

## **Making a connection: connecting makers.**

### **Biographies:**

**Andrew Welch** is the Studio Head of Jewellery + Metal, a specialisation within the Bachelor of Visual Arts at the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia. A graduate from the University of South Australia's precursor institution the South Australian College of Advanced Education, (Bachelor of Design - Jewellery & Metalsmithing), Welch completed a Master of Design in 2002. Welch is also an Access Tennant at Zu design jewellery + objects (102-103 Gays Arcade Balcony, Adelaide 5000) an artist run workshop and retail gallery that represents over 60 Australian and international jewellery artists. Welch's recent jewellery making focuses on exploring how industrial production methods can be adapted and used in combination with hand-making to create forms that exploit the design potential of this way of making objects. At the same time the relationship of these objects to the body continues to be the driving force, or as Wendy Walker puts it, 'Above all the primary design imperative remains that of wearability, of a striving for harmony, a spirited symbiosis between bodily adornment and the human form. (Wendy Walker 2000).

**Anna Russo** is Executive Officer to the Pro Vice Chancellor and was recently a Project Officer Teaching and Learning in the Flexible Learning Centre, the academic support unit of the University of South Australia. Her discipline base is Design and she has a Bachelor of Design in Jewellery and Metalsmithing and a Graduate Diploma in Cultural Heritage Management.

She supports the academic coordinators, Teaching & Learning Services and Research & Scholarship by providing research and analysis of the issues in teaching in higher education today. She works on University wide developments undertaken by the Flexible Learning Centre that have arisen from needs identified by University Teaching and Learning Committee or from the Portfolio of Learning Support and Access. Her role has involved research and analysis of key developments such as postgraduate research qualities, the introduction of processes to interpret student feedback from courses, and institutional approaches to improve graduate employment outcomes. Recently, she has been involved in an analysis of student feedback data aggregated at School level with a view to identifying strategic activities for improvement of the University GCEQ scores. Her research interest is in exploring the scholarship of teaching within the creative arts discipline context.

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### **Introduction**

When teaching in the creative arts, one approach to giving students real world experience is to provide the opportunity for them to visit a practicing artist at work in their studio or to undertake an internship in the artist's studios. This notion of 'work based learning' is well established in the UK as a key element in providing students with a set of generic skills such as problem solving, teamwork and communication, which will boost their employability. A UK study in 2001 of 16 universities, case studied institutional responses to developing graduate employability and a key finding was that employability has three aspects: the development of employability attributes or generic skills, the development of self-promotional and career

management skills; and a willingness to learn and reflect on learning (UK Universities). One of the major teaching strategies to improve graduate employability adopted in the UK has been to embed a range of different types of work based learning courses into university programs. Using external work experiences in programs is now gaining momentum at the University of South Australia. As of 2005, all new program approval submissions are required to provide a statement of how work experience or 'work based learning' is addressed in the program curriculum. Moves to develop course offerings in 'work based learning' are also being investigated and are in development.

The contribution of practicing artists as part-time teachers perhaps deserves equal examination not only for the contribution made to student learning, but with regard to what can be gained by the full-time teachers in terms of strategies to improve teaching.

To investigate this idea the authors devised a questionnaire aimed at getting a better picture of the approach to teaching that a full-time teacher and part-time practitioner take. The questions allowed the two teachers, one full time, the other, a sessional staff member to reflect upon their approach to teaching and to review the contributions each bring to teaching and ultimately the employability of the graduates. The responses were compared and an analysis of the contributions to teaching and learning was undertaken.

#### **Full time teacher: part-time practitioner.**

While there is argument about the pros and cons of casualisation of staffing in Higher Education it's clearly an opportunity for a mix of career teachers and practicing artists to contribute to an approach to learning that prepares students for professional practice. In 2004 the University of South Australia employed 2103 casual staff as lecturers, tutors, markers and other academic duties. In the School of Art 78 casuals were employed for contracts of various duration and requirements, 70 of these people acted as tutors and 69 as lectures suggesting that most staff employed took on dual roles. (UniSA info reporting)

This combination of full-time and part-time staff is now a feature of the contemporary higher education landscape.

