



2010

Editorial 7.2

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Recommended Citation

O'Reilly, D. (2010). Editorial 7.2. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.7.2.1>

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Welcome to Volume 7, Issue 2 of JUTLP. It is wonderful to see the journal continuing from strength to strength, and with this Special Issue devoted to the theme of “Achieving Teaching-Research Connections in Undergraduate Programs”, there was an enormous response from authors in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Although we have stretched the issue to encompass more articles than usual, there were simply too many well-conceived initiatives to include them all in this issue. Watch out for extra articles on this theme in future issues.



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The selection of articles included here reflects our aim to showcase a diversity of approaches to linking teaching and research in undergraduate programs. I believe that the Special Issue thus makes a significant contribution to academic practice not only across the broad range of disciplines but also through several levels illustrating the broad landscape of teaching-research connections, a whole-of-institution approach, practice-research-teaching links, and collaborations between academic staff and postgraduate students with their undergraduate student colleagues.

To set the scene, the first article by Santhanam begins by asking whether “there is a need for yet another paper on the topic [of connections between teaching and research] and what can be learned that is not known already”. In-so-doing Santhanam echoes the commentary posted to me personally in the lead-up to this Special Issue by the esteemed Professor Lewis Elton as he also mused: “Has there been anything new on this subject in the past ten years or... quoting Marlene Dietrich, ‘when will they ever learn?’...” Santhanam manages to respond well to this question by revisiting teaching-research connections through a brief review of the literature on the value and trends in establishing these connections, and then moving on to report on the adoption of inquiry-based or research-based learning at one Australian university.

We stay at the macro level through Bennett, Wright, Blom’s paper in which she considers the perspectives of Australian artist academics. Through an exploration of what it means to be artistically multilingual in order to function effectively and at times simultaneously as practitioner, researcher and teacher, Bennett’s research heightens our curiosity on how academics might adopt a useful orientation to their professional practice in order to maintain a functional balance of roles.

The next article by Partridge and Sandover effectively takes us past the conventional view of undergraduate students as a source of data for our academic reflections on teaching, to the idea that they may actively engage in pedagogical research and have the potential to be agents of change in their own educational process. By focussing on undergraduate students and authentic research the authors have carefully outlined a mechanism for bridging the gap between teaching and research and helping undergraduate students become aware of the importance of research.

Guatelli, Layton, Cutajar and Rosenfeld report on the pairing of first year undergraduate students with postgraduate students in the radiation physics laboratory where students are trained in the use of specialised simulation toolkits for research. The development of students’ research skills is shown as being contingent upon building relationships within student pairs who then work effectively together, and develop cross-cultural understandings through their interaction.

Engaging first year students in challenging problem-based activities is the approach taken by Koppi, Nolan and Field in their introduction of inquiry-based methods for agricultural economics. Through a scaffolded approach whereby students learn how to be self-directed, early development of research skills is evident through their learning journals.

From another perspective, journals also form the basis for Rennie's work. In this case from New Zealand, students develop their understanding of research through engaging in the process of reviewing, editing and publishing a journal. The experiential learning that links undergraduates directly to research publication serves to build confidence, critical thinking and research skills and is managed through a process of collaborative peer learning.

Stimulating the uptake of postgraduate research pathways, as a result of undergraduate research experiences, is the small scale study reported by Guerrin and Ranasinghe. Surprising differences were found between international students' and domestic students' perspectives on the research culture within the higher degree environment in their discipline of engineering.

Finally a series of case studies is provided by Boyd, O'Reilly, Bucher, Fisher, Morton, Harrison, Nuske, Coyle and Rendall showcasing a number of dimensions of the teaching-research nexus. In each of the five cases academic staff describe how they support the teaching-research connections as part of their approach to undergraduate teaching. The range of disciplines across the case studies is also diverse.

As a whole this issue provides a variety of stimulating approaches to making the connections between teaching and research within undergraduate programs. While the notion of making these connections is in itself not new, the stories of implementation across disciplines, levels and a variety of institutions, confirms many innovative and creative achievements. It has been important to take stock of these achievements in order to acknowledge and to continue to progress our activities for the benefit of student learning.

Finally it is also important to acknowledge the large team of reviewers who provided blind peer review and assisted in the preparation of this Special Issue. Basically the entire review team of 80 international colleagues was engaged at this time as well as regular Chief Editor Geraldine Lefoe and production assistant Michelle Kent. Thanks go to each and every one.

Dr Meg O'Reilly
Guest Editor