Editorial

Welcome to this issue of *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*. Important social aspects of contemporary higher education are addressed in this issue by authors from a number of countries and social science disciplines. These range from learning and teaching concepts of capitalism and alienation, to the impacts of computerised university administration, the systematic ways certain categories of students fall through cracks in the academic pipeline, and how to reintroduce social activism into a 'professionalised' curriculum and teach social justice through international study visits.

In the first article, Neda Maghbouleh, Clayton Childress and Carlos Alamo-Pastrana describe and evaluate a role-playing exercise that they use in introductory sociology classes to teach key concepts in Marx's theory of capitalism. Students undertake the role of workers, managers and the reserve army of labour. Each worker simulates the physical labour required at the different stages of the production of wooden tables while the tutor gives a lecture on wage labour, surplus value, alienation and so on. At intervals, the managers pay the workers for their labour (in candy) that the workers then exchange for their means of subsistence. Individual students may decide to stop working by 'dying' at any time and are replaced from the reserve pool. The authors report that a collective withdrawal of labour always occurs at some point but that the managers' sanctions or inducements usually result in a return to work quite quickly.

Students' evaluations of the exercise were positive and said it helped them to understand the material. The experiential and the emotional aspects of the role play were particularly important in this. The students' gender, race, major subject, social class and educational background did not make a significant difference to their responses, and students in the earlier years of their programme found the exercise especially helpful. The authors conclude that the exercise is transferable to introductory Marxism classes for first- or second-year students in other social science subjects and in other countries.

In the second article, Asta Vonderau investigates the new online management system at a German University. Known locally as Jogustine, the system

was introduced in 2009 to implement changes to study programmes to conform to the Bologna model and to demonstrate the university's excellence in managing the whole of the student life-cycle from application to alumni status. Jogustine was promoted by the university leadership as a mechanism to ensure transparency, efficiency and fairness in all the institution's interactions with students. However, the author's ethnographic research shows that its design and use involves confusion, extra costs and disadvantage for some groups of students. The confusion arises from the need to translate academic concepts into the language of the system; the extra costs from the employment of extra administrators, often on insecure contracts; and the disadvantage from erroneous assumptions about the material conditions of students' lives – for example, that international applicants all have reliable Internet access and enrolled students are available to attend classes at any time during the week.

Vonderau points out that Jogustine is also an example of universities' becoming dependent on commercial products rather than systems they develop themselves. It is also a tool for standardisation and audit and a technology that reduces face-to-face human interaction. The dehumanising effects of Jogustine have provoked student protests and attempts to subvert the system.

In the third article, Holly Hansen-Thomas and Ludovic A. Sourdout explore the under-representation of Latina/o students in higher education in the U.S.A. More than 20 per cent of primary- and secondary-school students are Latina/o but currently only half graduate from high school within the expected time. While 52 per cent of Asian students, 33 per cent of white students and 20 per cent of black students who complete their secondary education gain an undergraduate degree, only 13 per cent of Latina/o students do so. Describing progress through the educational system as 'the academic pipeline', the authors draw on policy documents, interviews with teachers of students for whom English is a second language, autobiographical reflections and a case study of a student who was an undocumented migrant to analyse the issues. Factors that lead many Latina/o students to fall through the cracks of the academic pipeline include learning in a second language, lack of financial resources, no family history of or familiarity with higher education and low expectations. Young people who are undocumented migrants face additional difficulties because they lack legal status and the ability to access key documents such as a driver's licence.

The authors advocate legislative action to give access to citizenship to under-eighteens who are undocumented migrants, more programmes to promote educational aspirations, better training for teachers who work with English language learners and systematic provision of information in Spanish about higher education.

The fourth piece is an essay by Tobias Denskus and Daniel E. Esser in which they argue that the founding principles of International Development Studies are at risk from current attempts to vocationalise postgraduate programmes in North America and Western Europe. Originally established as an interdisciplinary field that critiques the theory and practice of international development, International Development has become more popular with prospective students in recent years. Courses have proliferated and, under pressure to align programmes with labour market needs and the career aspirations of applicants, universities have given greater emphasis to the teaching of professional skills. While acknowledging the need for courses to be relevant to future employment, the authors fear that the critical, intellectual dimension of the subject will be weakened by this trend towards professionalisation. In response, they advocate that the critical purposes of International Development courses should be foregrounded in their design and publicity, that curricula should include opportunities to connect with groups in the Global South and to learn about non-Western theoretical perspectives and that the skills taught should include the central one of being an activist for change.

We have invited a number of scholars in the area to comment on this essay and we will be publishing their responses in a future issue of *LATISS*.

In the fifth contribution, Joan Gross reports on a learning community established between Oregon and Ecuador on food and social justice. The two groups of participants introduced themselves in an outline meeting before the Ecuadorian group joined the Oregon group for two weeks of visiting alternative food system sites there. Both sets of participants then attended similar classes on agrifood movements, nutrition, health and rural-urban connections for two months in their home institutions. After this the groups toured alternative food sites in Ecuador for fourteen days.

Gross points out that the activities before and between the trips made the short visits a deeper learning experience, as did the opportunities to make cross-cultural relationships through sharing leisure activities, particularly cooking and eating food. Such initiatives need a lot of planning, plus

fundraising to defray some of the expenses of groups from less affluent countries. In future, the programme will be enhanced by an online course taken in advance, additional accredited coursework and more time for reflection during and after the exchange visits.

The issue ends with reviews of three books that cover the detrimental effects of impenetrable academic writing in the social sciences, the impact of social class origins on the prospects of women undergraduates and transformative learning in higher education.

Our thanks go to the authors of the articles, essay, report and book reviews, the anonymous referees who commented on the manuscripts, the publishers who provided review copies of the books, our own publisher Berghahn and the Editorial Board.

Penny Welch and Susan Wright