Each of the 10 studio areas in the Bachelor of Visual Art (specialization) program - ceramics, new media, drawing, glass, jewellery & metal, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture and textiles – is coordinated by a 'Studio Head', usually a full time staff member. The Studio Head works with a mix of full time (continuing) and part-time or 'sessional' staff to deliver the studio courses.

In the jewellery & metal studio area Andrew Welch is the Studio Head. As Studio Head an important focus of Welch's approach to curriculum development is to consider how his teaching, and the contribution to teaching that the sessional staff members make, helps students when they graduate to successfully make the transition from student to practitioner. The curriculum design is guided by the use of graduate attributes, or 'Graduate Qualities', that the University seeks as outcomes for its graduates. (Appendix B) These Graduate Qualities focus on generic attributes that contribute to operating as a professional and are designed to be embedded into programs and interpreted for particular fields of practice.

In 2003 Welch conducted a series of interviews with focus groups from selected jewellery practitioners to find out what kind of skills these professionals identified as valuable to graduates in order that they could start 'being a professional' in the context of practice as a studio jeweller. Welch interviewed Sue Loraine, Head of the Metal Studio at the JamFactory, Catherine Truman, Julie Blyfield and Leslie Matthews from Gray Street Workshops, Jane Bowden and Roman Kielczewski from Zu design and John Campbell, Head of Jewellery at Adelaide Centre for the ARTS (TAFE SA).

The key outcome of this investigation was that 'attitudinal' factors were identified as a key to success and that creating networking opportunities for students was critically important. Practicing artists also identified that having a passion for the field was instrumental in successfully becoming an artist and exposure to professionals during a program of study could help students 'picture' themselves as practicing artists and therefore help them develop the attitudes (passion, life-long learning, etc) that professionals identified as keys to success. (Welch, A. 2003).

In the Jewellery and Metal studio, Welch is the only full-time (continuing) staff person. He works closely with sessional staff to deliver the jewellery & metal courses across the Bachelor of Visual Art (Jewellery) program. The sessional staff are all full time practicing jewellery makers who are members of cooperative, or what might be described as 'artist run' enterprises. These enterprises include the internationally recognized Gray Street Workshops (Leslie Matthews), Zu design, a gallery and workshop that has been operating for 8 years and that represents over 60 Australian jewellery makers (Jane Bowden and Roman Kielczewski) and the recently established Soda and Rhyme (Naomi Schwartz). Coincidentally, and reflecting the maturity of education in the jewellery field, these jewellers are all graduates from the UniSA jewellery program.

Welch, as Studio Head maintains his practice as a maker by spending one and a half days a week as an 'access tenant' at Zu design in Adelaide. The outcomes of this access tenancy include a number of solo and group exhibitions and curatorial responsibility for one group exhibition. It is also an opportunity to experience first hand the day-to-day managing of an artist run enterprise. His approach to teaching is strongly informed by studies in the Graduate Certificate in Teaching (Higher Education) completed in 2001 through Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and by the current studio experience at Zu design. Experience from the QUT program encouraged him to take an approach to teaching that moved from asking 'what does the curriculum need' to asking 'what does this student need to succeed?'

The authors asked Jane Bowden, a sessional staff member who has taught in the jewellery and metal studio area at Unisa since 2002, to reflect on her teaching using the questionnaire, because as a practitioner she has supported herself through her work for over ten years and her contribution to the curriculum has genuinely been ad-hoc. As a full time practitioner Bowden's ability to make time for teaching is limited so her teaching portfolio is characterized by short but intensive contributions, for example team teaching when other staff are unable to commit to a complete semester or taking specialized workshops and guest lectures on

specific topics. Bowden is a successful mid-career practicing artist who sees her contribution to the curriculum as a way of giving something back to the institution that gave her a start, and this was affirmed by her responses. It's important to note that the authors recognize that these staff share a complex relationship as both studio members (studio 'landlord' and access tenant, perhaps) and S.A. School of Art staff (studio head/sessional staff) and have had previous opportunity to discuss the topic.

