

Introduction

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Innovative Teaching and Learning (ITL) has undergone a series of changes over the past eighteen months in its editorial team and practices. The Managing Editor, Dr Yi-Lung Kuo, and Assistant Editor, Zhixiang Yang, have both moved on to new challenges. The ITL Editorial Board thanks them for their tireless efforts on behalf of the journal, seeing it through difficult and turbulent times. Their departure has led to an inevitable pause while the new editorial team comes to grip with the journal and reflects on its purpose and mission going forward. As this period of reflection took place, there was a hiatus in the production of the journal; our apologies go out to those who submitted manuscripts that were caught in the backlog. We are confident that, as the journal is rebooted, production will henceforth be smoother, and the content will be even stronger than before.

The present issue, we believe, bears out this confidence. As higher education in China and across the globe enters a period of accelerated disruption and technological change, there is a greater need than ever for research and informed discussion of pedagogical innovation. How can we integrate new technologies while preserving the fundamental values of education? How do we prepare both faculty and students for an increasingly digital learning environment? These questions lie at the heart of this special issue, which brings together perspectives from both emerging and established scholars in the field.

The majority of papers collected in this special issue originate in presentations given at an interdisciplinary conference for emerging researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, organized by Professor Indika Liyanage and hosted by the Institute

for Cross-Cultural Studies and the David C. Lam Institute for East-West Studies, at BNU-HKBU United International College in May 2024 (Chen et al., 2024). These papers are revised and expanded versions of presentations given at this conference, and thus they indicate the concerns, particularly of young scholars, as well as senior students and new graduates, who are entering the profession as university teachers. A constant theme in these papers is the nature of innovation, in particular the fast-changing affordances of the technological support that is now available to students and faculty. Through their research, these emerging scholars explore possible ways that training and curriculum design might evolve in response to an educational environment influenced by AI and other digital tools.

The issue opens with Malila Prado's examination of how AI literacy can be systematically and thoughtfully integrated into different undergraduate courses. Her students were in the field of literature and translation studies, but the competences she addresses are relevant to a much greater range of disciplines. Xujia Yuan reflects on the future of EFL instruction in blended-learning environments. Although memories of the COVID pandemic of 2019-2022 may be fading, one legacy of the restrictions on social contact during that period follows from the abrupt and deep engagement with teaching and learning in full or partial online environments that the restrictions necessitated. Blended language learning is now an established but little-understood practice, and one that seems set to develop further as AI-powered applications become ever more pervasive. Even so, in the Humanities the object of study is rightly the individual and his or her relation to the social collective, and Ruixue Zhang offers an alternative to the sometimes blinkered focus only on digital and AI tools as a source of innovation. She reflects on the novel use of autoethnography in college writing to redirect students' gaze away from the shiny baubles of co-piloting software, towards an inward reflection on the self, and one's own emotions, beliefs and values. Students' autoethnographic reflections were prompted by their study of the classic text, *Frankenstein*. Her essay comes as a timely reminder that one of the functions of a liberal arts education is personal growth, self-awareness, and the development of wisdom, not just the acquisition of a set of marketable technical skills.

Student-centred teaching and learning also inform Yue Fu's investigation of student perceptions of academic listening support given by university ESP instructors. While instructors often conscientiously follow long-established and sage teaching protocols,

the value of these may not easily be understood by learners, who consequently develop their own strategies that complement, supplement or disregard the instructor's intended learning outcomes. Yue's essay stands as a salutary reminder that the instructors' perceptions of effective strategies might not align with those of the learners, and that teachers, as well as students, might need to learn to listen more effectively.

Ziqian Zhou addresses a different kind of misalignment in the educational system, that between the taught content of courses and standardized examinations. Taking as an example the Zhongkao exam in China, and the textbooks used to prepare for it, Zhou demonstrates how corpora of textbook material can be matched to exam readings to show whether the textbooks adequately cover the language that is tested. Instructors with an understanding of the corpus-informed techniques can follow the steps that Zhou describes to evaluate the reliability of any assessment that purports to test material that has been taught over the duration of a given course.

Nicolay Demerdzhiev's working paper, part of an established and ongoing comparative study of innovative practices in music education to gifted students, might at first seem qualitatively different in topic from the others in this issue. However, it echoes themes that are evident elsewhere: like Ruixue Zhang's essay, it privileges narrative as a means to ascertain knowledge, and champions education in the arts as a means of fulfilment and self growth.

Beyond the conference presentations, this issue features one submission that further enriches our exploration of innovative teaching and learning approaches. Peter Xiao Luo, Guozhi Cai, Xueshan Zhang, and Andrew Ji Ma examine language learning strategies used by English learners in a cooperative university setting. This study identifies cognitive, metacognitive, and compensatory strategies as key to students' English proficiency, shedding light on how learners adapt within English-medium instruction environments. Their findings contribute practical insights into curriculum design for non-English-speaking students in expanding-circle institutions. The article takes a quantitative approach to the analysis of data; a qualitative angle on the same topic will be presented in a future issue of *ITL*.

The papers collected in this issue, then, give a taste of the intended direction the journal will take under a new editorial team and structure. Under the editor-in-chief and managing editor, we will invite guest editors to explore areas of special interest, whilst also calling on individual contributors to submit papers in their own discipline.

We aim to provide an arena for the demonstration and discussion of pedagogy at a time when innovation is almost relentless. While our focus is on new ways of teaching and learning, often using technology, we continue to uphold the values and beliefs that characterise liberal arts education. In the end, as an eminent colleague used to remind me, we do not teach skills, we teach people. Thus, this journal will be dedicated to innovative pedagogical research that contributes to whole-person education. We look forward to engaging readers in stimulating conversations as we move forward into a new phase.

References

- Chen, X., Lan, X., Liyanage, I., Ning, X., Prado, M., Rotaru, A. C., . . . Zhang, R. (Eds.). (2024). *Interdisciplinary Conference in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Empowering Emerging Researchers*. 2 Volumes. Zhuhai, Guangdong, China: BNU-HKBU United International College/Hong Kong Baptist University