Introduction to the Proceedings

The fourth ECE conference attracted a range of papers from outside the UK as well as colleagues from higher education institutions in the UK. A key aspect of the organisation of the conference was the abstract review process that required colleagues from across the University of Salford to give their time and expertise and I would like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues for their support. In terms of the structure of the Proceedings, I have arranged this as follows:

1. Diversity, Internationalisation and Intercultural Learning
2. Learning Technologies in Higher Education
3. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
4. Partnership, Employability, Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning.

This reflects the number of papers contributed to the first three themes and my decision to combine two of the themes in the Online Proceedings. The Learning and Teaching Research Network at the University of Salford was established to encourage research into pedagogic practice and the conference was seen as an ideal venue to present research findings and curriculum innovations. With approximately two thirds of the papers and workshops presented coming from outside the University the fourth conference has become an international conference. It continues to provide a forum for colleagues within the University to present research findings but this has become a more competitive process. This, in a way, was bound to occur once the conference went national-international and is a reminder that we need to continue to develop more informed theoretical frameworks within which we carry out our practitioner research. There are two key aspects to this that are significant for the future and the first is a paper by Furlong and Oancea (2005) that provides a rationale for research in, with, and/or for practice. Their framework for applied or practice based research has gained an important position that has informed educational research in the 2007 RAE.

The second important aspect, for colleagues involved in educational research, is the focus on teaching and learning in disciplines. Both the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) have indicated the importance of pedagogic research within disciplines. The former through its subject based networks and the latter through its funding of a major research project Enhancing Teaching- Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses 2001-04. Although the Proceedings has a significant number of papers dealing with practice there are few papers that address subject or disciplinary based practice. Many of the papers deal with more generic issues related to teaching, learning and assessment or are concerned with policy issues or with using specific technologies within a subject. This is not a major concern but it may well indicate a tension between pedagogic research and scholarship as a central aspect of disciplinary practice. There are several papers in the Proceedings that address student learning directly or that approach student learning through curriculum development or innovation. I'd also like to point to the strength of the two keynotes and their contribution to a successful conference. This was reflected in comments by delegates and was indicated in the evaluation of the conference carried out recently.

Papers in the Diversity and Internationalisation theme address a range of issues related to policy, practice and conceptual issues. Caruana and Spurling's (2007) paper based on a literature review commissioned by the Higher Education Academy in 2006, serves to establish parameters and frontiers in addressing four key questions - what working definitions of internationalisation of higher education are in currency? what meanings are attributed to internationalisation of the curriculum? what models for institutional internationalisation are emerging? and, what curriculum

models are emerging? Certain key papers offer a strategic approach to internationalisation which is 'values-driven' thereby regarding international students as a rich source of 'cultural capital and intentional diversity' (Jones, 2007; Etherington and Spurling 2007; Sola and Wilkinson 2007; Singh 2007). There is a conceptual paper by Brown, (2007) that indicates the emergence of a 'New Public Diplomacy' related to the process of globalisation. Other papers address different ways of dealing with diversity and multiculturalism within a variety of teaching and learning situations and three papers address internationalisation using new technologies as expansive learning sites where new practices can be constructed.