While teaching represents a different proportion of Welch and Bowden's working lives, both are motivated by a similar goal, that is, that graduates emerge from the institution with the professional skills that enable them to make a successful transition from study to practice. For Bowden, as the manager of a gallery, this means that emerging artists who bring their work to her to sell or exhibit can appropriately position their product in the market place. As Studio Head, Welch aims to identify and promote those skills – making, designing and marketing – that along with the conceptual development are part of 'being a professional'.

The significant differences identified by the questionnaire to teaching practice were in curriculum development or contribution and the discipline practices or expertise brought being delivered to students. Although both staff members are spending time in the industry as professional practicing artists, the elements being brought into the University from that practice differ quite dramatically.

Welch brings into the classroom practical examples observed from professional practice of approaches to problems, materials and practice. He also makes a point of demonstrating products he has completed and the tools used in his production. To complement these very discipline based topics, he also used his experiences to bring to the students current examples of the more intrinsic values of the practice. Successful marketing and the understanding of customer relationships are skills of professional practice which can take many years to understand and develop. Rather than the expectation that the industry based teacher would bring these elements into the curriculum, it was in fact the continuing staff member who had identified this gap in the curriculum and used his experience in the 'real world' to gather knowledge and bring this back into the classroom.

What Bowden brought into the classroom was quite different to the discipline base knowledge that may have been expected. Rather, her knowledge was broader and included not only practical experience but also the crucial experience of the business side of the industry. Pricing, quality, valuing work and its impact on clients are all additional parts of the discipline knowledge which in the creative arts is traditionally difficult to teach without industry based projects. As an industry based teacher, Bowden has the advantage of being responsible for making a living from her creative profession and brings this very real and survival part of the discipline into the classroom.

The key advantages for students of having her come into the classroom, rather than sending the students out into the studios were identified as:

- Exposure to authentic practice without leaving the classroom
- Assistance to conceptualize or visualize themselves as successful practicing artists
- Opportunity to form networks which could lead to relationships such as mentoring and business partnerships.

Welch reports that a defining moment in the taking this approach – bring professional practice experience into the class room – was reading student feedback provided by the CEI (Course Evaluation Instrument) where a student responded that they valued learning from a professional artist. The CEI collects student responses to a number of set and optional questions in the form of data that can be displayed as a graph and 'free text' where students can respond with a written comment.

*Having an actual practicing jeweller as a teacher gives more confidence that the techniques are relevant to todays market place and that feedback we get is of a professional standard. (Student response to the free text question in the CEI for Jewellery Casting. CEI - Course code: Jewellery Casting (VSAR 2091) (12859) Internal Year: 2002 - Semester: S2 - Mode: I)*

Welch sees the student responding to learning from a 'practicing jeweller' as a direct result of students being exposed to his art practice through his exhibition 'Zitto' (*Zitto!* Friday 16 August 2002. Exhibition of Jewellery and Artefacts at Zu design jewellery + objects (102-103 Gays Arcade Balcony, Adelaide 5000) accompanied by a catalogue essay by Wendy Walker) and it encouraged him to draw on the objects and tooling for use in teaching the course, *Jewellery Production Techniques* in 2004.

Although the response rate to the CEI in 2004 was low (33.33% or 7 responses from 21 students) Welch was encouraged by one free text response that indicated that bringing examples from his own practice into the class room might contribute to students think like professionals.

*this course taught me some valueable (sic) skills which i believe will be useful in my career as a jeweller. I liked the way that we were encouraged to keep ideas simple, and focus on the technique... this way we learnt the skills, and developed them, rather than overlook them in complicated designs. (Student response to the 'free text' question in the CEI for Course code: Jewellery Production Techniques (VSAR 2092) (12860) – Internal Year: 2004 - Semester: S1 - Mode: I)*

*Jewellery Production Techniques* was offered again in 2005, taught by Welch and with Bowden presenting a one-off lecture on 'How to approach a Gallery to sell your work'. The focus of this lecture was how a professional artist might price their work in order to both be competitive in the market place and earn a reasonable return. Bowden's presentation was supported by the spread sheet that she uses in her every day business, which accounts for such items as materials, overheads and the appropriate wholesale and retail markup . Welch reflects that having a professional artist come into the class room and discuss their 'trade secrets' 'gets the students thinking like professional artists – even while they are still students'.

