

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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This is the first issue of *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, a journal which aims to present and discuss issues and research of relevance to university and college educators in the Arabian Gulf Region.

LTHE is published by Zayed University (ZU), which is based in Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, a young and rapidly-developing nation in the East of the Arabian Gulf. The university's students are all young, female Gulf Arabs, and the institution has a commitment to a learning outcome-based approach, and to the use of educational technology. Although the papers in this first issue of the journal come from this specific institution, several of the issues which are of particular importance in this context are also potentially of relevance to higher education in other Gulf countries, in other Arab countries and in other parts of the world.

One key feature of the UAE context is its mix of cultures. Universities and colleges in the Gulf States tend to be staffed by expatriate teachers, often from the West or from other Arab countries, while students (particularly in state institutions) include a large proportion of Gulf Arabs. Higher education in the UAE and in other countries is developing through contact between different cultures of learning: firstly traditions and patterns which are rooted in the education systems and cultures of the Arab World, and which influence students' default learning approaches; secondly, new educational approaches based partly on Western models; and thirdly the cultures of academic institutions, based on international communities of scholars in particular disciplines. Russell's and Burt's papers in this first issue both consider ZU students' responses to Western-influenced approaches aiming to promote more "deep" or "active" learning, and they are optimistic regarding the future of such programs.

McBride's and Fulcher's papers tackle more explicitly culture-related issues in higher education. McBride presents the author's own findings as a Western teacher in Gulf university classrooms, and suggests some elements of an appropriate methodology (Holliday, 1994) for Western teachers working with Gulf Arab students. Fulcher takes a more institutional perspective, considering how an outcomes-based approach to university curriculum fits in with a) a more traditional approach based on subject disciplines, and b) local cultural "rhythms" which shape the daily activities of students.

Connected with the issue of culture is that of language. ZU, like many other colleges in the Gulf Region and elsewhere in the world, uses English as a medium of instruction, while the first language of most students is Arabic. Hedaiat's paper presents a range of work done at ZU to support the students in developing their use of their first language (L1 - Arabic) while they are studying mainly through a second language (L2 - English): she considers the benefits and some of the challenges involved in promoting balanced bilingualism (Sears, 1998) through a university curriculum.

Another characteristic of ZU which it shares with other institutions is its emphasis on the use of information technology for educational purposes. In ZU, for example, all students use a laptop, and the university provides a network infrastructure and software to support teaching and learning. Walters and Lydiatt draw on data from UAE college teachers and students to make recommendations for the use of technology and the running of university classrooms more generally. They emphasize that new technologies can, if used appropriately, address some of the issues of language and cultures of learning mentioned above.

We hope that LTHE will stimulate discussion of these and other issues. Each abstract contains a link to the LTHE online discussion forum for readers to discuss the papers in question.

In future issues of LTHE we will continue to explore issues which are of particular relevance to university education in the Gulf Region, and we hope to broaden the authorship to include contributions from members of other institutions in the Gulf Region. To find out how to submit a paper to the journal, please e-mail the editor.

I would like to thank the other members of the editorial group who helped in selecting and reviewing papers and shaping the direction of the journal: Ken Carr, Lyall Crawford, Fiona Hunt, Keith Van Tassel and Lea Wells, as well as the reviewers from various departments of ZU who painstakingly read and responded to drafts of the papers in this issue of the journal.

References

Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sears, C. (1998). *Second Language Students in Mainstream Classrooms: A Handbook for Teachers in International Schools*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.