars in getting to conference this year, it feels good that the society will be subsidising travel and accommodation up to \$700 for those members paying their own way and presenting a refereed paper. Given that our choice of Hong Kong this year was a promotional move by the society to reach out to a wider audience, it seems right to ease the extra financial cost for those members already contributing to the society's success through their academic work. The special member subsidy is only for Hong Kong; next year we will return to the normal subsidies for retired members and graduate students.

Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia Scholarships

Following our decision at last OGM to implement two scholarships for supporting doctoral students in the field of philosophy of education, work has now been completed on drafting the form of the scholarships. After much haggling over the words, a draft was circulated to members earlier this year for consideration and feedback. Responses have been

incorporated where appropriate, and the result is the final form proposed for adoption by the society in a motion at this year's AGM. To show changes made in response to member feedback, I will post a revised version (draft 6) on the society website, with annotations showing edits since the copy distributed to all members earlier this year. Because of the extensive time allowed for consultation, if any further amendment is required, it may be proposed as a formal amendment to the motion at the AGM. Administration of the scholarships will be discussed when the exec meet in Hong Kong, and details explained at the AGM.

EPAT

An administration can always look good when the economy is booming. Our society is currently in good financial shape, thanks in large part to the ongoing development of our journal. Thanks and appreciation to Michael Peters and the editorial team, to Blackwell as publishers, and to the academic contributions from increasing numbers of authors, whether members or not. The journal also relies on the good will and academic standing of an excellent panel of reviewers who contribute to the professional standard of the journal. My thanks to the society members involved in the review process, for their good will and for their sensitive yet rigorous scrutiny of papers submitted for publication.

The EPAT Editor's report outlines the specific directions being taken and projections for upcoming issues, so that sort of detail will not be repeated here. I do, however, want to refer to a few issues raised for discussion at last year's general meeting. Some resulted from miscommunication and wrong information, although the editorial team has continued to focus on improving the turnaround of papers, with developments communicated to the exec. The journal is about to enter a new phase of administration, with a full electronic system to manage paper submission and reviews, through to publication. After last year's meeting, I investigated reported delays in turnaround of papers and reported to the exec as follows:

Most of the delay in our turnaround of papers is in the review process. Many of our members who undertake reviews spend up to (and sometimes more than) a year sitting on papers, even after several reminders. We frequently cancel reviews and have to reassign other reviewers, increasing the load of the faithful – to the point that some members have asked not to be considered for any further work in the short term. We have had almost a hundred papers rejected since 1999, all requiring at least two reviews. Part of my drive to increase PESA membership has been to increase the number of available reviewers. There are further delays before publication, since issues are decided up to two years ahead. Although delay can be frustrating for authors, it might also be interpreted as a measure of the journal's success as a desirable vehicle for publication.

As the number of submissions increases, the number of rejections also increases (almost a hundred since 1999), and reviewers are far busier than the number of published papers would indicate. Despite the best of intentions and the most efficient of systems, odd papers have been held up between reviews, editors and authors. In hindsight, some of these delays could have been resolved by a timely email inquiry. Both Michael and I field a number of email requests for an update on review progress and possible publication dates. We are now chasing up reviewers and authors sooner, although it is difficult to insist on instant turn around from busy volunteers.

At last year's meeting, concern was also expressed that as we increase the number of special issues, the avenues for members' 'ordinary' papers are diminished. A request was made to keep at least two general issues per year. My report to the exec also pointed out that a

number of EPAT issues posing as 'special' were in fact quite ordinary for our members in terms of their interest as readers and their accessibility as authors. Examples given included issues (based on a call for papers) on the philosophy of learning, the philosophy of teaching, and the issues based on our annual conferences which are very member-focussed. Although these are categorised as 'special issues', their focus is common to most of our members. The suggestion is that basing an issue around a common theme with a call for papers is a means of making a particular issue more coherent. Also in my report to Exec and worth repeating:

From a business perspective, the move to six issues per year has allowed for more special issues, providing better penetration into new readership markets, particularly the United States, Asia and Europe. The balance between a sense of local ownership and international acclaim/special interest is a tricky one, and one that I think is good for us to debate. There is argument for and against both ways, and I think that the crossover between 'special' and 'general' issues is being handled in such a way as to allow for both. The journal has not always been this popular. For a number of years, there were not enough papers of publishable standard submitted for general publication. Competition for publishing space is seen as a useful mechanism for raising the academic standard of the journal.

Michael has produced a comprehensive report on the journal, for presentation at this year's annual general meeting. He will address the proposed changes and the proportion of special issues.

Website

Our website (www.pesa.org.au) has continued to function as a vehicle for communication for the society (both internal and external). The site provides contact details for exec, a copy of the society's rules (and old constitution), various official forms, minutes of meeting since 1999, current conference details, details of all members (for members only), html links to a range of useful resources for philosophy of education, and (in hopeful anticipation) copies of papers for the conference. As with all websites, ours is in constant development, limited only by an optimal balance between administration and usefulness, and a healthy suspicion of technological imperialism.

Online payment of membership fees

At the Auckland conference, some frustration was aired about the difficulty in joining and renewing membership for PESA, either for people living outside Australasia or for those not attending conference. Having set up our own website, it proved too costly to add an online facility for secure transactions. Since then, Blackwell have offered to manage our annual subscriptions: sending reminder notices, collecting payments on our behalf in any currency (via their secure website), and then passing them on to us as a bulk payment along with payment of royalties from the journal. In effect, society membership is now separated from conference attendance, and can be paid for in any currency from anywhere.

Advantages of the change include, in no particular order: fewer transactions for PESA secretary (reminders, receipts etc.); a journal distribution list that matches the list of paid-up members; a workable payment mechanism for non-Australasians and members not attending conference; all subscriptions converted to Australian dollars through the website transaction; secure credit card transaction website with no cost to PESA (up to 100 members).

Our society rules still require applications for new membership to be approved by the exec, after which details will be passed on to Blackwell for collection of the membership fee and inclusion on the list of annual reminders. Since most membership subscriptions are currently up to date, the new collection mechanism will begin for the next financial year, when members will receive email notification from Blackwell that their subscription is due.

General

My thanks again to the exec for the development work throughout the year, and also to the members who continue to support the society through their writing and conference presentations. The proposed changes are intended to strengthen the society and hopefully to ensure it stays around for the long term.

And last but not least, University of Auckland has this year seen fit to award me with a PhD for my work in philosophy of education. Rumour has it that I can now say what I like.

Peter Fitzsimons

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