The response rate to the CEI for *Jewellery Production Techniques* in 2005 was again low (40% or 8 responses from 20 students) and inconclusive for the purpose of this project with

the text responses almost unanimous in their focus on problems with the shift of the South Australian School of Art from its Underdale campus to new premises at the City West campus.

Welch has also taken on a 'directed study' student who aims to extend their Jewellery Production Techniques experience by developing a limited edition series of jewellery pieces using the processes taught in the course and suitable for sale in a gallery like Zu design. Prompted by Bowden, Welch has set the assessment criteria to be a presentation to Zu design of the finished pieces and consultation with Bowden on the cost. Welch sees this as a valuable opportunity to establish links with potential business partners.

### **Conclusion**

With the Australian higher education system being one of the most casualised industries in the employment market (DETYA, 2001) continuing staff members are faced with the challenge of creating curriculum without the continuity of core permanent staff. The disaggregation of programs at the University of South Australia means that any course can belong to any program and once again notions of continuity and in-house specialization are challenged. The response to the economic demands has been to draw professionals from industry as casual or sessional staff to take on teaching roles.

This disaggregation of programs and the proliferation of employment of sessional staff is now the norm in the Australian Higher Education sector. From an administrative point of view, these changes have made sound economic sense. For academic leaders, the key to successfully bringing sessional staff into the University as contributors to an authentic teaching and learning environment is an understanding of the contribution sessionals, from their experience in professional practice, can make to the curriculum. In order to do this, continuing staff need to have an understanding of the elements of employability that are inherent in 'work based learning' and develop curriculum that draws on sessional staff to build upon those concepts. For students, the advantages of having the 'work based learning' experience brought into the classroom provides them with a number of benefits. It assists them to understanding their discipline better; conceptualize themselves as professionals and to form the essential networks that are needed in order to succeed as a practicing artist in the creative arts industry. Although the employment of professional artists as teachers in the University could never replace the traditional industry based or studio experience and the additional qualities that are built in that context, it does provide a useful segue between the real world and the class room which students are clearly benefiting from.

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## **Appendix A**

Each staff member was asked to independently complete a questionnaire with sections on the topics of Motivation, Curriculum, Links to the community, Links to the workplace and Support from the University. While each responded separately the responses are collated together under the topic headings in order to more clearly illustrate the different (or similar) approaches to their teaching. AW indicates Andrew Welch, JB Jane Bowden.

### **Motivation**

When asked the motivation factors for teaching, both the full-time and Sessional staff members talked about their personal feelings of responsibility to contribute to the field through teaching. Both believed that by sharing their knowledge they would be preparing students for the field and exposing the valuable contributions the students had the potential to make the jewellery community.

*1. What motivates you to teach?*

AW

My students motivate me to do it well. I also recognise that being a teacher is a privileged position in the jewellery making community, encouraging me to ensure that my students get the best learning experience that prepares them for the field and in turn enables them to make a valuable contribution to the jewellery community.

*1. What motivates you to teach?*

JB

I am passionate about my craft and so I enjoy passing on my knowledge and experiences to people who are passionate about learning. I come from a family of teachers, my Mother is an Art teacher and runs her own art classes, my Father was a mathematics/science high school teacher, and my grandmother was also a teacher, so I guess it comes naturally. My philosophy is to share as much information as I can with the community of jewellery makers who I come in contact with at Zu design. Part of this process is connecting students with artists who can advise on problem solving in their specialist area.

## **Curriculum**

The questionnaire identified significant differences in each staff members approach to curriculum development and the discipline practices. Welch uses his industry experience to make the skills he teaches as part of the course work 'real', while Bowden brings to the classroom the 'nuts and bolts' of everyday business as a practicing artist.

*2. What practices do you bring into the classroom that help bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace?*

AW

Examples of how my studio colleagues (from zu design) approach problems, their approaches to materials and practice. I also bring in examples of my jewellery and the tools used to make it.

