Message from the Dean
Since my last message in The Educator I have been watching progress and counting the days until our refurbished EDFAA library would be open. It was promised for Semester 1 2012. The timeline was tight. By January I thought achieving the target was impossible. I knew how much our staff and students missed having a library: not only did they miss the ready access to academic materials but they also missed the space for social interaction around their studies. Evidence that students were feeling the loss of the library came in the decrease in measures of Student Satisfaction with their courses, noticeable in programs that usually score very high Student Satisfaction ratings. A week before Semester 1 classes started, opening the library still looked doubtful. But downstairs, unseen to the outside observer, the library was taking shape. And on 23 February 2012 the doors opened to students. A month later we celebrated the formal re-opening of the EDFAA library, two years from the day of the flood. Its opening is a tribute to the coordinated teamwork of many people. Our staff and students are full of praise for the new facilities it provides, and so am I. I encourage you to visit and appreciate the greatly improved services provided by the EDFAA library.

UWA investing in School Leaders for the Future
In January 2012 some of Western Australia’s best school teachers enrolled in the new Master of School Leadership degree, offered by UWA’s Faculty of Education. The degree is tailored to nurture leadership talent and provide professional support for aspiring school principals. The course aims to develop participants’ confidence and high levels of skill to lead their own school communities.

The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Winthrop Professor Helen Wildy said, “I am very pleased that UWA has the opportunity to work with the Department of Education to offer a relevant hands-on approach to leadership that will support principals to lead schools with confidence and face the challenges in their leadership roles.”

The Minister of Education, the Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA, addressed a welcome launch for students and staff at UWA’s Cullity Gallery on Tuesday January 24, 2012. The function provided the opportunity to celebrate the beginning of this innovative course and partnership between UWA and the Department of Education. In attendance were the Director-General of Education, Ms Sharyn O’Neill, the newly appointed UWA Vice-Chancellor, Winthrop Professor Paul Johnson, participants of the inaugural “Leading Teaching and Learning” unit that was in its second day and most of the first cohort of 50 aspiring principals. One participant, Gregory Grant, had travelled from the Muludja Remote Community School in Fitzroy Crossing to attend the launch.

In February 2012 we celebrated the accomplishment of our first cohort of Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA) school leaders in completing their Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership. We are pleased that several of the participants intend to continue with their studies to complete the Master of Educational Leadership. Indeed, the success of our partnerships with professional organisations seems to be gathering momentum. Since 2010, Professor Simon Clarke has participated in teaching collaborations in the Graduate Diploma of Educational Leadership with both AISWA and WAPPA (Western Australia Primary Principals’ Association) involving four separate cohorts and approximately 50 participants.

With the strengthening and expansion of these partnerships, there are likely to continued on page 2
be greater opportunities for professional learning as school leaders and university academics are drawn together in their desire to meet professional needs not otherwise accommodated by system arrangements. It would seem – with apologies to William Blake – that when practitioners and universities meet, great things are achieved in the world of educational leadership.

An unpopular image with perceptions of irrelevancy for everyday life combined with some less than inspiring teaching are causing students to question the purpose of Mathematics and Science in the classroom. A report by Universities Australia, commissioned early in 2012 by Professor Ian Chubb, highlights Australian students’ growing lack of appreciation of the relevance and role of science in their lives and and communities.

Universities Australia CEO, Dr Glenn Withers, said ‘This trend should be setting off alarm bells as it poses a risk to Australia’s future as an innovative national and an international leader in research’.

As part of this report a surveyed student stated:
‘I feel like in science and maths classes, it’s more like talking at you … When you are engaged in and doing projects, and may be more of an engaging activity versus sitting in a room for 60 minutes and listening to someone talking at you’.

Winthrop Professors David Blair and Grady Venville with Marina Pitts, PhD candidate, at The University of Western Australia are taking up the challenge to reinvigorate science in the classroom with an innovative Physics project focused on primary school students. This project seeks to ascertain whether Year 6 students comprehend complex abstract Physics concepts like Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. To this end, six in-class sessions were presented by David Blair at Rosalie Primary School covering topics such as: Connecting Space and Time; Curved Space Geometry with Balloons; and Fun with Black Holes.

The students drew triangles on balloons and traced the paths of parallel lines. They also explored the history of ideas about space from Pythagoras to Einstein, discussed the meaning of a straight line and learnt about observations of the curvature of space. To reinforce the classroom theory lessons, the students were taken on an excursion to the Gravity Discovery Centre, near Gingin. The students were given the opportunity to experience the Physics concepts that had been discussed in class, through guided interaction with the exhibits and by performing experiments from the top of the Leaning Tower of Gingin.

Finally, the students performed a play called ‘Free Float’ in which scientists such as Kepler, Newton and Einstein – as well as modern scientists who proved Einstein’s theory of gravity – all come together with a group of students to discuss, question and criticise each other. The students rose to the challenges of this exciting approach.

