Editorial

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This Issue offers lively insights on innovative efforts, carried out at different stages of Higher Education teaching, learning, and research paths. In our May 2016 Issue, we reported about echoes from micro and macro processes, which occur in the epochal paradigm shift regarding Higher Education, from teacher-centred to student-centred education. Here we report about a new set of micro processes and experiences. In more detail, two contributions concern curriculum and course units' design in the domain of architecture; three deal with teaching and learning experiences within a classroom context; and the last one offers a model approach to employability of students in Agricultural Sciences.

Besides spontaneous submissions, most papers of the present Issue are selected outcomes from two events, i.e. Tuning MEDA Research and Good Practice Sessions, held in Bilbao (Spain) on May 2016, and the Tuning Africa Symposium on Research and Good Practices, held in Accra (Ghana) on October 2016, both focusing on competence-based and student-centred approaches in Higher Education. The two initiatives were first time events in the history of two by now well established Tuning Communities, namely Tuning MEDA (Tuning Middle East and North Africa countries) and Tuning Africa (over 40 participating countries) respectively. The operational concept for both initiatives included several steps, such as: i) a call for proposals (either a Research Article or an Account of Good Practice); ii) a preliminary selection, based on the proposal abstract; iii) a final selection, based on extended papers; iv) a final symposium, presenting the selected Research Articles and Accounts of Good Practice. The authors of these latter papers were invited to submit their works to Tuning Journal for Higher Education (TJHE). The Editors, in agreement with the Tuning Academy, decided to let

the research articles undergo the usual review process of this Journal; while a different review process was envisaged for the Accounts of Good Practice, which will appear in 'Special Issues' of TJHE, additional to its regular Issues. In practice, both events led to quite interesting developments. The participation in the Tuning Africa event was beyond expectations. After the initial Call, the organisers — we acknowledge and thank here in particular Prof. Damtew Teferra, University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa — received about 50 initial proposals, either for research articles or accounts, similarly divided between the two strands. The list of approved papers for the final symposium in Accra included 7 research articles and 4 accounts of Good Practice. As a whole, the present Issue hosts two research contributions from the Tuning MEDA event and 3 from the Tuning Africa event.

The first two contributions in this Issue deal with the "modernisation" of taught course units within a degree course. Tuning MEDA contributions show how the Tuning reference points and the related meta-profile concept can impact and change curriculum design in the Architecture subject area in two Middle East Universities, in Syria and Jordan respectively. The backbone of the two papers is similar and it consists in a re-visitation at their respective institutions of selected course units in "Design", an important sub-area of the architectural programmes. The units are the pair of units Basic Design I and II in the Hakky's contribution and a single advanced unit, i.e. Design 5, in the Al Husban et al.'s contribution. Both contributions, which in the background rely on a deeply understood Tuning Methodology, are pieces of "evidence-based research". They exemplify, in a somewhat complementary manner, how people, who are academics in a subject not explicitly related to Educational Sciences, can nevertheless obtain meaningful findings, about how to improve student education in their own specific area, which can represent relevant learning resources for peers.

Hakky's contribution describes and documents results of using the Bloom's taxonomy and the Learning Retention Pyramid within two course units to achieve 5 core competences, showing that the competence based approach allows the students to achieve both the upper levels of Bloom's scale (they were trained to analyse, synthesise, and evaluate) and a high degree of retention. The study was based on a questionnaire and instructor's own evaluation and results indicated that all competences were well recognised by students. Moreover, students declared that the most effective teaching techniques were: lecturing, demonstration, group discussions, and practice by doing. This research showed that it is possible to modify courses in the curriculum at a detailed level without the application of major changes in their core objective so as to match critical competences, as advanced by Tuning MEDA.

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Al Husban et al.'s contribution relies on a very comprehensive approach. In the first part of their article, they intend "to explore, describe, summarize, and understand the holistic view of teaching and learning, program/ curriculum design, generic and specific competences, intended learning outcomes, assessment and constructive alignment." Indeed, relying on the corresponding bibliography, they offer a wide theoretical background for a "holistic" approach to curricular design. As underlined by one of their reviewers, this approach offers a goldmine of ideas and evidence-based reflections on "any course redesign and transformation of any curriculum in architecture, looking to change the traditional educational model for one with emphasis on skills and competences". Moreover, a particularly interesting aspect regards "the idea of eliminating subjectivity in the evaluation process, through the use of various modalities that allow greater interaction and student ownership of their learning process".