The papers in the Technology theme address a number of practical pedagogic issues. Several papers present case studies of barriers or distance being broken down or reduced in the use of new technologies, (Rossiou and Papadakis, Nightingale *et al.*, Stephens *et al.*, Jonas and Burns, 2007). Saadatmand (2007) draws on constructivism to try to develop a theoretically informed web base assessment for learners. Conboy (2007) presents a case study of using games in the curriculum and it is by no means a straight forward matter while Langley (2007) suggests a complex articulation in a case study of blended learning from Northampton. Ribchester and French (2007), from within the discipline of Geography, provide an interesting case study of using feedback via podcasting to engage students. In the theme of Scholarship there are a wide range of practical and methodological concerns. For Burton and Swanepoel (2007) the expansion of Teaching, as a way for Black people to gain a vocation or profession, has specific problems around diversity and subject knowledge that they address in their papers. de Oliveria, Greenbank, Crabtree and Savory (2007) present case studies on developing soft skills in a management course; addressing collaborative assessment for students; exploring student independent learning skills using data from interviews with lecturing staff and using PDP in learning to learn. Bolt (2007) is concerned with improving teaching and learning using action research and Ahmed and Teviotdale (2007) presented a workshop on formative assessment. Cheng (2007) and Cope (2007) present case studies of research on quality audit and the development of CPD. Ali (2007) presents a paper dealing with the global challenge to Arab higher education and Bugay (2007) presents research with undergraduate students on loneliness. Finally, Jones (2007) explains his innovative way of teaching social history using a walk of key landmarks.

In the final theme, Work-based Learning, Partnership, Lifelong Learning and Employability there are case studies of development, research and a few theoretically informed papers. Burns(2007) presents a case study related to invisible barriers, Booth's (2007) paper is concerned with the lack of ethnic minorities who graduate and find employment in Science, Engineering and Technology and Meehan describes the use of a computing course to re-engage women in learning. Hordyk (2007) argues that the skills of team working are essential and can be developed for employability and Buckley, Barnes, Owens and Rutherford (2007) describe the development of partnerships that enhance learning opportunities. Bolt (2007) provides a case study of practice based learning to enhance employability and Zaitseva and Mitchell (2007) look at boundary crossing through a CPD project. Doyle's (2007) more theoretical paper explores the practices of partnerships by drawing on the Engestrom's activity theory and Jones (2007)
explores the changing nature of employees' identity on a work based Foundation degree. Walmsley (2007) presents a development of NVQ 4 course and Rowan (2007) describes the tuning of occupational qualification and skills in a European context. Blake (2007) explores the possibility of accrediting the part-time employment of undergraduate students. Davis and O'Doherty (2007) present case study evidence on adults that relates to learning as becoming.

There are over fifty papers in the Proceedings that address a range of issues pertinent to the sector and some of these have the potential for further development as research projects. With a more explicit theoretical framework several of these could be developed for peer reviewed educational journals. After four ECE conferences, two of which I have been involved in at different levels, how do we understand the nature of the changing environment? We need to understand environment as both something that we are familiar with and, at the same time something that is changing in relation to wider socio-economic forces. I have taught in the secondary sector that has been affected by curriculum and assessment changes and in the further education sector that has been subject to a never ending review-change-review process by different governments and by new Ministers. So change, to some extent in education, is beyond our control because it is directly related to both government policy and ministerial careers. Similarly, the processes of globalisation and internationalisation that involve the movement of people goods and services across the globe (Urry, 2000), at the same time that they involve us as consumers and travellers appear to be beyond our control because of the very scale of events. Some of these aspects of change and the ways in which we, as practitioners, attempt to make sense of the implications for practice are present in these proceedings.

Diversity and the resultant stratification within the system ensure that coping with difference is a key aspect of practice even at the level of engaging with a wider population of EU students who move within the boundaries of the EC (Reay *et al.* 2005). Change, in the form of partnerships, as a key aspect of government policy has to be both developed and analysed for mechanisms that work in particular contexts. New qualifications such as Foundation degrees require both development at the curriculum level and evaluation once they have been established. The development of different practices that are informed by both the changing nature of the student population and the possibilities that new technologies can offer in solving some of the problems posed by such change is a key aspect of these proceedings. However, as Conole and Oliver (2007) reminds us it is the articulation of technologies with theories of learning that pose the critical problems for practice. These, and many more aspects of change, are present in the four chapters that make up the 2007 ECE Proceedings. I would like to thank the editorial group, Dr. Viv Caruana, Dr. Ela Beaumont and John Owen for their comments and support and for the time they spent reading the papers.

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Editor

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