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### **To edit or not to edit? Why is editing academic collections not recognised in the Humanities?**

#### Abstract:

Edited academic books garner neither research metric nor institutional praise, compared to peer reviewed journal articles or monographs. For the editor, there seems no reason to undertake such volumes. But we still do them; we still edit or co-edit them. Louise Edwards claims there are many good reasons why academics persist in editing (and reading) this type of academic output, her prime one being that they 'meet a series of distinct intellectual and community needs' (Edwards 2012: 62). This paper brings together two academics who have both contributed to and edited or co-edited such volumes. The scope of the paper is their experiences in editing and co-editing, in order to open up a discussion about the worth of such volumes: why, despite the university's reluctance to recognise them as either creative or research outputs, academics continue to regard editing as a meaningful scholarly pursuit; and importantly, as we clearly do value these undertakings, how can institutional attitudes to their merit be changed? The co-authors discuss their own personal ethos and experiences about editing and co-editing these texts. This paper stems from a panel at the 2017 AAWP conference, an open dialogue with the audience facilitated by a collegial interlocutor, Dr Carolyn Rickett, herself a co-editor of books.

#### Biographical notes:

Dr Sue Joseph has co-edited three international books – two on profile writing and one on memoir – and has guest edited an international peer reviewed journal as well as co-edited a domestic peer reviewed journal. She is currently also co-editing an international text on memoir and trauma.

Professor John Dale has edited three non-fiction and fiction anthologies, and co-edited one journal edition and another anthology. He is currently editing *Sydney Noir* for Akashic books, USA.

#### Keywords:

creative writing – edited collections – metrics – creative practice – Humanities

## Introduction

There is scant attention paid in the academy to the discussion of edited collections of scholarly or creative works, apart from demeaning them. This is evident at a fundamental level by the fact that edited academic or creative books garner neither research metric nor institutional praise, compared to writing peer reviewed journal articles or monographs. As Cary J. Nederman writes, 'Perhaps no type of scholarly production is more unappreciated, if not wholly maligned ... than the edited collection of research essays' (Nederman 2005: 221).

Building on the work of two academics in the past 15 years, we hope to create debate – and by doing so, possibly effect change – about the status quo of edited collections. We believe it warrants reconsideration, particularly in the Humanities. Through qualitative survey, we tasked research administrators throughout Australia to answer questions we derived from our own broad research. We then convened a panel at the AAWP annual conference 2017 (at Flinders University) to further engage the scholarly community, and include comments from the panel and audience here where pertinent, together with the voices from administration. It is clear from our findings that there is much disquiet and frustration at the lack of value institutions attribute to these practices – although without these practices, it could be argued that the dissemination of academic discourse would grind to a halt.

## Earlier research

Nederman is the first to write about the status of edited collections in the past two decades. His research shows that edited collections are 'among the most commonly and widely referenced forms of scholarly literature' (Nederman 2005: 222), particularly in the Humanities, and although we are told are considered when it comes to promotion, are not considered as research per se. But even on a promotion or merit level, Nederman writes that one of the major issues of what he tags a 'misapprehension' is that edited collections are regarded as less rigorous than journal articles or monographs. He writes: 'Those who edit and contribute to such volumes are by no means given credit for their scholarship, during promotion and merit exercises, proportionate to that received by authors of monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles' (Nederman 2005: 221). He claims two great strengths of edited collections:

- to 'permit forms of scholarship to blossom that might not otherwise come to fruition';
- 'to bring diverse scholars into a dialogue or debate about some key issue or thesis'. (Nederman 2005: 224-225)

Some seven years later, Louise Edwards builds on Nederman's ideas. She agrees with Nederman about the dismissal of academic value of editing as active research when it comes to promotion. She writes: 'professional colleagues sitting on appointment, tenure, or promotion committees have yet to fully appreciate the intellectual value of the edited volume' (Edwards 2012: 62). She adds, to bolster her claim: 'The persistence of edited volumes within the HSS sector despite the myriad attacks on the format stands as strong evidence of its continued utility' (Edwards 2012: 73). Hers is a call to arms for scholars, particularly in the Humanities. She wonders why the edited volume refuses to disappear, despite its lowly regarded status, 'and instead thrives in the twenty-first century' (Edwards 2012: 62). She adds to Nederman's list, claiming that edited collections:

