

## Introduction to the Issue

Saranne Magennis

**Maynooth University**

Welcome, readers, colleagues and friends to the issue of AISHE–J that brings 2017, Volume 9, to a close. On this final day of October, it gives me great pleasure to bring you an issue that examines an interesting range of themes in higher education: a strong practical focus is combined with a theoretical base that will, I believe, be of benefit to practitioners from across the disciplines. In addition to five substantial articles, two book reviews are included, each with a practical focus. It is with these that I begin my comments; Shelagh Waddington in her review of Frith, May, and Pockington (2017) *The Student's Guide to Peer Mentoring*, introduces a brief, accessible and thoroughly accessible to peer mentoring. Aimed at students, its appeal will, in her view, extend beyond the student population. Bob Lawlor reviews Barrett, Terry (2017) *A New Model of Problem-based learning: Inspiring Concepts, Practice Strategies and Case Studies from Higher Education*. Maynooth: AISHE. His positive appreciation of the book is clear, not least in his closing instruction which is to enjoy!

Before commenting on the papers that make up the body of the issue, I will take the occasion of these reviews to consider the practical resource for the community that is provided by the growing number of AISHE publications that are available under the Creative Commons Licence through the AISHE website. These include books on a variety of topics, published by AISHE or by AISHE in collaboration with other organizations. Recent examples include the

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\*URL: <http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/336>

Academic Practice Guides from November 2015, Maguire, M., Harding, N., Noonan, G. & O'Connor, T. (Eds). (2017). *Teachers as learners: exploring the impact of accredited professional development in learning and teaching in Irish Higher Education*. Maynooth: AISHE, to be reviewed in the next issue and, Terry Barrett, (2017). *A New Model of Problem-based learning: Inspiring Concepts, Practice Strategies and Case Studies from Higher Education*. These two volumes are part of the AISHE Readings series, which dates back to 2005. For the practitioner within the higher education community, they represent a sharing of experience, innovation and analysis that can be uniquely beneficial because of the combination of Irish and international perspectives.

The recognition of both national perspectives and commonality with international colleagues is well represented in the papers presented in this issue. Geraldine McDermott presents a qualitative interview study which explores the extent to which the cultural nature of their design and delivery of online courses is considered in one Irish higher education institution. As online provision grows, a need to consider the diverse background of students increases in importance. The study indicates that although there is an awareness of diverse learning needs of students, culture was not considered either in the design or delivery phases of their courses. The recommendations for addressing, included in the paper will provide valuable assistance for colleagues facing the issue.

Ronan Bree discusses engaging with digital resources to enrich a key element of the student learning experience in science based modules, namely the practical component. In a paper entitled: "Preparing Students for Science Practical Sessions: Engaging with Digital Resources to Enrich the Learning Experience" Bree recognizes that students can "acquire and develop hands-on skills in a powerful learning environment", that of the practical. Bree has studied how preparation for the practical can impact on learning. The preparation used in the study went beyond the traditional scenario in which "students are required to read pre-prepared text in a paper-based laboratory manual before entering the session. The text provides background to the principle/theory/technique being examined." In many cases the text is not read, and therefore practical time is reduced as the material is explained. As Bree explains, a "customised pre-practical video was recorded, edited and circulated to students prior to a laboratory session, " together with a smartphone app-based quiz on the content, to be completed before the practical session. The paper gives the reader "an overview of the approach implemented, insights from its evaluation, and recommendations for educators

aiming to implement the pre-practical concept.”

Elske Ammenwerth also considers the issue of online learning in her paper entitled “Envisioning changing role of university teacher in online instructional environments” Reflecting that the adoption of online teaching by university teachers is low, the author explores why university teachers seem unable to take over the new roles that are needed for online teaching. Showing an awareness of the manner in which online teaching challenges the traditional roles of university teachers and its impact on the changing role of the teacher, the author argues that online teaching impacts upon and redefines the traditional face-to-face teaching.

Ammenwerth argues that University teachers are not well “equipped to respond to the pedagogical and technical challenges of online learning” because they are socialized as content experts; insufficiently trained in sufficient training in online teaching; and university teachers are evaluated based on their research. The essay explores the many implications for the pedagogical training of university teachers and suggests ways in which the situation might be improved.

Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt have contributed an excellent resource in the form of a practical, step-by-step guide to undertaking thematic analysis in the area of teaching and learning. The work was developed in the context of the NDLR and was available from that source. However, responding to requests from colleagues, the authors have updated the work and translated it into an extremely clear and useful guide to the process for inclusion in this issue. While there are other introductions available to this prevalent approach to qualitative analysis, a particular benefit of this contribution is that it includes what is best described as a worked example. This adds to the accessibility of a treatment of the topic that was already a model of clarity. For the novice or experienced qualitative researcher, and for colleagues teaching qualitative data analysis, this guide to thematic analysis will assist its reader in credible qualitative research through supporting “his or her ability to understand, describe and interpret experiences and perceptions is key to uncovering meaning in particular circumstances and contexts.”

In a paper entitled “Keeping it Real”: A review of the benefits, challenges and steps towards implementing authentic assessment, Vanessa Murphy, James Fox, Sinead Freeman and Nicola Hughes present the findings of a literature review on authentic assessment. The review is part of a collaborative research project by lecturers from diverse disciplines in a large higher education institute. Taking assessment as an integral part of the learning process, it considers the potential of alternative methods of assessment, including authentic assessment, to benefit the learner. Active student learning, improved achievement and greater retention of information, are among the benefits considered in addition to “providing students with valuable real world experiences in a safe, supportive environment.”

In addition to the benefits, the authors discuss the challenges that may be encountered, including student resistance, large groups and time constraints. Among the most useful aspects of the paper is the “guidance template, in the form of an infographic, which outlines a number of steps that has been developed from the literature” through which Murphy *et al* hope to “demystify the process and ... encourage lecturers to introduce methods of authentic assessment into their teaching”.

I trust hope that you will find AISHE-J Volume 9 Number 3 (2017) informative and inspiring to you in your practice and that you will find the authors’ contributions of value both in your work and your collegiality. I would like to thank all of our authors for their work and for their patience as their papers progressed through the stages towards publication. I would also like to thank our peer reviewers who gave their time and expertise so generously. Without their contribution the journal could not have developed and it thrives only because so many experts give of their knowledge without recompense beyond our deep appreciation. Likewise, colleagues who support the journal with copy editing, proofreading, technical support and the many other tasks that are required to bring the journal to publication are deserving of sincere thanks.

Finally, I would like to remind our readers that AISHE-J invites submissions from colleagues in all discipline areas, and particularly welcomes submissions from early career researchers. We have scope to publish papers from academics, educational developers, and colleagues engaged in e-learning, information skills and student support. New works 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. The Spring issue of Volume 10 is well underway and will appear on 28 February, 2018. There is time, however, to submit towards the Summer 2018 issue, which like this will be a general issue.

Without further ado, it gives me great pleasure to bring you AISHE-J Volume 9:3, on this last day of October 2017.

Saranne Magennis, 31 October 2017