Learning and Teaching in Action

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Author: Charles Neame
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Editorial

This special issue of Learning & Teaching in Action brings together the reflections of a number of MMU colleagues with others, mainly from around the UK, but some from much further afield. Reading these personal accounts of teaching practitioners getting to grips with new experiences in professional development I am prompted to consider how readily we need to be able to switch between expert and novice roles.

These stories bring with them many examples of innovation: for many of us, participating in open and online learning is a new experience in itself; for most of the authors in this issue, facilitating that kind of course was particularly new; the technology we use is constantly changing, and it also is always new to someone, if not to all. ‘Dealing with what is new’ in higher education teaching is the one thing that is no longer new! In some shape or form we have to do it almost daily, either as teachers (or facilitators) or as students ourselves. The days when we could achieve a position of professional mastery and expertise and work from that constant for the rest of our professional days is, for many of us, now something of a myth. The idea of ‘teaching a canon’ of universally accepted disciplinary knowledge, which can only change with the measured consensus of a disciplinary peer group and which is taught according to the signature pedagogies of our discipline, is no longer as unshakeable as it once seemed. To deal with this, we have to get used to switching from teacher mode to learner mode, sometimes almost instantaneously.

This changing educational landscape is set out here by Chrissi Nerantzi and Carol Yeager, who have edited this edition. In doing so, they have not only brought together a series of stories with which we can identify according to our own experiences of open and online learning, but they are simultaneously inviting us all to share our own experiences too. The phrase ‘an ever-changing world’ can be irritating when used loosely by writers to excuse an insufficiently robust analysis of change; in the area of open and online learning and the technologies that support it, the world really does seem to be ‘ever-changing’ – for the time being at least. Sharing our own experiences of that change is to be encouraged, and I hope this collection will encourage colleagues everywhere to do so.

Charles Neame
Editor