- 'provide the space for authoritative comparative perspectives across such dimensions as time, geographic localities, and disciplinary borders';
- 'play an important role in generating communities of scholars for the endemically fragmented HSS academics';
- 'have the advantage of speed that the sole authored monograph lacks. They are (or should be) faster to appear because the writing and research load is spread across many people. The new ideas propelled by the debate, dialogue, or breadth of the edited volume impact the field more quickly than those in a sole-authored book'. (Edwards 2012: 63-64)

She claims that 'edited volumes play important intellectual and community-building roles in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) sector' (Edwards 2012: 61). And she is hopeful, writing that as the domination of the scientific International Scientific Indexing (ISI) of journals is diminished by use of Google Scholar Citations and other technologies to gather metrics, that academics are able to 'make increasing use of citation engines that more accurately reflect the nature of their academic publishing and the way that ideas circulate in their branch of academia' (Edwards 2012: 73). Book chapters and edited volume metrics are now available through Google Scholar Citations, and academics can more easily access their impact through such technology. She writes: 'The inclusion of book chapters and edited volumes within Google Scholar Citations serves to reveal the considerable impact of edited volumes to the HSS sector and will increase their value as markers of scholarly quality as a result' (Edwards 2012: 62).

Historically throughout the sciences, collaborative work is the norm. In the Humanities, however, most scholars work in isolation, managing some networking through conference and various workshops and seminars. Editing and co-editing a curated text breaks through this isolation for its editors, but also for its contributors. As Davis and Blossey write, 'Ideally, an edited book should be like an ecosystem, with structure and connections' (Davis & Blossey 2011: 248). We contend the text and its process create this structure and connections. As Edwards writes, 'In sum, for solid intellectual reasons as well as important academic networking benefits, the edited volume has an important role to play in the HSS sector' (Edwards 2012: 64). More recent discussion of editing texts recognises the significance of this collaborative effect. Carrigan writes:

Don't underestimate the potential benefits attached to it [an edited volume]. Assuming this is a topic you're interested in then you're likely to massively increase your connections with others working in the field, as well as getting a broader review of the field as a whole. (Carrigan 2013)

Chapnick and Kukucha also write of the significance of this type of collaboration:

In the academy, personal contact is too often limited to conferences and similar workshop-like events. Engaging in a collaborative research process that will last months and even years provides an opportunity to interact more frequently and develop personal and professional relationships. (Chapnick & Kukucha 2016)

Some four years after Edwards' hopes of Google Scholar citations perhaps changing the acceptance of curated and edited essays, Chapnick & Kukucha observe that, 'Even with advances in tracking "impact" made possible by Google Scholar, book chapters are also often treated like second-class publications because the peer-review process is less rigorous than it is for a manuscript submission to a journal' (Chapnick & Kukucha 2016). It appears Google Scholar has not made a vast impact yet on how the work of edited texts – and their contributors and editors – are regarded.

Obversely, returning to Nederman with whom we began this discussion, his philosophy is simple and somewhat disruptive: he calls for a critical mass. He writes:

I am convinced that the only way to change the attitudes of professional colleagues and academic administrators about the value of the edited collection is to create and publish more of them that contain the very best scholarship, presented in ways that promote fruitful exchange of ideas and debate that would not occur in research monographs or journal articles. (Nederman 2005: 227)

We set out to capture the views of 14 national research administrators and/or managers through an email sweep, asking for their views and opinions on the ARC notion that editing and co-editing does not constitute active research.

### **Our research**

From 14 national research administrators and/or managers in the Humanities, we received only five replies, which might go a long way to explaining initial intransigence and a lack of administrative engagement at an institutional level. We believe that convincing our own HSS administrators/managers to champion the rationale of this research is a first step. This is what we emailed, covering every state and territory:

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Compared to writing peer-reviewed journal articles or monographs, edited academic or creative books receive neither research metric nor institutional praise under ERA, and yet editing books is a scholarly activity. The amount of time to gather, curate, collate, peer review, edit and proof both scholarly and practice-led journals and books takes months of work; the aim of the final output to provide new insights into differing fields of knowledge.