The following group of contributions to the present Issue regards innovative teaching learning experiences in the context of a classroom or work-related teaching experience. Two contributions come from the Tuning Africa Symposium quoted above, reporting about how in some Ethiopian universities formative assessment or self-efficacy practice contributes to student-centred learning. The third one comes from Europe, namely from an Italian university, reporting about how work-related experiences can help soft skills achievement.

Weldmeskel et al.'s contribution focuses on the role of student self-regulation on learning. It describes the extent at which quality formative assessment (formative feedback, self-assessment and peer assessment) on lessons of a course involves students in self-regulated learning. The quasi-experimental intervention carried out included pre and post self-regulated learning questionnaire and focus group discussions with the students. Significant differences between intervention group and comparison group were found: students who were taught by the use of quality formative assessment on lessons report more involvement in self-regulating learning and perceive formative assessment as an encouraging step toward making the learning and assessment process more involving and interactive. Authors provide, therefore, recommendations to promote the use of quality formative assessment in order to aim at the improvement of student self-regulation on learning and assessment in university classes.

The contribution by Kinde et al. aims at investigating the practical utility of the theory of self-efficacy in other cultural settings aside from Western countries. In the authors' words, "Students' mathematics self-efficacy is defined as belief of competency in engaging in mathematical problems". In

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practice, the authors exposed 63 first year engineering students, at Jimma University, Ethiopia, to a self-efficacy enhancing "treatment" while they were attending the course unit Applied Mathematics II. The findings are that the "treated" sample show meaningful improvements of performance parameters with respect to a control sample of similar size. This is corroborated by qualitative findings stemming from appropriate Focus Discussion Groups.

Frison et al. frame their contribution within the literature on work-related learning activities. They aim at exploring and identifying considerations able to improve teaching strategies and methods. As the existing literature states, the qualitative research presented in this study — based on content analysis of texts produced by students — shows the strong impact of a work-related experience on the development of generic skills. In particular, the students' reports focused on the emotional, reflective, self-management and teamwork skills. The content analysis highlights an important reference to emotions and feelings, which can be related to the contact with the "real environment", where work takes place. This evidence-based research offers methodological inspiration that can be used to design work-related activities, able to foster the development of generic skills when implemented in an academic course.

The last contribution in the present Issue is from a small African country, Mauritius. The authors of this contribution applied the "Tuning survey methodology", in order to map out "the set of skills, understandings and personal attributes that will increase the job prospects in agriculture of the fresh graduate from the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Mauritius". The study includes description of the job market situation of the country and of its higher education system. Moreover, their findings are discussed in a worldwide perspective, quoting appropriate references. In the words of one reviewer, "the paper follows very important aspects of Tuning, like: Description of the job market and the role of the universities; Status of working in the field of Agri (undergraduates). It includes [perceptions of] employers, students and graduates/Alumni; it gives a detailed description of existing undergraduate study programmes in Agriculture science; it can be a good example for other parts in Africa to find out about the relevant needs for employability".

As a concluding remark, we would like to point out how, out of six accepted contributions, only three ones (Hakky; Al Husban et al.; Armoogum et al.) are strictly and explicitly Tuning-related contributions. The other ones examine the role of different approaches / methodologies in pursuing 'real' student-centred teaching & learning activities. Moreover, it is interesting to note that even the contributions, which are related to Tuning, introduce issues for cross-fertilisation such as relationship with Bloom's taxonomy,

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learning retention, objectiveness of assessment processes. All this confirms the editorial choice of this Journal to serve "as a platform for students, teachers, policy makers, administrators, and academics … in order to engage in constructive debate on new approaches, methods and tools on teaching, learning and assessment in competence-based and student-centred curricula in higher education". This choice was clear to the founders of the Journal, even though it was then an implicit one. Now, after three years of publication, after a consolidation phase, which has built awareness about this Journal as the voice of the Tuning Communities, we explicitly confirm the "open" platform role of the Journal.

The Editorial Board warmly welcomes submission of articles that fall within the compass of this Journal.

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