

# Editor's Introduction

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Publication of this issue of *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives (LTHE)* coincides with the beginning of a new academic year. The *LTHE* editorial team wish all faculty and students a successful year of learning and developing, and we hope that the papers in this issue will provide food for thought as the year begins.

Smith's paper in this issue considers how educators in the Gulf might reconcile a critical approach to teaching which challenges students' assumptions with a respect for students' cultural beliefs. This issue is of concern in many contexts where teachers aim to stimulate a critical perspective among students who are from a different cultural background to themselves (where 'culture' can refer to a wide range of values/expectations related to particular groups: see Palfreyman, 2007). In the Gulf region this cultural gap can be very marked, and filled with possibilities for misunderstanding. As Smith notes, there is relatively little substantial scholarly discussion of this issue in the Gulf region (indeed, *LTHE* would welcome future submissions providing empirical evidence in relation to this area). As a teacher of the Humanities, Smith is sensitive to the issues surrounding the idea of a Western 'canon' of cultural material, and professors in other fields might consider how similar issues are played out in their own subject area.

Ishtaiwa and Shana's paper presents a systematic study of how a new technology is applied by student teachers in their first experiences of teaching. The technology in question is the Interactive White Board (IWB), which enables teacher and students to share and interact in an intuitive and kinesthetic way with a computer display projected on a screen for the whole class. The teachers involved are students preparing to teach Arabic language; the authors describe how these teachers view the available IWB technology and how some of them make selective use of IWB in their teaching. The paper also discusses how teachers' use of this technology is limited by their perceptions of the technology itself as well as of their own skills. This paper provokes reflection on how our own use of technology, as well as students' use, is shaped by various factors.

Hassall's paper describes how a simple but innovative idea can be developed and explored over a period of years to involve an ever-increasing range of learners, teachers and other stakeholders in international arenas. The Extremely Short Story Competition (ESSC) was initiated in one UAE institution in 2004 and has, through the efforts of a large number of student writers as well as of the competition organizers, grown into an international event combining educational, creative and research aspects. As well as involving Gulf students on a scale unprecedented for an extracurricular activity, the organizers of the ESSC have worked hard to present the process and outcomes of the competition on the public stage, and to 'seed' similar competitions in other parts of the world. This report on the development of the ESSC offers stimulating ideas for higher educators wishing to cultivate sustainable student projects with maximum impact.

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

We are now also calling for expressions of interest in contributing to a new series of special issues focusing on particular areas of current interest. The papers in these special issues will include evidence from Gulf further education contexts regarding one of the topics shown below. Expressions of interest, including an outline of the planned paper, should be [emailed to the Editor](#) (preferably by 10 October 2011) with the subject line *LTHE special issues* followed by a keyword (in bold below):

- the use of new **technologies** (e.g. social media, multimedia), to support traditional and/or innovative learning aims for students.
- the role of **gender** (of students and/or faculty members) in learning and teaching in the Gulf. What gender patterns can be observed in areas such as subject choice, success strategies or responses to teaching?
- **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?

This series of special issues will be published in 2012/2013 according to the number of quality contributions received.

## References

Palfreyman, D.M. (2007). Introduction. In Palfreyman, D.M & McBride, D. (eds). *Learning and teaching across cultures in higher education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.