

Education in a Changing Environment Fifth Conference September 2009 Online Proceedings

Welcome to the online Proceedings of the Fifth ECE Conference held at the University of Salford September 14-16th 2009. We would like to begin by thanking everyone who participated in the conference in all the different ways that make such an event come together. We would like to thank the ECE committee members for their work, the administrative staff for their preparations and the peer reviewers for their expertise and time. We would also like to thank those colleagues who managed to find the time to write up their research papers and workshops for publication in these Proceedings. Because of unforeseen circumstances the Proceedings have gone on line a little late but nevertheless there are some contemporary issues that are central to the overall theme of critical voices and times which were the conference focus. Little did we know when we decided to focus on policy and the changing practices of teaching, learning and assessment in higher education that the bulk of the teaching grant for higher education would be abolished by a new coalition government and that market relations would be etched so deeply into higher education in the future.

These Proceedings therefore prepares some of the ground for reflection not only on issues of teaching, learning and assessment but reminds us that policies on higher education are socially and politically sensitive issues that make or remake governments. We write this as many students appear to have awoken from their slumber and have taken to the streets to demonstrate about something they believe is an injustice for future generations of students. Such a change in policy will affect the nature of the pedagogic relationship as the Vice Chancellor Martin Hall indicates in his keynote as the move from higher education as a public good, paid for by the state, alters to higher education as a private good and investment by the student. This attempt to shift the existing market analogue to a full blown market with students as customers will affect the teaching and learning practices in significant ways in the future. Some of the issues relating to such changing practices in higher education are addressed in these Proceedings and one which will be significant in the future is students' experiences of learning and teaching using evaluation systems. How do subjects, departments and universities obtain information on existing pedagogic practices and how are issues raised in such evaluations addressed? As Sue Clegg stated in her keynote what exactly is meant by student voice and are there not a range of student voices some more powerful than others? At present this is a powerful issue for universities as the National Student Survey has demonstrated. However, responding to student ratings of satisfaction may be more difficult than envisaged as the paper by Bolt and Dickie suggests and an interesting alternative through an ethnographic study is offered by Dale and Holyoake's paper.

Theme 2 in the Proceedings addresses the issue of new technologies and student engagement and as always there are problems without a clear articulation of the relationship between pedagogic practices and new technology. The SiMMERing paper from Australia deals with this issue of articulation by indicating clarity in relation to improving self efficacy in teachers' practices and cognitive attainment in students during this project. Self-efficacy is a major conceptual area within psychology and by situating their project within this research literature they provide the specific form the articulation took in this project. Their study adds to our knowledge of how teacher self-efficacy in relation to the use of new technology can be improved. At the level of student engagement the evidence is less convincing and although interesting it is our view that issue of articulation between theories of learning and new technology in effecting change in student engagement and demonstrating social and cognitive change is still a question that requires fine tuning. Nevertheless, there are some interesting papers in this theme of technology and engagement.

Finally, the theme of student diversity and critical pedagogy demonstrates work in several areas such as Activity Theory, Critical Realism and philosophical practices for multicultural teaching. We hope that this collection aids your reflection on your own practices in teaching, learning and assessment and we hope you will join us or return to the University of Salford for the Sixth ECE conference in July 2011.
(www.ece.salford.ac.uk)

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Joint Chairs of Education in a Changing Environment Conference