



Dear Readers,

We have seen increasing development of a number of emerging instructional strategies over the last few years that have captured the imagination of researchers, lecturers and teachers at national and international levels. Authors and editors are acquainted with many of these, but many have also been rephrased and redefined to capture their roles and functions in specific contexts. They range from blended learning, hybrid learning, group work, cooperative learning, teamwork, peer learning, flipped learning to virtual realities, digital learning, MOOCs, project and problem-based learning, automatized learning, e-learning, and e-laboratories - and there are many more. In many cases, the contexts in which teaching and learning is taking place focus on classical and historical problem areas such as mathematics education, science education, as well as the teaching of English to second language learners. Many reports focus our attention on the social and environmental inequalities of our time, poorly and under-resourced learning environments, overcrowded classrooms, and poorly qualified educators. The support provided to teachers and learners to perform their tasks and functions has also seen significant changes in the past decade. Scholars have been doing a lot of research to better understand quality and quality assurance, thinking and teaching styles, and student support and performance.

The International Journal of Instruction (IJI) has reported comprehensively on many of these themes and topics over the years, and has shown its commitment to voicing the opinions of scholars as a benchmark of international quality and significance.

This issue deals with a number of contemporary teaching strategies ranging from group work, cooperative learning, scientific inquiry, concept mapping, communication, English essay writing, mathematics education to measuring student performance in mathematics, and reflective teaching. The researchers also address inclusive education, student satisfaction, performance enhancement, quality education, teacher qualifications, phenomenological analyses, disruptive behaviour, and bullying. One article concludes by pointing to past and contemporary trends in the reporting of educational research.

Cooperative learning as an instructional strategy and a form of classroom intervention still remains a popular research focus for many practitioners. Zedda, Bernardelli and Maron illustrate how groupwork (as a cooperative learning technique) influences student learning positively, and explain how students' active participation during group work can be beneficial to both cognitive and social skills in terms of overall student satisfaction and performance enhancement. On the same topic, Inuwa, Abdullah and Hassan reiterate that cooperative learning could enhance the achievement of secondary school students. In a third article on cooperative learning, Seyoum and Basha explain how cooperative learning as an active andragogical strategy should be regarded as one of the most highly used and rated active learning method, as related to their specific study.

The work done by Kozikoğlu raises the importance of major work currently being done on teacher identities and the development of teacher identities in communities of practice globally. He acknowledged that teaching pedagogical skills, humaneness (joviality), and personal and professional values should be regarded as dominant categories of prospective teachers' cognitive constructs. He argues that these cognitive constructs play important roles in developing conceptual models of ideal teaching. The use of a qualitative phenomenological strategy on 'repertory grids' was also important in this study as it allowed the research to explore phenomena in their natural settings. This is a classical technique that was used in a form of data collection and research methodology that was first known as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), which later became established as Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA).

The Anatolievna, Murovna, Kasimovna and Mirzayanovna report on the communication ability development of university students, and bring to our attention how a narrative approach can allow the pedagogical management of communication ability development as the process of creating conditions for successful social psychological adaptation and effective interaction with other people. They reiterate the importance of perceiving people, assessing them adequately, showing empathy and understanding, and keeping a steady state of the individual self.

Ertikanto, Herpratiwi, Yurarti and Saputra dealt with a classical phenomenon that has been dominating scientific teaching and learning for a few decades now. Whether it is called discovery learning, investigation or experimentation, or inquiry-based teaching and learning, it has been the focus of science educators for many years. The researchers explain how a teacher-training program, called the Model-Supported Scientific Inquiry Training Program (MSSITP), has been successfully developed to improve the inquiry skills of Indonesian elementary teachers. The programme impacted significantly on the inquiry skills of respondents.

To find an innovative approach to the teaching of history, Nair and Narayanasamy sought the value of concept maps in the teaching of history and claim that they found that the utilisation of the concept map method was significant in improving students' achievement and interest in history. One has to agree that the findings of this study support the theory of meaningful learning and the utilisation of concept maps. The authors also claim that the findings have strong pedagogical implications for innovative history teaching.