JB

I have worked for myself for the past 15 years and I think that it gives students the encouragement that if you are positive and persistent about what you want to achieve you can earn a living from your craft. My experience as a practitioner and gallery owner has given me an insight into the importance of accurate pricing and appropriate commercial quality/detail. For example, there is a need for an artist to be able to be business savvy in order to be financially self sufficient and to be able to place their work at a correct price point in the market. If people underprice their work they are undermining themselves and other graduates the potential to become self employed.

*3. What elements do you bring from your professional practice which would otherwise be excluded from the curriculum?*

AW

My contact with other jewellery makers through the Zu Design Gallery (i.e different ones than my Zu studio colleagues) has given me a special insight into the way different artists market their work and also how visitors to the gallery respond to the work. For some people a visit to Zu is their first contact with contemporary jewellery – the range of materials used to create jewellery and the diverse approaches to body adornment can be surprising intriguing and indeed confronting. Conversely some clients are very knowledgeable about the artists and are avid collectors – often each with their own favourite jeweller. Zu design represents over 60 SA and Australian artists – having a business that is half workshop and half gallery has an interesting synergy – the members need to be respectful of the individual artists work (for example we would contact the artist before resizing or repairing their work) while at the same



time clients who cannot find the right piece can have something custom made. This is a delicate balance that is perhaps the success for both zu design and the artists that they represent.

JB

Practical things like pricing work, how to approach galleries, and the things to be careful of when selling your work through galleries. How to value your work and how it affects the bigger picture, and how everything effects how clients will value pieces.

*4. What are the assessment tasks you have set that bring students into contact with practicing artists as opposed to the practice of artists in the community?*

AW

The only project that comes close is perhaps the project in the course 'Introduction to the jewellery workshop' asking the students to produce an A4 poster about a particular artist. Sometimes when it has been possible students have contacted the artist – usually these are the most interesting posters.

This might be an important strategy to explore.

JB

Unsure.

*5. Do you use any technology as a teaching strategy?*

AW

I strongly encourage students to contact me via email when they have queries about their work (outside class time of course!) I make an effort to respond in a timely and positive fashion. This is an important strategy for me. I believe this approach encourages the student to 'problematise' the situation. The effort to compose and send an email often enables them to solve the problem for themselves.

JB

Not specifically. I have just begun to use power point as an alternative to using slides in presentations. I think it is important as a practitioner to have good images of my pieces and from a teaching perspective for students to see how a professional should present themselves. About three years ago I bought a digital camera with a good macro facility so that I could document my own work. I also get Grant Hancock to take professional photographs of my exhibition work.

*6. What do you believe are the key advantages of students connecting with professional artists as part of their core curriculum?*

AW

I think that direct contact with practicing professionals helps them to visualise themselves as a professional (although they may not think of it this way). The other key advantage is that it helps them establish a peer network that I believe is part of successful transition from study to practice. The jewellery community in Adelaide (and indeed in Australia) is close knit and supportive – making contact with one member of this community can lead to life long friendships and a becoming part of a support network as a practitioner.

JB

There are many things that you have to learn along the way when you are trying to earn a living as an artist. If students can connect with artists who have achieved their goals of being

self employed (and not relying on other forms of income) then they can learn some of the steps that made this possible, making the transition from student to practicing artist a little less difficult. When I made the transition from University to setting up a workshop I chose to invite trade jewellers to work with me so that I could continue learning and refining my skills. I also employed them to do components that were harder for me to make, as in stone settings and other manufacturing techniques.

### **Links to the community**

As Studio Head Welch aims to bring professional practice into the classroom by inviting practicing artists to contribute to the curriculum as sessional staff members and through consultation with professionals to develop coursework. Bowden as established artist is in a position to connect emerging artists with her network in the close knit community of practicing artists.

*7. What networks or links have you facilitated between the students and the art community?*

AW

Informal contacts through sessional staff who are practitioners and visiting artists.

JB

Informally I have always encouraged students to approach galleries and other artists to ask for advice on ways to achieve their future goals. As I am a practicing jeweller and a gallery owner I hope I can make the students realise that there are many people like me who are approachable in the art community. Zu design – jewellery + objects has agreed to take on Simon Williams as part of the internship program. Rebecca Ziersch, a recent graduate from TAFE is applying to the Helpmann Academy to become an access tenant at Zu design during 2006.

