

2011

Editorial 8.3

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Abstract

Welcome to the third and final issue of Volume 8 of the Journal of University Teaching and Learning (JUTLP) in 2011. As the year draws to a close we are seeing some striking changes to the higher education sector internationally. In England budget cuts have seen the closure of the twenty-four Higher Education Academy subject centres at the same time as the establishment of student fees. In Australia the cap has been lifted across the board on the number of students that can be enrolled in universities with the resultant projected increased student numbers. The focus in Australia is on social inclusion yet in England the concern for the introduction of fees is just the opposite, these will be the very students who may now be excluded.

The changes in both countries see new measures of accountability and more complex regulations put in place. Will this cause people to rethink the way we teach and the way students learn? For the Higher Education Academy in the UK, new directions see the hosting of a summit on learning and teaching with a focus on flexible learning, an indicator of new directions for many institutions. In Australia, we see a renewed opportunity to investigate such changes through the opening of the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) and its role of recognising the importance of learning and teaching through grants and awards schemes. We hope in 2012 we'll hear more from our authors about the impact of these transformations, as well as those changes occurring in other countries around the world, on teaching practice in our universities.

Keywords

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As usual we have an interesting collection of papers across diverse disciplines and countries and once again we would like to thank the wonderful reviewers who take time from their busy schedules to provide feedback to our authors. Our first paper by Stuart Palmer provides a rationale for flexible learning through an examination of espoused theory, policy and practice from the literature. His examination in an engineering context provides some insight on the impact on teaching and learning practices. This is a very timely paper for those in the UK who are currently exploring this area. In a related paper, Santandreu Calonge examines a blended learning approach to developing Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in a Hong Kong University within an intensive, compulsory teaching program. He provides evidence of the effectiveness of such an approach for ensuring GTAs are prepared for their teaching role, as well as their research role.

Jeannie Allen from the USA provides some honest perspectives on the tensions between learning about theory and practice in the context of a subject which focuses on global citizenship. She uses positive psychology as a focus to explore the student experience of civic engagement and concludes that "students need concrete applications when engaged in the study of global problems and positive psychology". Mackaway and her colleagues examine assessment processes when the move is made to these more practical applications and introduce the term Learning through Participation (LTP) to incorporate "work-integrated learning, cooperative education, practicum, project-based learning and service-learning". They present a design framework, informed by the recent literature, to guide the formation of assessment for such implementations.

Fujimoto and colleagues report on an intervention within a business school in Australia to support students developing academic literacy in the context of an assessment task that engages them in debate about, and analysis of, discipline specific readings. They stress the importance of moving beyond the transmission of knowledge to developing skills through a climate of peer collaboration and student autonomy.

Subject redesign to incorporate an inquiry based learning approach is the focus of the final paper by Zutshi, Mitchell and Weaver. Their intention was to support independent learning by students through challenging the traditional lecture/tutorial format for large classes (n=90). They identify two challenges for this kind of implementation which are the tension between

the development of learner independence and instructor support; and evaluative measures that move beyond perception studies to actually measure improvements.

Once again I thank those who consistently contribute to improving our journal: the Associate Editor, Dr Meg O'Reilly for her support and allocation of reviewers; Jude Carroll from the editorial board, who called in to share her knowledge and experience with us recently; and the many people involved in the background who keep the journal running through their roles in the editing and layout of the journal.

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