EDITORIAL

Levels of Student Engagement

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Student engagement is generally seen as a proxy for better learning outcomes (Trowler, 2010). How can we, however, determine what we should do to increase student engagement? George Kuh (2003) suggests engagement is both "deceptively simple" and "self-evident" (p. 25), but then considers the conditions for engagement: what are students actually doing when they are engaged in learning? To some degree, student engagement can be observed if students are involved in learning in a sustained way, enthusiastic about what they are doing, focused, curious and questioning. However, another possible meaning of student engagement involves the enlargement of the curriculum to involve students in the contexts in which disciplinary knowledge may be used. We see, for example, in this issue, an exploration by Wong Mun Loke and Lim Lum Peng of how pre-clinical dentistry students can be persuaded that learning better patient communication provides them with skills to practice. In another article by Chris McMorran, students are drawn into scholarly conversation that will foster a lifelong ability to enter into contested discourse in a meaningful way. Both of these represent engagement as an enlargement of the arena in which learning occurs, with an intention of looking to the future. The gears of learning engage with the gears of real-life professional practice.

The rationale for fostering engagement, Kuh (2003) suggests, is that "students who are involved in educationally productive activities in college [develop] habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and personal development" (p. 25). This statement is useful in framing the six articles and book review in this issue, because of their concern with fostering student engagement either through the enlargement of the curriculum, or through ways of teaching that will trigger greater student engagement.

The first article in this issue by McMorran goes straight to the question of increasing student engagement (or active learning) by developing a strategy that involves students in scholarship as conversation with leading scholars. McMorran pursues the notion of scholarship as conversation where learning as acquisition of knowledge and learning as participation in an ongoing dialogue are dynamically in play. Importantly for students, scholarship as conversation can embody a negotiation over meaning, leading students away from a belief that what they are learning (and what they read in textbooks) is settled knowledge. It is also proposed that when students engage in scholarly

conversation with leading scholars, the experts can be seen as situated members of a discourse community rather than as a disinterested purveyor of facts. Students themselves can now begin to be participants in that community.

This article begins with a discussion of metaphors of scholarship and learning, and the value of scholarship of conversation. It then moves into a discussion of a particular strategy used by the author where students enter into real-time discussion (online) with authors of works used in their course. Significantly, McMorran identifies five categories of question that students use in their interactions with authors, and these may indicate different levels of sophistication in engagement. This is a good example of a scholarship of teaching and learning investigation, where an intention to improve active student learning leads to a concrete activity that in turn is open to analysis and generalizable outcomes.

The second article for this issue by Han Kiat Ho mounts a persuasive argument for reconsidering the place of norm-referenced assessment in Singapore. This can be a controversial topic in the realm of student assessment, though it is one that seems to have reached a settled conclusion in some locations. In Australian universities, for example, it has long been unacceptable to use norm-referenced assessment. And in several universities in Hong Kong, assessment policies stipulate the use of criterion-referenced assessment only. This article gives a brief and clear expression of the rationale given for the current system in Singapore: human capital is absolutely central to the success to this small country, so getting student rankings right in terms of ability is a chief concern of university assessment. Ho offers a very careful and subtle analysis of the effects (often unintended) of grading under the curve. A key point in this analysis is that grading under the curve can misinform students about their abilities (at both ends of the scale) because the final grade they receive is designed to create a curve for ranking rather than a direct correspondence between demonstrated ability and grade. Ho suggests that the underlying problem is that curve fitting provides "symptomatic relief from issues of grade inflation" (p. 31, this issue). Using the normal curve becomes a cover for poor assessment practices of some assessors.

Communication is central to the pursuit of most professional careers, yet it has not always been explicitly developed, or it has been consigned to a later part of a degree programme. As Wong and Lim suggest in relation to the practice of dentistry, there is a need to raise students' awareness of the importance of communication and to introduce this idea early in a programme. They explore how dental students can best engage in learning at the pre-clinical stage and

how to communicate with patients in an empathetic way. Based on research indicating that a skills-based approach works better than a didactic approach, they initiated the use of both role play and standardised patients (SPs)

A major aim of this article is to determine which of these approaches works better for the second-year students at the National University of Singapore and the larger part of the article is an elaboration of the data collected from student responses to the interventions. The reader is given the opportunity to appraise the value of these interventions and think about whether the same approach might be suitable for other courses and disciplines.

