

EDITORIAL

## **JNUSTA: A journal to facilitate inter-disciplinary learning**

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## ***JNUSTA: A journal to facilitate inter-disciplinary learning***

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of the NUS Teaching Academy*. *JNUSTA* is named for the National University of Singapore's recently established think-tank, the [NUS Teaching Academy](#). What we have in mind for this new quarterly journal is that it will serve the international teaching community by creating and nurturing "[a global network of academics and educators who will discuss ongoing changes and future trends in tertiary education](#)". We intend *JNUSTA* to serve as a resource for educators to share their experiences and knowledge for the benefit of others. To that end, the journal will not be discipline specific. Rather, in striving to be inter-disciplinary, we are confident that it will allow us to make connections with, and learn from, one another. For example, the teaching and assessment of professionalism, ethics, and communication skills have long been emphasised in medical, dental and legal education, but have perhaps only more recently become important in some other fields. These same professional schools have, however, sometimes neglected the critical, questioning attitude fostered in liberal arts education. Clearly, we have much to learn from one another.

To this end, *JNUSTA* will feature scholarly reviews, original research articles, book reviews, commentaries, and opinion pieces. The journal will feature short articles in which teachers can share an experience (i.e. a teaching or learning encounter) or idea that provides a lesson applicable to the art or science of teaching and learning, or showcase an innovative educational project aimed at improving teaching or assessment. These short reports will, we hope, give a voice to educators who, as disciplinary specialists, may not have considered publishing in the field of pedagogy. We want *JNUSTA* to provide them with the opportunity to disseminate their new, unique, and exciting ideas, as well as to showcase their educational innovations.

In the first four issues our aim will be to focus on four important themes, namely global citizenship, communication skills, innovations in education and liberal arts education. However, the editorial board will welcome scholarly research articles, opinion pieces, or reviews based on other suitable themes. *JNUSTA*'s online platform offers several advantages, for instance, the ability to feature hyperlinks, multimedia files (video and audio), as well as pod- and vodcasts, whose interactive nature should make the journal a more interactive experience than a publication limited to print. In addition, the online format of *JNUSTA* will allow readers to comment on published articles, as well as on pithy, interesting topics that the editorial board of *JNUSTA* will propose from time to time. In this way we hope not only to learn from one another, but also to identify future noteworthy themes for the journal to explore.

This first issue of *JNUSTA* consists of contributions that broadly cluster around the theme of global citizenship. It starts with the first installment of “From the Desk of...”, which we hope will become a regular feature of the journal. “From the Desk of...” is a column that features eminent academic leaders who will share their ideas on an important educational topic of their choosing. In his wide-ranging overview of the contemporary educational landscape, President of NUS Professor Tan Chorh Chuan details a set of critical shifts faced by universities today as they prepare students for the workplace. Perhaps the foremost of these is that they need to negotiate the difficult task of providing students with both depth and breadth. Hence, learning should happen not only in the classroom but outside “in the field”, where theory and practice often relate in unexpected ways. Universities need to “cultivate a more global outlook in our students” so they can learn not only respect for diversity, but also how to value it actively.

The articles in this first issue of *JNUSTA* explore different but related ways of rising to this challenge. One practical way the “standard curriculum” will need to be expanded, as noted by Tan, is to introduce more language, and in particular foreign language, instruction. Byram’s article on intercultural citizenship makes a strong case for such instruction. The article offers a proposal on how to implement it that would, however, require an overhaul of established practices. After critically discussing the importance of citizenship education from an internationalist perspective, which he thinks is essential “preparation for living in a globalised economy or an international community”, he turns to a closer consideration of language instruction. Byram agrees that language is best acquired through content. Given that this is the case, he proposes that foreign language instruction should concern itself with the “social significance of language learning,” and that citizenship education is what should provide this content.

Looker’s contribution, like Tan’s and Byram’s, highlights the increased complexity and diversity of a globalising world, but works to emphasise the (continued) importance of cultural specificity in spite, or rather because of, the forces of internationalisation. Focusing on the burgeoning scholarship of teaching and learning movement, a crucial aim of which is to encourage reflection on and research into teaching by disciplinary specialists who are not pedagogical experts, Looker considers a number of paradoxes. One of the key paradoxes which he addresses is that, while “the challenge for the scholarship of teaching and learning is to become truly capable of informing global practice equal to the global dissemination of disciplinary research”, nevertheless for such scholarship to achieve this it “must focus on localised practice and remain grounded in (that) practice”. This is so since, despite the apparent leveling of differences brought about by globalisation, “what happens in the classroom may involve deeply embedded cultural practices shared by teachers and students”. If we are to be

serious about excellent teaching that strives to equip students in the ways outlined by Tan, then this requires both a scholarship of teaching and learning and also greater cross-cultural sensitivity.

It is just this notion of cross-cultural sensitivity that O'Brien's article addresses, with specific reference to cross-cultural communication. The article focuses on Stanford University's Cross-Cultural Rhetoric (CCR) project as an example of an initiative that seeks to "improve students' communicative abilities and to help them expand their worldviews as future global citizens." In a globalising world, where different people with different cultural practices come into contact more than ever before, the need for cross-cultural understanding is also becoming a more pressing issue. O'Brien proposes that we, as educators, focus on three "core competencies crucial for global citizenship in the technological age," namely digital literacy, cultural literacy, and socio-communicative literacy.

Just as Looker examines the scholarship of teaching and learning, Poole discusses the value of educational scholarship, comparing perceptions of the value of the traditional PhD or DPhil against "professional" doctorates such as the EdD, EngD and DBA (for the fields of education, engineering and business administration, respectively). He discusses the emergence and increasing popularity of the EdD in the United Kingdom, examines the "doctorateness" of EdD programmes, and highlights the fledgling EdD programme in Singapore.

Finally, in his book review of Hult's "Directions and prospects for educational linguistics", Ben Said underscores Tan's points about the importance of language instruction and linguistics.

We are confident that these contributions will prove illuminating and thought provoking and hope that you will enjoy reading *JNUSTA*. We are looking forward to receiving your feedback on the journal, and would welcome manuscripts and comments on any topic relating to the theory and practice of teaching and learning.

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**Constructively engaging diversity on a global campus**

"Global citizenship" and "global education" are two terms that get tossed around a lot these days.

- But what exactly do they mean?
- Do they simply refer to the increased diversity of the student and staff population in our universities, or to our efforts to provide students with international exposure by studying and working overseas?
- Is travel good for student development, or is that just "academic tourism"?
- How do we provide a truly enriching global education – and with what kind of global attributes do we want to imbue our students?

It seems clear that as educators and administrators, we have an important role to play in helping to maximise diversity on our own campus, and more importantly, to build on the richness and strengths that diversity brings through a constructive engagement with difference.