Gholami and Alinasab introduced a strategy of source-based writing tasks in their research approach, and explored how this approach could impact the writing practice of English First Language learners. They also followed and investigated the probable differences between those tasks and independent writing tasks in improving Iranian EFL learners' essay writing abilities. They found that participants with hybrid writing practices outperformed their counterparts in integrated essay tests.

The content and construct validation of the measuring instruments used in systemic evaluations such as TIMSS and PIRLS have been drawing the attention of edumetrists the past decade and more. It is against this background that seven colleagues from

Sultan Oaboos University and the Ministry of Education in Oman researched the development and validation of a scale for measuring mathematics education at primary school level. The three subscales that emerged from the investigation, showed strong internal consistency and sufficient evidence of construct validity and concurrent validity. They illustrated how these scales have potential uses for both educational and research purposes. Closely linked to this article is a report by Retnawi, who focused on the assessment of mathematics in the national examination where the competences mastered have to be identified by the examination. Students were found to lack basic and more complex functions necessary to master mathematics adequately.

The work of Khoshaim alerted us once again to the issue of high school readiness for tertiary education, and explored the challenges that students have to face when moving to higher education institutions.

Inclusive education is a major challenge that teachers have to face in regular classrooms. It follows the major global trend that special needs education is no longer regarded as an isolated practice, but as an inclusive requirement to fully integrate learners with impairments into everyday school settings. However, very few teachers are educated to cope with inclusivity. The findings of Padmadewi and Aritini once again focus on such challenges. They found that schools and teachers who participated in the study had very limited preparedness either in teaching skills or material development to meet the actual needs of inclusive students in general. Their study then aimed to investigate appropriate strategies for teaching English to a student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) that had been included in a regular classroom. In their findings, it is especially of note how the Individual Education Plan (IEP), supported by visual media through co-teaching, differentiated instruction and also through a “buddy program”, helped the student learn English as a foreign language. They thought that the strategies used were effective enough to be implemented in an inclusive classroom programme.

In another study, Purwati and Japar embraced the association between the education of parents and their children’s disruptive behaviour. Interesting results emerged from the study showing some effects of parents’ education and personality on children’s disruptive behaviour, as well as some association between parents’ aggressive personality and children’s disruptive behaviour. Similarly, the article by Adegboyega, Okesina and Jacob examine the association between family relationships and bullying behaviour among secondary school students with disabilities. The most important finding of this study is that there is, in fact, such a relationship.

Eğmir, Erdem and Koçyiğit’s findings are alarming, yet understood to some extent, as they claim that quantitative research designs appear to be the methodology of choice for researchers who reported their findings in the IJI. The value of such post-positivist applications to educational research and data analysis is appreciated, especially by colleagues performing secondary analyses on TIMSS and PIRLS data; yet a little concerning as researchers have relied more on descriptive analyses and not on more sophisticated inferential applications. Furthermore, there is ample evidence to believe that future trends in instruction and learning could rely heavily on qualitative interventions that are supposed to contribute to the professional development and

emancipation of staff and students. This might be one of the reasons why so much attention is currently being drawn to research-based teaching strategies such as traditional Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA). Both approaches rely heavily on reflection. This is further confirmed by the article by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh, who emphasise the importance of reflection on the development of professional disciplinary practices. PAR and PRA depend on collaborative participation, allowing group work and cooperative learning to ground the interventions that have become the hallmark of these strategies. On the other hand, Sulaiman, Sulaiman and Abdul Rahim demonstrated the use of multiple data collection strategies very effectively as they attempted to discuss teachers' perceptions on the standard-based English language curriculum in Malaysian primary schools.

We also rely on qualitative research methodologists who, with their narrative, interpretative and discourse analytical skills - and 'way-with-words' -, to entertain us with innovative and creative instructional ideas. Theory-building remains however our major endeavour and most values professorial enterprise.

Sincerely,

Prof. William J Fraser CBIOL FRSB

Associate Editor

Emeritus Professor

Department of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education

Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria, South Africa

Email: william.fraser@up.ac.za