

Introduction to the Issue

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Editor

The *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (Autumn) is described as a general issue. Issues so described are designed to offer the reader material that is relevant to any aspect of the broad range of activity that forms part of the life of the academy today. The issue offers insights into challenges facing colleagues in responding to changes, some welcome, some not necessarily so, that impact on teaching and student learning in contemporary higher education. The matters under consideration in this issue include those that could be characterised as at a macro level, with a focus both on the institutional and the course level, in an international context, and those that focus more specifically on research and practice assessing teacher interventions to support student learning. The issue represents voices from across the higher education sector, and addresses some of the key challenges facing students and teachers including academic writing, skills modules and the effective use of e-learning. There is a welcome focus on student learning and on dynamic teaching across the issue.

The issue opens with an invited contribution from Ruth Pickford and Sally Brown entitled “The Relationship Between Institutional, Course-Level and Individual Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: a proposal for developing competitive advantage through leveraging the expertise of excellent university teachers “ The title itself gives an insight into most of the key issues facing the sector, referencing the interrelationships that are a feature of the sector, excellence in teaching which is at its heart and the economic and political context that forces higher education to consider business concepts such as competitive advantage. The paper examines approaches to the recognition and reward of higher education teaching excellence, using a

case study from the UK, taking into account the relationship between institutional, course-level and individual teaching excellence and finally proposing that HEIs can develop a competitive advantage based on the expertise excellent university teachers, all to the benefit of learners.

In the context of this opening, Tomas Dwyer's paper, "The Influence of Teaching Satisfaction on Student Persistence" offers a useful perspective. Dwyer examines the influence of satisfaction with teaching experiences on students' intentions to persist. He suggests that the influence of an individual educator's teaching practice on student persistence is sometimes undervalued although the literature supports the viewpoint that teaching approaches that are satisfying and inclusive for the student body including active learning can influence student persistence.

In their paper entitled "Working with the Challenge of Designing and Implementing a Stand-Alone Learning to Learn Module in a Large Arts Programme", Geraldine O'Neill and Suzanne Guerin tackle an issue that will be familiar to many readers, in the contemporary context especially where student numbers are high. The literature highlights that the most successful approach is to embed learning to learn competencies into the curriculum, However, extensive programmes with multiple pathways can present difficulties in relation to co-ordination. The paper evaluates the approach of a 'stand- alone' module. The discussion highlights the debate surrounding supporting students' learning to learn competencies and presents suggestions for improving modules that are required to stand-alone.

"Use and Evaluation of a Smart Device Student Response System in an Undergraduate Mathematics Classroom" by Séamus McLoone and Conor Brennan , discusses a smart device student response system (SDSRS) used in a first year Engineering Mathematics module in a School of Electronic Engineering, examining its potential usefulness to both the lecturer and the students. The paper outlines the evaluation study on SDSRS in an undergraduate engineering mathematics classroom. It presents detailed feedback from both the lecturer and the students involved, where neither groups had seen or used the SDSRS previously. The SDSRS allows for a more flexible input than existing response systems, such as clickers, and offers students a mechanism for sketching graphs, writing equations and annotating figures.

Graduates in a range of professional disciplines must complete a practical competency assessment prior to registration in their chosen profession. Veterinary Nursing is one such discipline. Competency training is a critical aspect of in the student journey to registration as a veterinary nurse. Karen Dunne, Bernadette Brereton, Ronan Bree and John Dallat, in a paper entitled “Integrating Customised Video Clips into The Veterinary Nursing Curriculum to Enhance Practical Competency Training and The Development of Student Confidence”, report on a project designed to assess the value of customised video clips in the practical skills training of veterinary nursing students.

In the section we reserve for practitioner based papers where colleagues can reflect on and share their experience of particular strategies and activities, we have two pieces that will be especially useful to readers. The first is entitled “Conventional Wisdom in the Writing Classroom: A Short Defence of Grammar Instruction”. The paper, by Susan Norton, is timely as the a formal emphasis on academic writing is a discernible feature of the higher education sector in Ireland at present. Norton considers the question of where the priority in writing in higher education ought to lie: the mechanics of standard written English or the expressions ideas and content. The article includes both a selection issues relevant to undergraduate writing and suggestions of related,readily available resource materials.

The emphasis in “Mind Mapping: Overcoming Problems of Writer Identity and Convention for Academic Writing by Student Collaboration” by Carmel O’Reilly is on also on within the discipline of academic writing. The paper examines the use of Mind Mapping as an e Learning tool for the enhancement of learning and assessment in academic writing. It considers the problems for student writers of writer and the conventions of academic writing. The use of mind mapping offers an interesting approach.

We are pleased to bring you reviews of two books that may be of interest and we would like to register our thanks to our reviewers, Bernadette Brereton and Úna Crowley. Our first book is a volume from the Irish Society Series of Manchester University Press, a valuable series which offers overviews of key areas in Irish social, economic, cultural and political life. Pat O'Connor's (2014) book *Management and Gender in Higher Education* is a timely examination of senior management structures of the Irish university sector.

Our second review, of Stella Cottrell's recently reissued book, *Critical Thinking Skills. Developing effective analysis and argument*, has a specific relevance which the reviewer pinpoints in the opening acknowledgement that the "lens through which this book is reviewed is that of an academic involved in a pilot critical skills module for first year university undergraduate students".

Although not explicitly targeted at undergraduate students, it is designed to help readers experience, practice and develop various essential skills that will support and enhance learning. Among Cottrell's stated aims is '... to help readers develop an understanding of what is meant by critical thinking and so develop their own reasoning skills'.

I would like to remind all our readers that the while our next issue, scheduled for 28th February, 2016, will be a thematic issue, we are currently welcoming submissions for the June 30th 2016 issue, which will be another general issue in which we hope to present a diverse range of topics of interest to all who are committed to enhancing teaching and learning in higher education. : I encourage you to continue to submit your papers and contribute to the dialogue of the AISHE-J community of practice.

All that remains is for me to thank all of our contributors, editors and reviewers who have made the issue possible and with great pleasure, bring you AISHE-J Volume 7: Number 3.

Saranne Magennis, 31st October, 2015.

