

Editorial Preface

Once again we are pleased, through this journal, to capture a taste of the range of pedagogical innovation and scholarship that continues to inform and enhance teaching and learning at London Metropolitan University.

This volume offers an increased number of articles because it spans a wider period of time since the previous volume – during which the University has been undergoing an intensive process of institutional reorganisation. But the variety of topics contained here reflects the persistent quest for new ideas and practices for improving our students' learning, engagement and achievement that enlivens approaches to teaching across different disciplines, together with ongoing critical reflection and evaluation.

In this collection, alongside more familiar themes around the role of higher education (HE) in fostering criticality and professional development (**Richard Rockett** reaffirms the deeply held mission and value of critical citizenship against tendencies towards conformism, while **Diana Stirbu** locates curriculum development of professional courses in the context of societally responsive generation and application of knowledge), and around serving the contemporary 'employability' agenda (see the articles by **Wendy Slone** on developing the multimedia skills of Journalism students, by **Elaine Mealey** on improving placements for dietitians and by **Sally Lawson** on fostering employability skills of health and social care students, as well as by Diana Stirbu on graduate development in public policy and administration), there are explorations of newer terrains. These include the use of narrative (see piece by **Nicola Mace**) and incorporation of Mindfulness (read about the experiments here of **Patricia Merlin**) in HE courses, and the notion of a 'relational pedagogy' (espoused by **Christine Withers**) which places relationships and working in partnership with students at the heart of learning and teaching.

In a similar spirit, the importance of creative educational practices and dialogical approaches (as shown in the use of 'free writing' and other creative methods by **Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield** and in the analysis by **Aleks Catina** of architectural education) are advocated for empowering our students and unleashing their potential and confidence as learners gaining mastery of new disciplines, concepts and skills, communicative and design practices (see also the article by **Kay John** on steps taken to foster deeper, more independent learning among her students). This focus extends to the crucial area of assessment, with initiatives around developing more creative methods that also enhance students'

digital capability (see the article by **Jeremy Collins and Jon Baldwin** on video essays) and enabling more inclusive assessment (see the three-level framework proposed by **Cecilia Oyugi**). It also embraces the affordances of technology to facilitate learning, assessment and feedback (as explored in innovations around the use of the VLE – WebLearn ‘organisation’ module - to support course engagement, explained by **Lorenza Giannella and Sheelagh Heugh**, and computer-aided assessment linked to an e-portfolio, discussed by **Roberta Freezor and Sheelagh Heugh**). Running through most accounts, of course, is the awareness of the challenges of working with our very diverse students and the need for making effective provision for academic support and learning development (see the evaluation by **James Davis, Afshan Aghili, Bernard Aidoo, Lorenza Giannella and Cecilia Oyugi** of the successful ‘Academic Mentoring’ scheme piloted in human sciences).

Innovation and critical evaluation of educational practice is a dynamic as necessary for renewing the inspiration and enthusiasm of teachers as it is for enabling student success, particularly in the new era of the ‘Teaching Excellence Framework’ (TEF). While the TEF could ostensibly boost the pursuit of ‘good practice’ by concentrating attention on the outcomes achieved, from a critical perspective, there are concerns about the neoliberal emphasis on ‘performativity’ over notions of ‘teaching excellence’ that are grounded in ‘the moral purpose of teaching’ in advancing the cause of humanity and in ‘an openness to learning from colleagues and students’ (Wood & Su, 2017). It is a reminder that ‘staff engagement’ and ‘student engagement’ are profoundly interconnected:

‘The process of teaching involves a relationship of engagement: with students, with the subject matter, with oneself. The ways in which we as teaching staff approach this relationship can have an important influence on the nature and quality of students’ engagement with their own learning and emerging academic and professional identities’ (Harrington et al, 2016: 107).

Editorial Team

References

- Harrington, Kathy; Sinfield, Sandra and Burns, Tom (2016) Student Engagement, in Helen Pokorny and Digby Warren (eds), *Enhancing Teaching Practice in Higher Education*, chapter 6. London: Sage
- Wood, Margaret and Su, Feng (2017) What makes an excellent lecturer? Academics’ perspectives on the discourse of ‘teaching excellence’ in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22 (4): 451-466