

Introduction to the Issue

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Welcome to our final issue of 2023, which includes a range of interesting papers from colleagues across the Irish higher education sector, dealing with aspects of online learning and teaching and with professional development.

The first, 'Student and facilitator experiences of transition to online enquiry/problem based learning during the pandemic', presents a mixed methods exploration of the pivot online during the pandemic in the context of enquiry and problem based learning (E/PBL). As Norma O'Leary and colleagues point out, '*...there has been little work specifically examining its impact on experiences of enquiry/problem-based learning*' (p.14). These findings provide a rich insight into the complexities of online E/PBL. Communication online emerged as a challenge and it is clear that more active engagement by facilitators is required which '*...is somewhat in tension with the principles of E/PBL as a student-driven process*' (p.15). The authors make valuable recommendations, particularly around the need for training.

The second article, by Bernard Drumm, Caoimhim Griffin and Jade Pollock, also focuses on what we have learned from the pivot online. Their paper 'Low-stake quizzes and live application classes increase student engagement with online pre-recorded lectures', reports on the implementation of an online flipped classroom. The findings indicate that a combination of synchronous and asynchronous delivery and low-stake assessments can promote student engagement : '*...low-stake MCQs and synchronous classes did in fact encourage students to engage more fully with the asynchronous online materials. For the live classes, students reported that as they knew they would have to answer questions and work on problems related to that week's materials, there was an onus to engage with the recorded lectures so that they were adequately prepared to answer questions.*' (p.20).The authors discuss the implications for online module delivery.

The next article, by Geraldine Grimes, Fiona Boyle and Michael Noctor, focuses on the development and implementation of online learning standards on an Engineering programme. As the authors explain, '*The standards formalise the requirements of online teaching; by using*

them as a basis for creating an informal community of practice...to discuss and contextualise teachers' experiences online, we will be utilising a distributed leadership approach...to ongoing continuing professional development (CPD)...' (p.2-3). The article concludes with next steps and potential future developments; it is likely to be of interest to all involved with online programmes.

Our final paper, 'In praise of peer observation of teaching' by Michael Johnson, Olubunmi Ipinnaiye, Rachel Murphy and Hope Davidson, presents rich reflections on the process of peer observation in the context of a professional development programme in Learning and Teaching. Each of the authors provides a critical reflection on their experiences of observing and being observed; these are synthesised to identify lessons and draw conclusions. These accounts speak to the value and potential of peer observation as professional development. The authors conclude that '*...peer observation is a powerful tool readily available to academics in a higher educational setting, which allows them to share, develop and continuously improve their teaching practice*' (p.20). The paper also highlights the rich benefits of an inter-disciplinary approach to peer observation: '*...reflections presented in this paper highlight the crucial fact that peer observation undertaken in an interdisciplinary context is valuable for nurturing professional conversations about teaching and learning practices across disciplines*' (p.20).

Many people have contributed to this issue, and I would like to thank, most sincerely, all of our authors, who have been a pleasure to work with. I would also like to thank our very dedicated reviewers who give generously of their expertise to support AISHE-J. We are always keen to hear from potential reviewers so please do get in touch if you are interested in reviewing for AISHE-J. Finally, I would like to remind you of our current call for contributions to a Special Issue 'Universal Design in Tertiary Education', in partnership with AHEAD ([Home - AHEAD](#)). We have had a great response to date and submissions can be made up to the 31st of January 2024. Further details are available here [Joint Special Issue with AHEAD: Universal Design in Tertiary Education | AISHE-J](#). Please get in touch if you would like to discuss an idea for a paper for this Special Issue, or indeed for any general issue, and/or if you are interested in reviewing for this issue. Please note that we accept general contributions at any time - deadlines only apply to Special Issues.

I hope that you enjoy our Autumn 2023 issue.