Like McMorran's article about scholarly conversation, this is a clear demonstration of the procedure of the scholarship of teaching and learning, where the teachers see a gap in student education in a particular discipline, create a series of interventions to address the gap, implement the intervention over a couple of iterations of a course, and then gather appropriate data on the effectiveness of the interventions. This in turn provides information about how to improve the course further.

Karen Inkelas's paper on living-learning programmes moves us into a multi-institutional perspective and in several ways connects with our book review in that it comprehends a particular sweep of the history of higher education. Both take account of a period in which there was rapid expansion of higher education in the US. Living-learning programmes are a direct response to some of the perceived problems of quality in higher education resulting from that expansion. Here we have the question of student engagement at the multi-institutional level. An evaluation of the effectiveness of learning-living programmes (LLPs) is also highly relevant to what is currently happening in Singapore universities, where campuses are becoming increasingly residential. A future issue of *AJSoTL* will address this topic from a Singapore perspective.

Importantly, this paper provides us with a way to analyse the fundamentals of LLPs. Universities that want to introduce activities into LLPs can begin by asking whether the proposed activities answer to the model provided here, thereby giving an evidence-based rationale for improved student learning and development.

The articles by Fung Fun Man and by Shawna K. Metzger and Philippe Raynal might best be described as explorations about how to better engage students in their understanding of the subject, giving them tools to perform better in learning. The first looks at how to increase the personal engagement

of students in laboratory work through the use of a GoPro camera by the laboratory demonstrator; the second discusses the important issue of developing quantitative literacy or reasoning.

Fung harnesses the idea that video increases "engagement, knowledge transfer and memory, as well as interactivity with content" (p. 101, this issue). He then argues that the problem with most video recordings of laboratory sessions for students is that they are taken from a third-person perspective, and that with the refinement of the GoPro camera, it is now possible for a lab demonstrator to attach a GoPro to him or herself in such a way that students will get a "first-person" point of view. An important point made in this article is that this shift in perspective from third- to first-person point of view (FPV) also gives the students a more sensory experience of what is happening, rather than one that is static and detached. Some of the most valuable aspects of this article are in the analysis of the particular circumstances under which the GoPro is effective.

Metzger and Raynal begin with a well-recognized modern problem in universities: many students' quantitative literacy and ability to reason quantitatively are not what they should be. They argue, however, that there is very little written about how to "think systematically about "*designing* a quantitative requirement" (p. 79, this issue). What kinds of courses, or what aspect of courses, will be able to satisfy the development of quantitative literacy and reasoning? This article offers a guide for determining whether courses are capable of addressing these abilities through a series of questions.

They make the point that this is also meant to enlarge the scope of the curriculum to include "learning outcomes and pedagogical motivations". A key part to understanding this article comes in the first section after the introduction, where the authors argue for subtle differences between "numeracy", "quantitative literacy" and "quantitative reasoning" (p. 81, this issue). An appreciation of these differences is vital for the creation of a diagnostic for courses that has meaning, capturing different positions on the spectrum from numeracy to quantitative reasoning.

This issue ends with Jonathan Sim's review of *Clark Kerr's world of higher education reaches the 21st century* (2012). Clark Kerr was the President of the University of California (UC) from 1958 to 1967, and he instituted the California Master Plan of Higher education in the 1960s. The book comprises a series of essays by those who worked with Kerr, or who were affected by his reforms.

As Sim points out in his review, the period in which Clark Kerr worked saw education reform and its expansion become subjected to the vicissitudes of higher education funding. Several chapters of the book are devoted to a consideration of Clark Kerr's Master Plan in the context of higher education in other cultures and why it would be difficult to implement where structures, traditions and educational ideals are different. In this regard, the book might prompt us to think about how agendas such as those of Clark Kerr would play out in the Asian context.

This issue of *AJSOTL* demonstrates the rich possibilities of thinking about student engagement at both the local course level and at the macro institutional, and even national level. It also demonstrates how the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning can inform future practice by closely evaluating innovative interventions into learning and teaching where there is an identified need. There is a lot for readers to take away and think about in this issue, and many things that may lead to further innovations in teaching and learning.

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