

Editorial: JEBE Online for the Future

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It is certainly a privilege to have been invited to take over the editorship of *the Journal for Education in the Built Environment* and so I would like to begin by extending my thanks to Mel Lees, as the pioneer Editor, and the editorial staff, particularly Diane Bowden, for their help in showing me the ropes. I would also like to remind readers that it was Chris Webster's initial idea to launch a high quality refereed journal that could help promote the development of an international community of educators in the broad subject area of the built environment.

Now in its third year, this issue of JEBE is testimony to the growing interest being shown by an expanding community of international teacher-researcher practitioner scholars to disseminate their research and practice. Not only do the published papers in the earlier issues demonstrate a deep engagement to research educational practices, but the diversity and substantive content of the papers clearly display the active critical reflection by educators working in the field of the built environment.

The two earlier volumes are also evidence that JEBE is becoming an important intellectual resource for teachers, trainers, practitioners, and scholars. Thank you to all the teacher-researcher practitioners who have identified JEBE as an appropriate scholarly channel to disseminate and share their pedagogic knowledge and insights. May I invite other scholars amongst you to consider publishing in JEBE.

It is also pertinent here to acknowledge Tom Berner's inspirational creation of the Web to support the dissemination of scholarly work. This innovation is recognised as having had a major impact on the scientific and publishing world (Abate, 1997). From a practical perspective, the shift from hardcopy to electronic media has the potential to reduce production costs, but, more importantly, means that articles can be disseminated, indexed, linked, copied, archived, redistributed and searched much more easily, and much more quickly; and are far more portable (Resh, 1998; Conway *et al.*, 2001). In addition, the availability of online journals has significant implications for the nature of our teacher-researcher community since, as Taubes (1996, p. 764) predicted:

this electronic wave isn't just a change in medium; it is also a force that is transforming the nature of scientific communication. Publishers talk about using the interactive powers of the Internet to turn journals into perpetual electronic conferences, where articles take the place of lectures and sprout on-line discussion groups and commentary.

The virtual shelf-life of online articles may thus be extended and animated in a number of interactive ways.

Online articles have certain advantages over hardcopy formats: they have the potential to include supplementary material, such as video and audio links, animations, and three-

dimensional modelling; they may have fewer space constraints; they can provide for extensive search functions, stimulate interactive discussion forums, and encourage opportunities (literally) to network with authors and other experts - most obviously through hyperlinks to related articles and databases (Taubes, 1996; Conway *et al.*, 2001). Many of these facilities and options would simply not be replicable solely in paper form.

Moreover, JEBE, and its stable-mate, *CEBE Transactions*, are open access. They are thus part of a new generation of open and online journals with a global reach, offering the free exchange of ideas between scholars (Scaria, 2003). This further opens up the potential connections and offers the prospective of reaching new audiences (Kling and Covi, 1995), thereby actively widening the built environment pedagogical research community. As part of its vision, JEBE welcomes new voices.

Notwithstanding the perceived advantages of the Internet, a number of concerns have also been raised about the random placement and ease of access of information in the electronic world. This has prompted questions about the authenticity, accuracy, validity and ultimate value of the information available (Heckman, 2000). This helps to explain why, in some quarters, there is a degree of suspicion and scepticism about *e-journals* over *p-journals* (Sweeney, 2000). Over a decade ago, Kling and Covi (1995), for example, suggested:

Today, many scholars are confused about the formats and intellectual quality of e-journals. In extreme cases, they feel that e-journals must be of lower intellectual quality than p-journals, because they sense something insubstantial and potentially transient - ghostly, superficial, unreal, and thus untrustworthy - in electronic media.

Yet, this is precisely why the peer review process is such a critical guarantor of the quality and rigour of scholarly dissemination in whatever form. As Heckman (2000) notes, notwithstanding the sometimes laborious nature of the peer review editorial process, this approach provides for:

- the screening of submitted material;
- the selection of high quality work;
- developmental support through peers for additional accuracy and clarity; and
- validation of the final submission.

Importantly, then, JEBE is very grateful to all those who act as peer reviewers since these scholars have a critical role in criticising, evaluating, and nurturing the work of their peers. This review process is a vital component in legitimising contributions to any journal and in building up a shared knowledge base (Sweeney, 2000). It also forms part of a mutual learning process where peers provide advice, support and critical feedback through the blind review dialogue.

Reflecting the international reach of JEBE and the objective of integrating the built environment professions, this issue duly contains a rich collection of papers which seek to enhance teaching and learning theory and practice. Margaret Horne and Emine Thompson (Northumbria University, UK) examine the role of Virtual Reality and three-dimensional

computer modelling on learning and teaching in a School of the Built Environment. Their study attempts to better understand the values and challenges of integrating visualisation technologies into built environment teaching and specifically offers insights into tutors' perceptions, opinions and concerns with respect to these technologies. The article by Carolyn Hayles (Queen's University Belfast, UK) and Sarah Holdsworth (RMIT University, Australia) reports a curriculum change research project which sought to explore and empower a new way of teaching sustainability within a School of Property, Construction and Project Management. This places an important emphasis on the cultural context necessary to nurture and sustain transformatory change if sustainability principles are to be embedded.

The final collaborative paper in this issue by Mei-yung Leung (City University of Hong Kong, China), Ying Wang (Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology, China) and Paul Olomolaiye (University of Wolverhampton, UK) seeks to provide a deeper theoretical understanding of the teaching and learning causal relationships relating to construction engineering undergraduates in Hong Kong. This pays particular attention to unravelling and explaining the significance of students' personal characteristics, different learning and teaching approaches, and students' overall performance and satisfaction.

This volume concludes with two sole-authored papers. Richard Tucker (Deakin University, Australia) examines the concept of learning style drift through a discussion of a cross-curriculum learning style survey conducted in an Australian School of Architecture and Building as part of an ongoing project aimed at resolving the learning difficulties of students collaborating in multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural team assignments. Drawing on David Kolb's work, Tucker invites us to reflect on how teacher learning styles impact on – and potentially shape – student learning styles.

Finally, Patrick Zou (University of New South Wales, Australia) provides a critically reflective paper around the challenge of developing a multi-pronged assessment strategy that can help students develop different skills and enhance student learning in postgraduate construction project management studies in an equitable and meaningful way.

What is interesting about this collection of papers is the extent to which the contributors are, each in their own way, intrinsically motivated by the practical challenges of explaining and enhancing the theories and practices of teaching and learning in the 21st century. The papers not only build on an established and shared knowledge base, but cross-fertilise insights across subject areas. They blend experiential learning and reflective self-questioning with the interrogation of empirical data collection. They challenge established thinking and invite further research.

Ultimately, however, it is the impact that the dissemination process makes to scholarly knowledge and practice that is crucial to the success of JEBC. Finally, then, thanks are due to the current readership of JEBC. Accessions to journal papers are continuing to grow at a pleasing rate and submissions are steadily rising. We invite you to become part of JEBC's community of reflective teacher-researcher practitioners as readers or contributors.

In the context of the built environment, JEBE provides a very particular scholarly outlet. It is online, subject to blind peer review, and free. I would welcome your feedback on how the journal meets your needs and how you would like to see it develop.

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