Introduction to the Issue

Saranne Magennis
Moira Maguire

We are pleased to welcome you to the Summer issue of the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE–J). Our open-access journal of research into teaching and learning is published by the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE). In the current issue we offer readers a selection of research articles and reports on innovation and practice, from Ireland and further afield, across the AISHE community.

Dr Sarah O'Shea, of the University of Wollongong in Australia, has contributed a thought-provoking invited article 'Supporting and Engaging Students who are the First in their Families to Attend University: A Practise Paper'. Sarah visited Ireland and UK earlier this year as part of her Australian Government Office Learning and Teaching Fellowship entitled "Engaging Families to Engage Students": Exploring how university outreach activities can forge productive partnerships with families to assist first in family students navigate their higher education journey. Sarah's work is concerned with educational equity. In this article she discusses her research on first-in-family learners, emphasising the crucial role of family in supporting these learners. This work has contributed to the development of a set of principles for supporting and engaging first-in family learners and their families. These provide a practical and usable framework for support that is likely to be useful in Ireland, as in many other places where a widening participation agenda is producing results. It is available at: http://www.firstinfamily.com.au/OLT-1.php.

Effective communication is a theme that runs implicitly and explicitly through the current issue. In their article 'Preparing higher education language students for their period abroad through telecollaboration: The I-TELL Project ' Marta Giralt and Catherine Jeanneau provide an interesting example of harnessing technology to support language learning and intercultural awareness. Spanish and Irish language students participated in 'online exchanges', via

Skype, to prepare them for their placements abroad. The evaluation indicated that this was very successful, and notably, the emotional preparation that was enabled was particularly valuable for participants.

Teresa Whitaker and Mairín Kenny also address intercultural education, focussing on moving from policy to practice in their article 'Assessing students' journeys from theory to practice in intercultural education'. As part of a Master's module in intercultural education primary school teachers implemented intercultural guidelines in their classrooms. The authors analysed a sample of the essays produced to explore the impact of the module. They concluded that 'I*n terms of the internalisation of knowledge, perspectives and nuances of current intercultural policies and legislation, the teachers reflected deeply on their own practices and demonstrated that they were reflective and reflexive practitioner*s.'

Sharon Tighe-Mooney, Meliosa Bracken and Barbara Dignam provide a very interesting analysis of peer assessment in their article 'Peer assessment as a teaching and learning process: The observations and reflections of three facilitators on a first-year undergraduate critical skills module'. The peer assessment exercise formed an integral part of a new Critical Skills module. The authors reflect on how the assessment approach succeeded in terms of intended and unintended learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are explored using four categories developed by Boud, Cohen and Sampson (1999) – Teamwork and Collaboration; Critical Enquiry; Communication Skills and Learning to Learn. The article is likely to be of particular interest to readers who are developing such modules but it will also be useful for colleagues who wish to integrate aspects of the approach into their disciplinary modules. The inclusion of reflections on challenges and concerns that arose when adopting peer assessment as a teaching and learning strategy adds significantly to the value of the piece.

Odette Gabuadan and Sue Norton also consider peer assessment in their very useful practice sharing article, 'Quiz Mastery: Students as Bloggers and Testers in Pursuit of Grammatical Competence' in which they discuss the effective use of peer learning on a module, Composition and Writing Skills, designed to improve grammar and writing skills. This module makes very creative use of a wide range of digital technologies, including blogging tools, animation software and quiz apps to empower the students to creative their own content, review the work of peers and to design peer-to-peer quizzes. This paper presents an array of strategies that are likely to be useful to those interested in using technology to promote a

more student-centred approach.

Matthew Fogarty and Alison Farrell also consider good writing in their review of the book Detox your writing: Strategies for doctoral researchers by Pat Thompson and Barbara Kamler. This review is particularly useful in that the authors review it from their own perspectives: one as doctoral researcher and one as someone supporting doctoral researchers. They conclude that '*Its tone of co-enquiry with its reader reflects the overall intention of the book, that is, to provide a moderate approach which will 'gently interrupt old ways of doing things and establish new habits and orientations to writing the PhD*'.

In common with many other learning and teaching journals, much of the research we publish here in AISHE-J is qualitative in nature, often analysed using some form of thematic analysis. Given this, it is surprising that so often the analysis process itself is something of a 'black box' and in many disciplines there has been a move to make the analysis much more explicit. Our final report, by Ronan Bree and Gerry Gallagher, is a very welcome contribution to this. Entitled 'Using Microsoft Excel to code and thematically analyse qualitative data: a simple, cost-effective approach', they provide exceptionally clear and practical guidance on using Excel to perform a thematic analysis. It is very encouraging to see a straightforward approach using readily available software and this report is likely to be a very useful resource, particularly to those who are engaging with thematic analysis for the first time.

We hope that you will find AISHE-J Volume 8 Number 2 (2016) of value to you in your practice and that you will find the content both thought provoking and practical. We would like to thank our authors for their work and patience as their papers progressed through the stages towards publication. We would also like to thank our peer reviewers who gave their time and expertise so generously. The journal could not be published without them.

 Finally, we would like to remind our readers that AISHE-J invites submissions colleagues in all discipline areas, and particularly welcomes submissions from early career researchers. We publish a mix of papers from academics with an interest in teaching and learning in their disciplines, educational developers, and colleagues engaged in e-learning, information skills and student support. New work on any topic in relation to the development of teaching and learning in higher education are therefore appropriate. The key criterion is that submissions focus on higher education. We look forward to seeing your submissions.