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DIVERSE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Trish Chaplin-Cheyne

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## DIVERSE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Trish Chaplin-Cheyne

Welcome to the 2022 edition of *Scope: Learning and Teaching*. The theme for this eleventh edition is the same as the last two years, open, which encouraged a variety of stimulating submissions. Issue 11 provides a forum for our academic staff to share experiences, offer learnings through reflection and affirm a commitment to enhance practice. In addition, this issue includes a special section on neurodiversity and neurodivergence. This emphasis on diverse voices is a timely inclusion as we move into a new era of vocational education through the Polytechnic merger into Te Pūkenga.

### TEACHER TRAINING AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

To open this issue, we present recent research on effective teacher training and how best to develop the tertiary educators of the future. Martin Andrew and Oksana Razoumova remind us of the learning value of practicums for emerging educators. Their study examines the rich narratives found within the collected responses of 22 practice teachers who had created portfolios as part of their practicum assessment. Their research findings highlight the importance of providing opportunities for reflection that acknowledge and prepare novice educators for continuing their professional learning journey.

A fascinating article by David Woodward and colleagues provides an insight into the unique transition from subject matter expert to tertiary teacher at Otago Polytechnic (OP). Through a community of practice, this group of recent tertiary education graduates reflect on their first impressions of teaching and co-develop a set of recommendations to be considered moving forward. They highlight the importance of a scaffolded approach that develops tertiary educators from novice to expert, that includes opportunities for mentoring, peer observation, and structured induction processes that are supported within a community of practice.

Complementing this research on tertiary teacher training, Bruno Balducci, Natalie Smith and John Mumford reflect on approaches to learning in classroom and online spaces. Balducci's contribution questions what experiential learning means to tertiary teachers and the impact of this approach on a student's learning experience. His research focusses on the authentic and interactive classroom-based learning practices of Otago Polytechnic lecturers at the Auckland campus. His article emphasises the differing perceptions of experiential learning based on one's teaching context but also finds common themes of student engagement, practicality, authenticity in the world of work, and interactivity both in the classroom and online. Natalie Smith reflects how her experiential learning experiences as a teacher of art history and theory led her to consider implementing this learning theory with her learners through collage. What is key in Smith's article is how she successfully uses collage to aid learners to understand the concepts of sociology through visualisation. Mumford's article also highlights ways to connect subject theory to practice for Information Technology students. Responding to the needs of employers for skilled data analysts to generate business intelligence, Mumford explains how he develops this skill in learners through the application of critical thinking to solve problems using Decision Theory and Decision Support Systems.

## ONLINE LEARNING AND RESEARCH

Facilitating effective online delivery has never been more important than it is right now. The three articles on this theme in this issue note both the advantages of online tools and their potential pitfalls. Jerry Hoffman, Robyn Hill, and Warren Smith from the Southern Institute of Technology highlight key strategies that support effective facilitation in this mode. Their research acknowledges these key strategies and explores the online experience from the Master's-level learners' perspective. David Bettis's article continues with the theme of online delivery and provides valuable points to consider when planning for learner interaction. He argues that it is the responsibility of facilitators to ensure the digital tools we are including in our online classes provide learners with the opportunity to become competent technology users.

Philippa Crombie and Cath Fraser in their article give a nod to the phenomenon that is social media but query our reliance on this tool in higher education. They urge caution, especially for novice researchers, in the areas of bias, ethics, credibility, validity and representation if relying on social media to support academic research applications.

## ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH, COMMUNICATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Along with online learning, environmental issues and sustainability have become central to educational institutions in the current era. Edgar Burns provides a timely reminder of the urgent need for social change to impact the negative effects of climate change. He explains how teachers must carefully navigate current discourse and reinvent pedagogical practice when communicating topics that can trigger emotional responses. In his article, Burns describes how factual and verifiable science can be communicated and made visible to learners.

At Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus (OPAIC), sustainability initiatives became the focus of an internship work-based learning project. The research reported in this article by Marianne Cherrington and others questions learner perceptions with an aim for continual learning and teaching improvement that can be progressed by cohorts in the following teaching block. Whether by good luck or good design this article describes 'sustainability in education.'

David Culliford and Amohia Peka in their article discuss another successful collaboration: a summer scholarship research project investigating estuary habitat health. Through the project, which aimed to quantify kaimoana by measuring pipi, tuangi and tītiko populations in tidal zones across six sites within the Waikareao Estuary, they identify the hidden value of the supervisor / student relationship. Their contribution shows how providing opportunity for our students to lead, better prepares them to be authentic, work-ready practitioners or employees.

## NEURODIVERGENCE AND NEURODIVERSITY

Percy F. ... aged 14 ... has always been a bright and intelligent boy, quick at games, and in no way inferior to others of his age. His great difficulty has been – and is now – his inability to learn to read. (Shaywitz, 1996, p. 98)

Many of us can relate to the characteristic anomalies associated with learning difficulties. However, the quotation above was retrieved from an article in the *British Medical Journal* printed in 1896. Since this time there have been many theories, hypotheses and definitions of neurodivergence which can appear highly complex and often leave educators and neurodiverse learners at a loss for practical classroom interventions.

This special section focusses on diverse minds and provides valuable insights for educators to better know our learners. Stella Lange opens this section with honest behavioural insight into the needs of neurodiverse learners

and the potential risk of misunderstanding those needs. Amber Fraser-Smith gives an insight into neurodiversity that is backed by science and also provides some support strategies. Amy Benians in her article argues for developing a new learning analytics tool, co-designed with learners, that will support all learners.

Next, we hear from some learner voices. Deane Patterson and Steve Henry reflect on their learning experiences through the neurodiverse lens and discuss the importance of designing for inclusive learning environments. To close the section, Rachel van Gorp provides a personal story describing the value she found in disclosing her neurodivergent self at the inaugural Neurodiversity Symposium, and the ongoing learning she receives as being a member of the Otago Polytechnic Neurodiversity Community of Practice.

We are privileged to present this special section on Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence in *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Learning and Teaching) 11*.

**Trish Chaplin-Cheyne** is the director of Te Ama Ako | Learning and Teaching Development at Otago Polytechnic | Te Kura Matatini ki Otago | Te Pūkenga, where she is responsible for the learning and teaching development service team. This team is tasked with ensuring that OP programmes and courses are designed to best practice standards; that academic staff have the full range of knowledge and skills needed to facilitate learner success; and that learners enjoy an outstanding experience with Otago Polytechnic. She is involved with facilitating on the Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education and enjoys being in the classroom environment. Trish joined Otago Polytechnic in 2015, as a learning facilitator involved in the Designing for Learner Success initiative. Her areas of particular interest are curriculum and assessment design.

🌐 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2709-572X>

## REFERENCES

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