Editorial

Luigi F. Donà dalle Rose

Editor

Anna Serbati

Assistant Editor

In our quickly changing world, Higher Education (HE) institutions may or have to play an important role. This is also at the root of the huge paradigm shift which is occurring at worldwide level in order to adapt higher education to the needs of both local and global society.

This Issue of TJHE highlights ways through which universities and other HE institutions can try to develop conditions favourable to foster the growth of their own students and ways through which, at different levels, academic staff together with students are implementing curricular innovation.

Students are the main protagonists of university life, and are therefore entitled actors who can valuably contribute to educational practices, sharing their voices which instructors and policy-makers should take into account to inform their actions.

The first half of contributions hosted in this Issue addresses important cornerstones in the life of an open academic environment, two of them directly involving students in the learning and teaching process, i.e. participation in the curricular planning both in general terms and more specifically on the issue of the student workload. The third contribution deals with the so called third mission of the HE institutions, i.e. how responsible institutions can contribute to the well-being of local and often much more extended societies.

The second half of contributions focuses on experiences of competence-based education implemented in specific contexts. More specifically, the fourth contribution analyses the degree of importance and perceived achievement of the specific competences by Psychology students, the fifth focuses on application of prior knowledge in problem solving situations during more advanced classes, whereas the sixth one describes a qualitative study with academic staff regarding generic competences in life sciences.

More specifically, the Issue begins with a paper by Jane Iloanya, which discusses two experiences of "student voice" in two institutions of higher learning in Botswana. Democratisation of teaching and learning is interpreted as a crucial tool for the implementation of the Tuning Approach in the teaching and learning process in higher education, not only for consulting and involving students, but also for giving them right and responsibility to participate and be partner with staff in the entire educational process. The research highlights participatory approaches already in use in the institutions as well as areas of improvement to really give students the opportunity to actively engage with and contribute to the development and implementation of the curriculum.

The contribution of Alsaeed Alshamy also embraces the "student voice" perspective, but with a specific focus on Credit Hour System and Student Workload. The research was carried out at Alexandria University (Egypt) and investigating the perceptions of both academics and students on student workload. Diversity of these perceptions suggests that transparency on the topic of required hours of students' independent work should increase, as part of a wider paradigm shift from input and staff-centred programmes to output and student-oriented ones. The author highlights implications for policy and practice to enhance the process of determining student workload in Higher Education in Egypt.

The paper by Javier Villar Olaeta addresses another cornerstone of an open academic environment, which is the university social responsibility and the so-called third mission of academic institutions in Latin America. The article discusses the connection and implementation of ethical competences at individual and organisational level (Ethical Conduct competence and Organisational Competence of Responsible University Social Innovation) and reflects on possible methodological implications, in order to respond to the new challenges to professional training in today's world.

Within the second group of contributions, the paper by Denise Benatuil and María Juliana Laurito analyses the degree of importance and perceived achievement of the specific competences set out in the Tuning Latin America Project, among psychology students of a private university in the City of Buenos Aires (Argentina). Ratings for competences are discussed in order to identify current educational needs for psychologists and thus enhance quality and adjust psychological practice to current social needs.

The contribution by Peter Kwaira describes an experience of applying knowledge, acquired in first year classes, in problem solving situations during more advanced classes for serving teachers enrolled in a B.Ed. degree programme at the University of Zimbabwe. The data offers a reflection both

on students' learning and ability to elaborate and apply prior knowledge as well as on subject integration and relevance of each course to the common purpose of skills development within the context of outcome/competence-based learning.

The paper by Lazarus Nabaho addresses the current discourse on generic competences and their alignment with dental surgery and nursing education at Makerere University in Uganda. The findings reveal that problem solving, lifelong learning and interpersonal competences are aligned with life sciences and that the most used three approaches to developing generic competences are problem-based learning, conducting generic course units, and role modelling, therefore combining both single subject level as well as curriculum level.

As the European Commission's Report on improving the quality of teaching and learning in Higher Education Institutions[1] highlights, different ways of promoting the quality of higher education can be implemented. One of them, described as one of the sixteen recommendations of the Report, fosters higher education institutions to encourage, welcome and consider student feedback to improve teaching and learning, and another one suggests the development of curricula through dialogue and partnerships among teaching staff, students, graduates and labour market actors.

Students are partners and change agents in explorations of pedagogical practice and can richly contribute to academic development.[2] This Issue offers to readers examples and opportunities to think and reflect on learner-centred approach and "student voice" perspective as central components to transform higher education and to answer to the needs of students and society.

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[1] European Commission, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013).

[2] A Cook-Sather, "Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: A threshold concept in academic development," *International Journal for Academic Development* 19, no. 3 (2014), 186-198, doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2013.805694.