Acknowledging that editing academic and creative works is good for promotion and engagement, we are investigating why the act of editing texts is not recognised as part of active research. If an edited collection is more than the sum of its parts then it can generate new knowledge.

We are interested in beginning a discussion about a rationale for recognising editing scholarly works as active research, and would like to include any comments or insights you may have.

Those who replied expressed knowledge of the notions we are concerned about, and also concurred with a need to change policy at a national level. Professor Clair Smith, then Dean of Research from the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University in Adelaide, congratulated us on undertaking this investigation. She responds succinctly to our question regarding the lack of research status of editing and co-editing: 'My view is that it kills the collegiality of HASS disciplines, including international collaboration' (Author correspondence, 17 October 2017).

University of Western Sydney is the one university we have found to date which does recognise editorial work within academic workload. Its Director of Research in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, Professor Brett Bowden, explains: 'Western Sydney has only recently included such editorial work (including journal editorial roles) in calculating workloads, which is an advance on no recognition at all' (Author correspondence 17 October 2017). Bowden has edited a four-volume work in critical concepts series. He writes: 'I firmly believe it is a research based scholarly activity. In this instance it involved selecting not only journal articles, but also editing book extracts and arranging more than 90 entries

thematically. The end product is more than the sum of its parts' (Author correspondence, 17 October 2017).

Professor Jen Webb is the Director of The Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra. She writes: 'I'm so interested in this project! It offends me that our energies and discipline-shaping work is ignored' (Author correspondence, 19 October 2017). Webb has edited nine scholarly and five creative books, eight special journal issues, two issues of the journal *TEXT*, and two edited or co-edited issues of *Axon: Creative Explorations*. She is also the Australasian editor for *Art and Humanities in Higher Education*, and has been an editorial advisor or board member for about six national and international journals, and three book publishers. She writes: '(a) I care about editing, and (b) ... I have invested quite literally years of work into this area of practice. The reason I do this is that publication happens only because experts put enormous intellectual and practical effort into making it happen' (Author correspondence, 26 October 2017). She cites her own publications which include eight monographs, 10 creative books, five professional research papers, 128 peer reviewed chapters, journal articles and refereed conference papers, 70 works of 'grey' literature, and some hundreds of poems and short stories. She writes:

None could have happened without other people applying intellectual and critical work to my writing, and for that I am eternally grateful. Editors don't just ensure that there are works that others can read; they shape the discipline: finding the right reviewers for the right manuscripts, making decisions about material that is sent to them, compiling important collections, recruiting guest editors to produce collections that are of specific interest, et al. They also train and mentor new reviewers, critics, editors and publishers to keep the work of intellectual output continuing.

Because the government (in the form of HERDC and then ERA) do not recognise this as valued academic work, university managers likewise do not recognise it, and do not encourage (let alone reward) their academic staff for this important aspect of intellectual engagement. This means it is increasingly difficult to find people willing to review draft manuscripts (in pressured times, people will invest their workload in activities that bear immediate fruit in the form of workload allocations and other performance recognition). In some cases journals fail because the editors simply cannot maintain their input. Worst case scenario: everyone stops doing the work, and the circulation of information, ideas, knowledge and data that have characterised the academy for centuries will come to a halt.

The discipline-building and knowledge-making contributions of editorial work is the backbone of academic disciplines. Keep burning out editors and reviewers, and we will see that backbone crumble, and fail. (Author correspondence, 26 October 2017)

Associate Professor of Writing and Literature Cassandra Atherton, from Deakin University in Melbourne, has edited and co-edited many works, both critical and creative: two anthologies of microliterature for *Spineless Wonders*; co-edited a special issue of *Cordite*; co-edited a special edition of *Rabbit Journal*; co-edited a special issue of *Australian Poetry Journal*; published and edited a text of essays with international renowned scholars and poets; co-edited a text on the atomic bomb. She writes:

Despite all of this, I have received no research points, internal funding or research assistance or other credit at university level for any of these books. I have been told by the hierarchy at my university not to bother doing edited collections as they don't really count for anything.

