

Editor's introduction

David M. Palfreyman

Zayed University, UAE

Starting with this issue of *LTHE*, we are pleased to be able to offer Arabic abstracts for all research/practice papers. In doing this, we hope to give readers in the Gulf region and the Arab World greater access to the ideas and findings presented in this journal, and to support the use of Arabic for discussions of learning and teaching at tertiary level.

LTHE aims to present important issues and findings of relevance to all those supporting learning in universities and colleges in the region. This broad relevance is achieved through research and reflection on learning and teaching in particular disciplines, because most academics' work is built around the teaching of specific subject areas, and it is concrete evidence from and insights into such contexts that form a bridge between scholarship and everyday practice. Most of the papers in this issue have emerged from work with STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics); but they discuss themes of relevance to learning and teaching in any subject area: student retention and career choices, student responsibility in learning, students' use of teaching resources in and outside class time, and discrimination between levels of achievement in courses. They are also relevant to the broader movement for cross-disciplinary general education and graduate attribute, including the tension between general academic awareness and specialist knowledge, as well as how to cater to students who bring with them very different high school experiences.

The first paper in this issue, by Gouia-Zarrad and Gunn, examines how students respond to the use of videoed lectures in a course. Such videos may be used as a 'backup' for students who wish to catch up lectures which they missed or revise topics previously taught; they may also be deployed by the teacher *before* a class, to give students input that can then be built upon in problem-solving class activities. Gouia-Zarrad and Gunn present their findings about how students have responded to these two approaches, identifying benefits as well as challenges for learning. Dickson, McMinn and Kadbey discuss a feeling which may be familiar to some readers of this journal: anxiety or antipathy when faced with 'alien' subject matter. They study the phenomenon of 'science anxiety' among Emirati education students who, regardless of their high school background or preferences, are expected as future primary educators to teach science. The study's findings show that such anxiety affects large numbers of students, particularly those from an Arts high school background, and may not be reduced simply by greater exposure to science courses.

Taking a different approach, Al-Arfaj, Secolsky and Alshaya's paper tackles the topic of performance tiers in course/programme assessment (for example, grade boundaries) at a Saudi university. They investigate whether statistical analysis can help to discriminate between higher and lower achieving students on a more objective basis, helping to set consistent pass grades and to guide students and the institution in decisions about their academic progress. Devadas's paper, like Dickson et al.'s, relates to student retention and career choices, eliciting students' preferences about a career in their chosen university discipline (nursing) and the reasons which underlie these preferences. Finally, Alrabai's paper investigates an aspect of learning of relevance across the university curriculum: learners' awareness and preferences regarding their own responsibility (as opposed to that of the teacher) in the learning process.

LTHE, like other academic journals, draws on the expertise of volunteer peer reviewers with specialist knowledge and experience. We would like to thank all our peer reviewers for their generosity in reading and engaging with multiple drafts of papers, and for the critical and constructive feedback which they provide to authors. Reviewers for this issue include Abeer Alamri, Ali Ibrahim, Brigitte Howarth, Cheri MacLeod, Fayez Sayed, Hazhar Muhammadineku, Hind Zantout, Janet Olearski, JR Ratliff and Malin Garemo.

Book reviews in this issue by Amir Kaviani, Ginger Silvera and James Piecowye take a critical look at, respectively, *What our stories teach us: a guide to critical reflection for college faculty* (Shadiow, 2013), *Intercultural communication with Arabs* (Raddawi, 2015); and *How to talk about hot topics on campus* (Nash et al., 2008). In keeping with *LTHE's* focus on the Gulf region, the reviewers discuss the ideas presented in these books in terms of local relevance as well as of the scholarship of teaching and learning in a more global context.

LTHE welcomes throughout the year contributions which include original work with data and experience from Gulf higher education contexts. Before submitting a paper, please review the information in the ABOUT section of our website <http://lthe.zu.ac.ae> to understand the scope and policies of the journal; then register as an author, log in and select *New submission*. *LTHE* also informs readers and Twitter followers about events related to the scope of the journal; if you would like to circulate information about such an event (or raise any other matter), please contact us using the email or comment links on our website or via Twitter ([@LTHEgulf](https://twitter.com/LTHEgulf)). Following our Twitter feed will enable you to receive up to date information about the journal and relevant events.