

# Editorial

In this issue of *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*, contributors from Canada, Denmark, Japan and the U.S.A. explore a variety of ways in which students' learning on social science courses can be enhanced.

David P. Thomas advocates the use of critical pedagogy in post-secondary social science classrooms in the first article. When students get the chance to shape aspects of the curriculum and to work collaboratively on the analysis of a current social issue, they increase their potential to be engaged and active citizens. The author applied the principles of critical pedagogy to a course on socially responsible investing, a topic that was of interest to many students at his Canadian university. The students chose the case-studies and the readings, wrote a collective report with recommendations for how the university should develop a strategy of socially responsible investment and presented the report to a public meeting.

The students showed high levels of commitment to the class activities and to the assignments. Their understanding of institutional investment decisions became more sophisticated and their awareness of the complexities of influencing them more extensive. The positive outcomes of the course seem to have rested on combining academic with experimental learning and using a student-centred approach in the classroom to analyse an issue with local salience.

In the second article, Helle Bundgaard and Cecilie Rubow address the incompatibility of extended individual anthropological fieldwork with the time-constraints of a two-year master's programme in Denmark. The classic model of the adventurous anthropologist setting out alone to immerse themselves in a different culture in a distant country still exerts a powerful influence on students. As a consequence, collective research and/or projects closer to home can be perceived as second-rate. But while long stays in the field may still be possible for doctoral students, they are impractical for master's students whose department will be penalised if they fail to complete the course on time.

Finding that fieldwork difficulties were the main cause of delays in completion, the authors embarked on a series of interventions to understand and



rectify the problem. This process culminated in the introduction of a guided fieldwork model based on building an online learning community mentored by PhD students. During their semester of fieldwork, students complete a series of assignments that oblige them to reflect on their own progress at regular intervals and get feedback from their mentor. They also respond to the reports of other students in their small group and share their dilemmas and difficulties in a private online forum. Involvement in the online community is not mandatory but positive feedback from participants in the first two years of operation has led to almost all students participating now.

Yukiko Ishikura reports in the third article on her study of the challenges encountered and benefits gained by Japanese students taking courses taught in English at their home universities. English-medium courses are part of a national government strategy to internationalise Japanese higher education and are particularly attractive to students who are unable to study abroad but wish to develop the skills and attributes associated with an international education. Gaining proficiency in English language was an important motivation for taking these courses, but the content and the learning and teaching methods were also sources of attraction.

Plenty of support from tutors and teaching assistants was available on the course chosen for the case study but the preference of many students was to avoid or delay asking for help. This meant that drop-out rates, particularly at the final assessment stage, were high. The author recommends that teaching staff on English-medium courses take a more strategic and proactive approach to offering advice and guidance to students.

In the fourth article, Christopher R. Cook investigates the extent to which the discipline of International Relations contributes to the current trend towards internationalisation of the curriculum in the U.S.A. He asks whether undergraduate courses in International Relations promote intercultural understanding and the recognition of plurality and diversity. Close analysis of thirty syllabi reveals that while the recommended texts have changed, the overwhelming emphasis is still on Western theory and relations between sovereign nation-states. Moreover, realism is the dominant theoretical perspective and state security the main focus.

While accepting that the field of International Relations is built on Western history and philosophy, the author argues that this narrow approach leaves out many important global developments of the last thirty years and, in particular, excludes the perspectives of non-Western and non-state actors. He advocates greater theoretical diversity in the curriculum



and more coverage of the economic aspects of globalisation and the role of transnational corporations and social movements. He acknowledges that this form of internationalisation can lead students to question U.S. economic and military hegemony and may provoke negative attention from conservative legislators.

The issue ends with two reviews, one by Hans Karl Peterlini of a book on the nature of scholarly authority and the other by Mary Brydon-Miller of an edited collection about community-based research.

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**Penny Welch and Susan Wright**