I think these kinds of projects are exceedingly important for the top 5 following reasons:

- 1) They allow you to be viewed nationally and/or internationally as a specialist or expert in an area (also benefiting your university);
- 2) You get traction from these publications in the way that other writers and scholars (both national and international) will contact you to discuss other projects to which you are often invited to contribute;
- 3) Editing also assists in making international (and national) partnerships which my university is exceedingly keen on. (My university wants international partners to be part of grant applications and co-authored articles, however, they do not believe editing books to connect with these people is productive.) I believe that editing is the first step in working with other scholars and writers;
- 4) Having a track record of working with other specialists in your field as a basis to apply for grants is easier to achieve with edited collections. To co-author or co-write, limits – to some extent – the number of people you can work with – editing allows for the bringing together of a number of experts in an area.
- 5) Editing allows a plethora of exciting ideas and writing to sit in juxtaposition with one another – this is not entirely achievable with co-written books or papers as there are many more voices in edited collections. (Author correspondence, 1 November 2017).

Professor Catriona Mackenzie, the Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie University in Sydney, writes:

I am very glad you are starting this conversation. I was at the Australian Humanities Academy meeting at the end of last week and understand that there are moves afoot in the Australian Historical Association to lobby on this issue. I am sure the Australasian Association of Philosophy would also support these moves, as editing is regarded as a major form of research in my own discipline of Philosophy. (Author correspondence, 20 November 2017)

Professor Mackenzie has edited five volumes. She writes:

... putting together a high quality edited volume is a substantial research exercise ... edited volumes can be important ways of generating new knowledge and that they ought to be recognised as such, both in institutional measures of research activity and in national research evaluation processes such as ERA.

I do not discourage staff from either editing or contributing chapters to edited volumes, despite the lack of institutional and national recognition for editing activities. The advice I give to editors is to ensure that they contribute a chapter to the volume they are editing (so that they receive at least some research recognition for the work involved), to secure a contract with a highly reputable publisher who will send out the volume for peer review, and to ensure in addition that as editors they provide detailed editorial feedback on contributors' chapters. For academic staff, especially ECRs, who ask me about contributing to edited volumes, I provide the same kind of advice, suggesting that before agreeing to contribute they should find out the prospective publisher of the volume and seek information from the editors about the peer review process and whether the editors will provide detailed feedback on their contributions.

Although our university research office routinely advises staff submitting ARC grants to list their edited volumes under the category 'Other Outputs' rather than under the category 'Books', I suggest that staff ignore this advice and include a separate category of 'Edited Books' in their publication lists. (Author correspondence, 20 November 2017)

Of the five research managers who responded to our initial email foray, all clearly believe editing and co-editing is active research. At Professor Bowden's university (UWS), this work is now recognised within staff workloads, despite non-recognition at a national level. And Professor Mackenzie at Macquarie University, while counselling her staff cautiously, supports them in this work and advises them to create a separate list on any ARC grants, using the words 'Edited Books', instead of the nationally preferred 'Other Outputs'. At this stage, we now know we have at least five champions of reform from within Australian Humanities and Social Sciences faculties. We hope through this paper to encourage more discussion and eventual change in the institutional recognition of scholarly and creative edited collections.

### **Next stages of research**

We presented our findings at the AAWP annual conference ('Climates of Change') at Flinders University in Adelaide in November 2017. The panel was comprised of both authors of this paper, interlocuted by Associate Dean of Research from Avondale College of Higher Education on the NSW Central Coast, Dr Carolyn Rickett.[1] We opened the session by explaining our research to date and setting out our hopes for it. We were interested in audience members' experience at their own institutions, as well as their over-arching thoughts regarding national policy. Audience voices were recorded with permission, and appear below anonymously.

An academic who edited several collections as an Early Career Academic, vows she will no longer undertake such projects and says: 'I did that as an early career researcher because I felt that it was an important thing to do at the time and it counted towards my promotion from level B to level C. But now that I've just moved out of that early career phase I can quite brutally say to myself, never again, there are limits to my altruism, because it's an enormous amount of work and I did it [in] my spare time ... we can record it on our system, our bean counting system, but it doesn't attract any of the points and it doesn't count for any workload calculation at my institution.' She then speaks of the editing experience and its benefits:

Picking up on something you said about the advantages of an edited collection ... it strikes me that another advantage is it's a way of bringing into the scholarly domain a newish feel of enquiry ... And putting it out there and making it prominent. I've edited a couple of special issues of *Text* journal and one of them was on magazines and this was an area of enquiry that hadn't been prominent and I felt that we gave this new field some prominence in a new way which was a valuable contribution ... I think an edited collection, as I said before it's a way of signalling to people new connections and possibly an entirely novel field of enquiry.

