

Introduction: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The call for contributions to the theme of scholarship of teaching and learning drew a variety of conceptual, methodological and empirical studies, providing an opportunity for reflection, and highlighting areas for further investigation. In the new global economy, the role of higher education in national development has become a central issue for educators. Rapid changes are reflected in a paper from Egypt and the challenge for the Arab region in stemming international educational inequalities (Hamid Ali, 2007) in the emerging GATS regime. Still in an international context, recent developments in the field of teacher training produced three interesting papers; one action research paper reflecting on an Australian Government funded project used a phenomenological approach to examine improvements in teaching and learning through reflective practice (Bolt, 2007). Two South African papers looked at the current state of teacher training; the first examined teacher training students' perception of strategies to improve learning and knowledge through the use of web based information technology. Developing students' computer skills played a significant part in the success of the project (Burton, 2007). The second reflected on the continuing movement by the South African Government to raise standards, and discussed the introduction of school based teacher education, positing the necessity of a move from 'theory laden' teacher education to practical problem-based programmes (Swanepoel, 2007).

Two contrasting studies from Portugal and Turkey illustrate the methodological range of studies presented at the conference. From Portugal, a qualitative case study focused on those soft skills most valued by employers, suggesting that the successful development of soft skills relates directly to individual student characteristics and life experiences (Oliveira, Sottomayor, Meireles and Martins, 2007). At the other end of the methodological spectrum, a scientific investigation from Turkey used three psychological instruments to examine loneliness and life satisfaction of Turkish university students. The study is in its early stages, but initial findings suggest that male students were less lonely and more satisfied than women students (Bugay, 2007).

From a UK perspective, the papers reflect concerns that include quality initiatives in teaching and learning, continuing professional development, collaborative learning, academic learning support for students, innovations in the curriculum, and transitions from tertiary to higher education. Examining the expansion of higher education and increasing pressure to demonstrate value for money and efficiency, Cheng (2007) discusses the effects of Quality Audit on the general workload of academics. Reporting on the results of a three year TQEF project on formative assessment in enhancing student achievement, Ahmed and Teviotdale (2007) discuss the attitudes of staff and students to the initiative. Cope (2007) presented the findings of a pilot study which asked whether, in the context of introducing a Framework for the national CPD agenda, 'organisational structure, systems and cultures can change so that the philosophical underpinnings of CPD can be considered?'

Practical challenges in teaching and learning, as the UK continues to widening participation, are high on the agenda. Action research projects addressing this issue include Greenbank (2007) on factors influencing the level of student participation in collaborative learning in exam preparation, the problems and the support needed before students engage in the process. Savory (2007) presents a case study focused on the growing need to provide additional support in academic learning skills for non-traditional students; findings suggest that interventions such as a credited academic learning skills module and increased personal tutor support are beneficial. Crabtree, Roberts and Tyler's (2007) comparative study of one university and one tertiary college offer encouraging evidence on improving retention by understanding the student's experience of transition from one teaching environment to the other. The chapter ends on an uplifting note, with Jones' enjoyable 'walk to deliver the curriculum', an innovative way of teaching the social history of health, and literally a breath of fresh air.