This innovative program by The University of Western Australia encourages students to engage with the world of science allowing them to discover the meaning and relevance of the science that supports their lives and communities.
Rasch Royalty at UWA

The Faculty of Education continues to be home to one of the world’s leading research centres in the field of social measurement, with research funded by ARC Linkage and Discovery Grants, funding for the Pearson Psychometric Laboratory, high quality research students, and the stream of international visitors including doctoral students from other countries.

The Fifth International Conference on Probabilistic Rasch Models for Measurement in Education, Psychology, Health, Marketing and Social Science, with over 80 delegates from countries covering all continents, took place at UWA between 23 and 25 January, 2012. The conference was preceded by two weeks of Rasch measurement courses in the Graduate School of Education.

Rasch measurement takes its name from the late Danish Mathematician and Statistician Georg Rasch who pioneered an approach to social measurement that has the theoretical characteristics of measurement in the physical sciences. His work had its origins at the Danish Institute for Educational Research and a newspaper article in May 1957 in Denmark had the following remarks about this work.

Something about Bridge Building Techniques: a sensational new creation by Dr Rasch
The headline of this article may give readers in this island kingdom associations to comfortable and queue-free transportation between the islands. However, it refers, of course, to the most sensational news at the report to the council at the Danish Institute for Educational Research, news which has already been much spoken of in the press. As a last treat, G. Rasch’s account of his interesting new creation for statistical processing of psychological tests concluded the meeting. Plainly put, this new tool means that one can compare the result of one test directly with the result of a previous test, thereby building a bridge between tests meant for different grades. Whereas these tests were previously something isolated which could not be incorporated into a whole, the opposite is now the case, and one can thus produce a development curve.

The article concluded with the following prediction:
With this illustration, Dr Rasch has at any rate removed the entirely abstract from the concept of bridge building techniques. This ground-breaking work will be studied and employed, not only in Denmark, but in the whole world.

The prediction of the newspaper article has proven to be correct. The work has lead to studies ranging from the development of statistical techniques and software, applications to large scale national and international assessment programs which include the OECD program Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Australian National Assessment Programme in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), through to philosophical and epistemological treatises on the nature of measurement. The Faculty of Education is proud of its links to the seminal work of Georg Rasch through the theoretical and practical applications developed by Winthrop Professor David Andrich and his team in the Pearson Psychometric Laboratory.

Hands-on in Harvey

Laura Wilson is a second year student in the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) and will be teaching at Harvey Primary School as an intern. Laura is undertaking a practicum at Harvey Primary School as part of the WA Combined Universities Training Schools project.

The Department of Education has awarded a contract to the Combined Universities Training Schools in a partnership between UWA, Murdoch University, Curtin University and The Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA). The Training Schools Project is part of the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality to increase the work readiness of pre service teachers in both metropolitan and rural areas.

Laura is being mentored by Year 1 teacher Jessie Duff who is the cooperative learning leader for Harvey Primary School’s K-Year 3 cohort as well as being the language leader for this group. School principal, Colin Brand, said that the aim of the program was to provide a practical, full year training for graduates. It will be a rich learning experience for both Laura and the school.

Dr Elaine Sharplin is Project Coordinator at UWA and can be contacted at: elaine.sharplin@uwa.edu.au
Deluge to delight: the new EDFAA library opens

The newly refurbished EDFAA Library opened on 23 February 2012 – almost two years after the March, 2010 storm which flooded the library and destroyed 15 per cent of the EDFAA collection.

Although the damage and disruption to the library was extensive, Acting Library Manager, Gina Sjepcevich said that,

“The refurbishment of the EDFAA Library following the flood has provided an opportunity to create a new library

with many new features. Those who remember the old library will recall that its interior was a bit tired and lacking in natural light. The new library has a new entrance with glass reaching up two floors creating a new light-filled space. There is more seating and a greater variety of spaces. There are areas for quiet individual work as well as collaborative work. There are four group study rooms, each equipped with multimedia equipment including electronic whiteboards and webcams. There are twice as many PCs as there were in the old Library.”

“Work on the collections has been continuing with items purchased just before the flood being replaced along with high use items and reserve items. The rest of our efforts are focused on replacing unique items and particular subject areas, including some new ones. The curriculum collection is being updated and will include more 3D items.”

Perhaps most appealing to library users will be the new checkout system installed in the EDFAA Library. This system allows multiple items to be scanned simultaneously during check-out and check-in. Items can also be renewed from the self-check kiosks and print-outs of loan items, issued. The system is called RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology and an RFID tag has been placed in each of the 50,000 items in the Library. There is a self-check machine in the reserve area where items are held ready for collection.

Library users can now collect and borrow their ‘on hold’ and reserve items and return reserve items themselves.

The Official Opening of the library by the Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA, and Vice-Chancellor, Winthrop Professor Paul Johnson took place on Friday 23 March.

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We welcome contributions, photos, feedback and anecdotes.