Another member from the audience believes editing to be one of the 'most scholarly activities you can do'. He recently edited a text for an American publisher and says:

I've used many of Australia's leading authors ... many of whom I didn't know before, so it made those connections and put them altogether in a new theme ... I can't think of anything more scholarly I can do as an academic than reach out to other scholars in the same discipline. I have an American audience, and an international audience as well.

Another member of the audience spoke about editing a text and including her own chapter. She says:

One of the things I wanted to say about having a chapter in a book, a text that you've edited yourself – I've been sneered at for that as well. You edited it, of course you're in it, which leads to the other criticism of edited texts that they're not scrupulously or rigorously gate kept. Now I've contributed to edited texts and just worked and

worked, backwards and forwards with editors on it; they all go out for blind peer reviewing. So I don't know who these people are who aren't rigorously editing their text. Nobody I know and no experience I've had yet.

Again and again throughout the session, academics speak about the networking and connections made through editing texts. And the idea that this forms a crucial and ongoing engagement with other academics, nationally and internationally, depending on the text. One audience member says:

It's often a really good way for a new academic to get started – you don't want to write a whole monograph; if you've got an interest in a particular, subject, there's a lot of work. You've got other colleagues who are interested in the same area and you make a pitch to a publisher. It's probably easier to do that than to write a novel and get that published. So it's a really good way of making connections, of establishing a name for yourself but it's not being recognised, which is the strange part, because ... the thing universities talk about the most is that engagement of international collaboration, but they're not fostering it and working at it.

Another member of the audience echoes his thoughts:

The first editing job I did, a special issue of a journal, it was so rewarding because it starts off as an idea. That there's this field here, we want to advance this field, and then you have all these people who contribute in different ways. And give you all of these really interesting articles and that's very affirming, I'm onto something here. But also you see that they start to fall into groups and you start to see future directions coming from that. And also you start to see connections between the pieces. And that's just so exciting and you do feel that you're advancing scholarship in a very productive and very tangible way. Some of the frustrations – a lot of it's just hard slog. If you're in an institution that supports or recognises this work and will pay, even just a thousand dollars goes a long way for a research assistant who can help with the copy editing. But when you're doing more yourself it's just weekends, over and over and over again. So you have to be on top of it all, so it goes from inspirational, down to the teeth grindingly boring, trying to get people to put their commas in the right spot ... the people I know who've edited these volumes, they do take it incredibly seriously. Because it's their professional reputation.

One of the panellists speaks of her editing experience and its mentoring component. She says:

The most difficult part of editing for me is working on weekends after I've worked all week. I mean it is time, and if you want to do it well – I want to do everything well – and I want it to be a great experience for my contributors. I see it as often an opportunity for younger writers but also acclaimed scholars. I had the most wonderful experience of being mentored I suppose by a professor from England, Richard Keeble and when I was on PEP a couple of years ago over there he asked me if I would like to edit *Ethical Space* which is an international journal – a special Australian edition on literary long form. And I jumped at it and I had no idea really what I was doing but I did it. And it was just really the most wonderful experience. I was so proud of being able to say I did this and here are six of my Australian colleagues who have written up a storm and we're on the map here. And then after that he wanted to co-edit a book with me on profile writing. And it ended up being two books. So we got two books out of it and funnily enough it was perfect because when he was asleep, on the other side of the world, I'd wake up and look at what he'd done – it was so efficient. It was really an excellent paradigm of editing. But the difficulty is the time. I mean I love it, but it really is losing personal time, working seven days a week for months and being exhausted and then going, holy hell I'm not even getting paid for this, I'm not even getting a research point.

