

## Editor's introduction

---

David M. Palfreyman

Zayed University, Dubai

This issue of *LTHE* offers an even broader than usual variety of topics and approaches in the scholarship of teaching and learning in the Gulf. The research papers in the first part of this issue take varying approaches to investigate student attitudes to diverse aspects of higher learning. Al-Asmi and Thumiki take a quantitative approach to understand student attitudes to advising systems in colleges in Oman, and the factors which influence students' level of satisfaction. Their findings suggest that colleges should focus on improving the student experience by orienting students and dealing effectively with their problems; they also show that some variables, such as gender or advising approach, appear to be less influential than might be imagined. O'Neill's paper presents both quantitative and qualitative data to illuminate how students in the UAE's bilingual education system view reading and writing in English and in Arabic. He presents retrospective survey data and interview case studies to show how students' attitudes to literacy may vary at different stages of their educational career and beyond graduation. Moving on to Saudi Arabia, Hagler's paper investigates how Saudi university students see Western culture and society, and how this could influence their learning of English and of other subjects in interaction with Western teachers or materials.

This issue also offers a wide range of reflections on teaching, assessment and research methodology, as well as institutional development. Tanko's paper describes his exploratory practice in mathematics for social justice in the UAE, and reflects on the challenges encountered, which have resonance for the wider Gulf context. The approach he has taken involves students using mathematical thinking to understand and analyse inequalities and opportunities for development in their daily lives; he shows that this approach can be helpful for content learning as well as real-world awareness, despite certain apparent mismatches with the local and educational context. Abuid's paper bridges between teaching, assessment and curriculum development, reflecting on the process of developing a scheme for the assessment of student participation in Oman. The scheme in question is intended to help faculty consider a wider range of participation (within and outside class) and gain more accurate information about all students in the class, while allowing flexibility for local conditions and needs. He discusses various aspects of participation and assessment, and provides insights into the process of piloting and developing the scheme, and how different faculty members respond to it. Alzeer provides a very interesting reflection on research methodology to investigate an everyday aspect of learning: how students in the UAE use the campus as a physical, social and learning space. She begins with observations of a kind familiar to all of us, of how students sit or read or talk in particular ways in particular places; and she shows how a systematic research study can be developed to investigate this systematically, in relation to recent theories of space, identity and learning. Finally, Damaj and Chaaban reflect on the development of their institution in Oman and how this has been shaped by collaboration with another university and by a process of self-study and academic accreditation. The university they were part of is in a remote location, but through collaboration and self-reflection is making the most of its resources – local, national and international.

The reviews in this issue provide us with Gulf faculty's summary and analysis of three recent books on topics ranging from local scholarship of teaching and learning (*Enhancing teaching and learning in higher*

*education in the United Arab Emirates*) to instructional theory (*Teaching as a design science*) and learning with technology (the comprehensive *Handbook of mobile learning*).

As always I would like to thank the peer reviewers whose critical and constructive feedback on submissions to *LTHE* helped authors to produce the quality papers published in this issue: Abdulaziz Ayoub, Adam Jeffers, Ahmad Alhaqbani, Alisha Tysor, Christina Gitsaki, Dawn McBride, Ilango Sivaraman, Janet Olearski, Jason Johnson, Kenneth Zuercher, M. Ali Ayari, Margaret Wood, Nicos Souleles and Susan Jones.

The August 2014 issue of *LTHE* will be a special issue on **cultural aspects of learning and teaching** in Gulf universities and colleges. In the locally rooted, globally influenced and fast changing Gulf higher education sector, culture and its influence on learning and teaching are topics of constant awareness, (and have been touched upon in papers in this issue, as well as in past issues of *LTHE*). In the next issue of *LTHE* we aim to take this awareness firmly beyond the realm of anecdote and preconception, and show how research and reflection can take a systematic approach, building on evidence, experience and current theory to understand better how cultures meet, interact and are created anew in the process of learning and teaching in Gulf universities and colleges. We hope to include a range of perspectives on issues such as:

- Local/ Western/ globalized cultures
- Institutional/ disciplinary cultures/ subcultures
- Local and expatriate perspectives
- Teaching, learning, assessment, course development, materials development, faculty development
- Focus on the classroom or other contexts (e.g. library, campus, labs, homework, extracurricular activities)

We welcome submissions for this special issue by the deadline of **31 March 2014** (in addition to submissions on more general topics for other issues).

Please see our “About” page for further details about the journal and how to submit your work:

<http://lthe.zu.ac.ae/index.php/lthehome/about>

Alternatively, feel free to contact the Editor (david.palfreyman @ zu.ac.ae) with an outline of your idea for submission to *LTHE*. Feedback and comments on our articles are always welcome; we encourage you to register as a reader (and perhaps as an author or reviewer of submissions) via our website <http://lthe.zu.ac.ae> , and you can also follow *LTHE* updates on Twitter: [@LTHEgulf](https://twitter.com/LTHEgulf)