

Editor's Introduction

David M. Palfreyman

Zayed University, Dubai

This issue of *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives (LTHE)* comprises a set of papers which together highlight distinctive factors for learners and teachers in the Gulf context.

Jewels and Albon bring us a substantial paper documenting the authors' professional journey through different understandings of how to help students in the UAE/Middle East context. Using ample examples from courses in Information Technology and other topics, the authors lead us through an iterative process of action research which they have pursued over a period of years. Each iteration of this process focuses on a different aspect of learning/ teaching, and provides clearer understanding of challenges for learners and teachers in the Gulf context. At each stage the authors review research literature as well as examples from their own practice and summarize their conclusions before revisiting the issue from a different perspective in the next iteration. They propose a model for effective teaching which applies to any subject area, and which distils the learning from their years of teaching and research.

Engin and McKeown's paper presents a focused study which investigates the motivations of students in their early phase of university study in the UAE. The researchers take a socio-cultural approach, viewing motivation as relative to the local context and the individual's identity within it, rather than assuming motivations to be universal. They discuss the relation between motivation and values, and between these constructs and various cultural factors. Among other conclusions, they highlight how socio-economic transitions in the Gulf have influenced students' values and motivations; and they suggest ways in which teaching and support for students could take these into account.

Risse's paper reflects on her experience in teaching literature in a setting on the periphery of the Gulf region, where the social context of the Gulf, as well as her university's location in a traditionally rural area, creates an apparent mismatch between the content of her subject and the expectations and interests of her students. Like Jewels and Albon (see above), she reflects on her own practice and suggests an approach to making content locally relevant which could be applied in other subject areas. Risse illustrates her approach with numerous examples to show how to help students make connections between course concepts and examples from their own and other contexts (cf. McBride, 2004).

We welcome registrations and submissions for *LTHE* at any time via our website (<http://ltthe.zu.ac.ae>); Submissions (articles, reflections and reviews) come from educators across the range of academic disciplines, and may deal with any aspect of learning and/or teaching in universities or colleges in the Gulf region.

As announced in the previous issue of *LTHE*, we are planning a series of special issues: we have received a good response to our call for papers for the first of these, focusing on gender in learning and teaching, to be published in August 2012. Other special issues are planned on the topics shown below. Expressions of interest, including an outline of the planned paper, should be emailed to the Editor with the subject line *LTHE special issues* followed by a keyword (in bold below); papers in these special issues should include evidence from Gulf further education contexts.

- the use of new **technologies** (e.g. social media, multimedia), to support traditional and/or innovative learning aims for students.
- **assessment** of learning or teaching in courses/programmes in the Gulf: which factors influence assessment, and what benefits for learners, teachers and others can be observed when using new assessment methods?
- **interdisciplinary** initiatives in teaching and learning support. How can perspectives from different subject disciplines be integrated to provide deeper learning experiences for students?

References

McBride, D. (2004). Becoming more culturally aware in the university classroom: advice from a faculty member teaching in the Gulf Region. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, 1. http://www.zu.ac.ae/lthe/vol1/lthe01_02.html