The other panellist speaks of his editing experience:

I enjoy editing, I really do. My recent collection which is ... due to be published in Australia and the United States – I first pitched the idea to a US publisher towards the end of 2015. They took about three months to get back to me that they loved the proposal ... And so I then contacted between twenty to twenty-four Australian authors with the concept – I needed to include fourteen writers; there were some who couldn't do it and others who fell through. The collection was written and edited by the middle of 2017 and it's due for publication out in 2018. So that was a really enjoyable experience working with a number of major Australian writers who jumped at the opportunity to have their work exposed to an international audience. I really enjoyed that aspect and I've enjoyed most of the editing that I've done. I worked with a colleague on an edition of *Southerly* and we introduced a number of young new writers who had never been published before ... So you're finding new authors, and you're also dealing with authors that are really experienced, it can be quite enjoyable. I think you learn a lot as an editor that is valuable for your own creative and academic work. But it does take time and I don't think you can make it the only project you're working on, because there is little financial reward, no institutional recognition and basically, you're doing it for love. But I guess that is the main motivation for most academics who edit scholarly collections.

There was much discussion about changing the term editing to curating, which could impact workload significance, and the consensus is that would work very well for creative work, but not so for scholarly collections. There are many kinds of editing and the terminology is often dismissed as not being scholarly enough. And yet editing does and can involve a wide range of academic skills. In the visual contemporary arts curators are valued for their creative input, for their selection and knowledge of the discipline, while 'editing' struggles for the same recognition, partly because it is not appreciated and partly because an editor's work is not regarded as adding any substantive value. At the end of the session, we tried to find a way forward. One audience member says:

We have to find a way of making the decisions makers or the gatekeepers invested in championing it [the debate] in some way. And build the prestige, have some sort of special issue of a really prominent journal that's read by a lot of people or even *The Conversation* that a lot of people read, that talks in a very positive way about the work that editors do. You have to build prestige around it ... It's PR, it's marketing the idea isn't it. It's repackaging and marketing the idea.

## Conclusion

There is a definite need to acknowledge the value of editing academic books and creative collections in the Humanities. The panel and audience agreed that institutions should be made aware that editing academic or creative collections can often be one of the most rewarding scholarly activities that an academic undertakes throughout their career. It lays the groundwork for a culture of engagement at both the national and international level; it encourages collaboration within and across disciplines; and it encourages the exchange of ideas and information between scholars. Our intention with this paper is not to simply complain about the lack of institutional recognition for editing collections but rather to open up the discussion and demonstrate how editing academic and creative collections benefits academics across the three areas of academic work: research, engagement (industry and international) and teaching. From the early career researcher trying to establish a career to the experienced professor who is building on his or her international

contacts, editing academic collections is one of the scholarly pursuits that can have the most impact.

An academic in the twenty-first university must be multi-skilled, and editing scholarly collections helps develop a wide variety of skills. It is obvious that editing enhances engagement and is beneficial for teaching – editing and redrafting their own work is a fundamental requirement for all Humanities students. But it is in the area of research where editors need to spell out in more detail what is actually involved. Compared to writing a traditional journal article, it is the conceptual and structural design in editing an academic collection that is its most important technical achievement. Where an editor takes an idea from concept around a neglected or innovative field of enquiry, gathers and works with an array of contributors from within and across disciplines, structures and shapes the rough final product to produce an original text that advances knowledge then it is hard to see why editing is not more valued and appreciated within the Humanities. If an edited collection of research essays or creative works is more than the sum of its individual parts, as any well-edited collection should be, and it contributes to a field of knowledge, then there is a convincing argument that it should be acknowledged as an integral part of an academic's research output. Increasingly, the freedom to teach and research within disciplines in universities is hampered by a restrictive definition of what constitutes research and an over-preoccupation with metrics. In addition to the many rewarding collegial and scholarly aspects that it brings, editing academic and creative collections can also contribute to knowledge creation.

## Endnotes

1 All voices are from the panel titled *To edit or not to edit? Why is editing academic collections not recognised in the Humanities?* on November 29 as part of the Australian Association of Writing Programs Conference 2017, 'Climates of Change', Flinders University, Adelaide.

## Acknowledgements

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Associate Professor Cassandra Atherton, 1 November 2017, Melbourne

Professor Catriona Mackenzie, 20 November 2017, Sydney

Panel at AAWP annual conference, 'Climates of Change', Flinders University, 29 November 29 2017: 'To edit or not to edit? Why is editing academic collections not recognised in the Humanities?' Professor John Dale & Dr Sue Joseph, University of Technology Sydney, with Dr Carolyn Rickett, Avondale College of Higher Education, as interlocutor.