### **Links to the workplace**

As Studio Head Welch fields calls from potential employers although he admits that in the contemporary jewellery field these contacts are limited. Bowden as gallery owner is in a position to connect emerging artists with other exhibition and sales venues.

*8. Do you think you provide any links to field employers and job markets?*

AW

Again these are informal and ad hoc – I am sometimes contacted by potential employers.

JB

As a gallery owner, when people are setting up galleries interstate I am often approached to recommend artists for them to exhibit or artists come to me and I then advise them on where I think their work would be best represented.

*9. How does your teaching ensure that curricula remains up to date and matched to industry practice?*

AW

As course coordinator and Studio Head I prepare the course booklets and brief the sessional staff. I believe that the physical structure of the courses (ie the key dates) and the projects - with an emphasis on practical outcomes – creates the best learning environment for 'studio teaching'. Part of this means bringing examples of the teachers own jewellery making (and approach to making) at appropriate times during the semester.

JB

As I am making all the time, selling my own work, doing commissions, running a gallery and selling to other galleries, I think that I am in touch with up to date practices in many areas of the jewellery field. I think this translates to the things that I teach and the information I make available to any of my students. I think it is important for the full time lecturers to be a part of the art community by working within their fields to stay in touch with what is happening outside the University. Reflecting on the quality of work at the graduate exhibitions, it would seem that the lack of contact time in courses now means that the work produced by the graduates is of a lower standard. This makes the transition between studying and working for themselves harder to achieve. This can be seen by the number of students who feel the need to do apprenticeships to further their technical skills and industry contacts within the jewellery field.

### **Support from the University**

The South Australian School of Art supports Welch's teaching practice by supporting his research – a kind of 'practice as research'. Bowden's response on the other hand reflects the dilemma of the part time teacher – the skilled practitioner who is also expected to be a good teacher. Fortunately for the South Australian School of Art Bowden comes from a family of teachers who have proved an excellent role models, exemplars that inspire Bowden's approach to her teaching - a passion for her field – that in turn inspires her students.

#### *10. How does the university support your teaching practice?*

AW

Staff in the School of Art are encouraged to maintain their practice – one strategy to do this is to schedule time for research and scholarship as part of the performance management process. I am able to spend one day per week in the Zu design studio augmented with weekend and evenings in order to maintain my practice as a jewellery maker. The kind of work that I am able to do varies from commissions, exhibition pieces and curating exhibitions. I also have direct contact with customers at Zu design.

JB

The only direct help I have had from the university is advice from the course coordinator about the structure of classes and also the level of skill that the students have and should be expected to have. I am not trying to be a full time teacher so I don't look for too much help in becoming a teacher, I think I am more useful and a practicing artist who teaches. The university does always help on a practical level of setting up computers or other teaching aids whenever I have needed them. I did attend an induction course which I didn't think it assisted my teaching practice much.

#### *11. What do you wish your students to experience through your role as a professional artist who teaches in a University?*

AW

To develop a passion for their field – I believe that this passion is perhaps the key indicator of success in any field of endeavor.

JB

I hope that I can inspire the students to learn and to ask questions to achieve their goals and that I can be a role model to the students who want to work for themselves in the future.

Professional artists that can support themselves are hopefully positive but realistic in the way they pass on knowledge to the students so that they too can become professional's in their fields. I hope I inspire the students to become passionate about their work.

## **Appendix B**

The statement of graduate qualities of the University of South Australia.

The following list of 7 qualities was agreed by the University of South Australia community as appropriate to the University's distinct mission and profile.

A graduate of the University of South Australia:

- operates effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice
- is prepared for life-long learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice
- is an effective problem solver, capable of applying logical, critical, and creative thinking to a range of problems
- can work both autonomously and collaboratively as a professional
- is committed to ethical action and social responsibility as a professional and citizen
- communicates effectively in professional practice and as a member of the community
- demonstrates international perspectives as a professional and as a citizen.

<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/gradquals/staff/default.asp>

or

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/etd/gradqual.asp>