

Special Issue

ECE 2011 - [Sixth Education in a Changing Environment](#) *Innovating Creativity and Engagement in Student Learning*

Guest Editorial - Frances Bell, Jaye McIsaac, Moira McLoughlin

Welcome to this special edition of PESTLHE that contains some of the best papers from the [Sixth Education in a Changing Environment](#) (ECE) Conference - Creativity and Engagement in Higher Education (ECE2011), held at the University of Salford and MediaCityUK 6-8 July 2011.

The call for papers attracted over 50 high quality submissions from local, national and international colleagues. Following review by the conference review panel and author revision, 31 submissions were accepted to be included in the conference. Writing and publication workshops supported authors' work before during and after the conference. ECE has become a global forum for published and presented work, as well as, disseminating innovative and creative practice across Higher Education institutions. The [archive of papers](#) from previous conferences gives testament to the development of the ECE forum, and this year the whole proceedings will be published in the University of Salford Institutional Repository [USIR](#). This Special Edition has offered a further opportunity for selected authors to develop their work and share it with a wider audience. Authors who were invited to submit papers to this special edition were also reviewed by the PESTLHE editorial board.

We believe that the 21st century has brought unprecedented change for academics working with university students in the United Kingdom and in the global context. These institutional and sector changes include curricula reforms, degree rationalisation, prescribed course and programme outcomes, technology enabled/enhanced learning, the development of desired graduate attributes along with increasing diversity in the student body. However, this has also raised a number of challenges for academics in higher education. How do we prepare students for the complexities of learning in the 21st century both now and in an uncertain future? We will have to effect changes in practice informed by research, that impact upon both staff and students. At both national and international levels, these changes are coupled with significant growth of formal support for the provision of improved learning and teaching. Academics and increasingly, related professional staff, have responded to these changes by evaluating educational practice and theories that impact them; their students; and more broadly, learning communities of staff and students. Dissemination at learning and teaching conferences like ECE2011 adds to the body of evidence in higher education research, and informs future practice and evaluations.

Whilst most of the papers focus on Learning, Teaching and Assessment, it was clear that the conference's emphasis on creativity inspired authors to take risks and to think differently about the object of their writing. Authors explored the creativity of staff and students, in the development and use of learning activities and resources: sometimes mediated by emerging technologies. Creativity was interpreted broadly and demonstrated, often imaginatively and in a variety of contexts.

Three key themes emerge from the author paper submissions for this special edition; first an exploration of student engagement and social learning, followed by aspects of diversity and their impact on practice. The final section explores the development of creative professionals through student perceptions and novel learning experiences, not all within the traditional boundaries of formal education.

Kamerade and McCullagh use the now well established action research methodologies to explore approaches to student learning. These approaches allowed them to consider peer learning in situ but with a rigour that suggests that findings may be used to inform practitioners in other contexts or disciplines. Kamerade proposes group role play as a useful adjunct to large group teaching, it contains many of the benefits of small group learning while enabling peer learning and learning reinforcement. McCullagh's conclusions, based on a technology intervention are supported in other literature, but an unexpected benefit of the study was an increase in peer learning. Dickie, Pick and Issa present a case study of the use of See, Talk, Act and Review (S.T.A.R.) model to enrich student engagement with ethical decision-making via role plays, dialogue and consideration of possible consequences. Analysis of data derived from two rounds of feedback, and comparison of standard end of semester evaluations with University averages revealed a higher level of student engagement and understanding that can inform innovations in other courses of study.

Challenging the skills learning agenda, Jacobs considers how exploring the human condition could better inform curriculum; disciplines and student learning. Her case study of the practice of pre-service teacher educators illuminates how an aesthetic approach provides an alternative view of learning that appears congruent with collaborative and lifelong learning approaches. Simeoni from Australia writes about educational outcomes within a health foundation degree and showcases how success was made more manifest by modification of assessment based on reflective student feedback. Listening to the student voice and making explicit changes clearly illuminates research impacting upon student and academic practice.

Jenny Willis writes cogently about academics developing creative professionals for a world of complexity, change and competition in the field of leadership. Using online questionnaires and in-depth interviews the research investigated the nature of professional development. This, she argues, can be achieved in a number of ways; her aim was to examine student perceptions of what it means to be a creative professional concluding that professional development arises from a mixture of life wide experiences. Holtham and Owens, from the very different disciplines of Drama and Business, tell a fascinating story of the use of Debord's concept of *dérive* as "one way through which time, space and place can be created to generate a form of person-centered, informal, dialogical learning". Not only do they show students trajectories across disciplines using art and architecture as prompts, but they trace their own development and research through dialogue across disciplines. Their motivation was to promote in students much needed creativity and critical reflection through novel learning activities.

The papers in this special edition provide a snapshot of practice on teaching, student engagement and educational research in higher education. In submitting their work to the ECE2011 conference, engaging in debate there, and refining their work for publication in this Special Edition, the authors have also experienced personal development. We think their work offers valuable stimulation to challenge you and provoke reflection. Moreover, we hope that this issue contains something that will

prompt you to consider changing your future practice, developing your own new ways of creativity and engagement.

Frances Bell, Senior Lecturer in Information Systems, Salford Business School, University of Salford

Jaye McIsaac, Educational Developer, Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Liverpool

Maira McLoughlin, Senior Lecturer/Student Experience Lead, School of Nursing Midwifery & Social Work, University of Salford