Graduate Perspectives: Teaching in Higher Education

This publication describes the current challenges facing teaching and learning in Higher Education from the perspective of postgraduate students.

The contributors to the book are in the early stages of their formation as teachers, i.e. tutors or demonstrators, and participated in a postgraduate module in University College Cork entitled Teaching and Learning for Graduate Studies, which culminated in a one day symposium. The paper and poster presentations by the postgraduate students form the content of this publication and highlight their initial experiences of teaching in Higher Education.

This publication is an accompaniment to the sister publication, *In at the Deep End—starting to teach in Higher Education* and both can be ordered from the NAIRTL website.

Excellence in Teaching Awards 2011

The National Academy invites nominations for its 2011 Awards for Excellence in Teaching. This is the fourth year of this national initiative which honours staff in higher education institutions who are exemplary teachers and innovative researchers and who successfully unite these two roles.

Previous recipients of the National Award for Excellence in Teaching include staff from eleven Higher Education Institutions and these represent multiple disciplines including Economics, Education, Engineering, English, Law (Human Rights), Management and Marketing, Mathematics, Medicine, Nursing and the Sciences.

Further details on this initiative including the nomination form, Awards brochure and a video with up-to-date advice on making a nomination, are all available at www.nairtl.ie/awards.

Engaging Minds Conference

Running from 9-10 June 2011, the National Academy’s annual conference is focused on the topic of active student engagement in the learning process. This conference will be held in NUI Galway in conjunction with CELT’s Galway Symposium on Higher Education.

We invite abstract submissions from a broad range of disciplines under the following themes:
- students as co-creators of knowledge
- civic engagement & social responsibility
- the first year experience
- engaging large classes
- technology enhanced learning

Abstract submission forms are available to download from the NAIRTL website www.nairtl.ie/conference and should be submitted by 31 March. This conference is free to attend and registration is now open.

Launch of National Framework for Supervisor Support

The National Academy will unveil its framework for optimising support for research supervisors at a half-day workshop in Dublin on April 11.

The workshop is focused on the development of support structures for supervisors and will feature presentations from members of the National Academy’s Supervisor Support Working Group who have worked collaboratively to develop and pilot a framework curriculum, drawing on best practice from Australasia, Europe and North America.

Invites to the workshop have been sent to the Deans of Graduate Studies, Heads of Research, Graduate admissions Officers, Staff Development officers, and all other relevant staff in the thirty eight Higher Educational Institutions linked to NAIRTL. Following the workshop, interested institutions will be invited to contact the National Academy with a view towards availing of the curriculum framework, resources and online discussion forum, all of which will be accessed via a password protected Virtual Learning Environment.

This framework curriculum has been developed at a time when there is increasing demand from academic staff for more support in preparing for the task of supervising postgraduate students as well as more calls at international, national and local level for more structured procedures for supervision and for the development of academic supervisory skills.

Please contact NAIRTL directly for further details.
Diary dates 2011

16 March
AHEAD, in collaboration with UCD’s School of Nursing, will run a one day conference on how to support students with disabilities in clinical practice. Details at www.ahead.ie.

13-15 April
The European University Association will hold its annual conference at Aarhus University, Denmark. The theme of the conference is talent development, and this event also provides the opportunity to take stock with regard to the future of the EUA as it celebrates its ten year anniversary.
www.eua.be/aarhus.aspx

1-2 June
Waterford Institute of Technology will play host to the 12th annual ILTA conference. The theme of this year’s conference is Innovation, Technologies and Practice: Show me the Learning! For full details go to http://ilta.net

9-10 June
The National Academy’s 5th Annual Conference Engaging Minds: active learning, participation and collaboration in Higher Education will be held at NUI Galway in collaboration with CELT.
www.nairtl.ie/conference

26-29 June
Adult numeracy and maths education is the focus of ALM18, the international conference of Adults Learning Mathematics at IT Tallaght.
www.ittdublin.ie/events/alm18conference

Submit details of your event via our website www.nairtl.ie.

Would this work in your classroom? ICT in assessment

The development of ICT skills is a key competence for today’s graduate and one of several key areas being investigated as part of the international project Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills. Collaborative between six countries and funded by Cisco, Dell and Microsoft, the project examines how assessment and education can be transformed to foster the development of such skills in students. One example of a classroom assessment that you might consider trying is the following:

1: Identify a problem scenario for your students using a voice recording which you post online. The scenario ideally describes a problem that they might face in their future world of work and would consequently require them to think as the practitioner.
2: The student is encouraged to use ICT tools to address the problem. For example, the student corresponds with work colleagues and experts via email or social networking tools, they conduct research online, and they create a multimedia presentation to defend their recommendations on how to solve the problem.
3: The final presentation can then be recorded by the student as a podcast and uploaded to a virtual learning environment e.g. blackboard, moodle, or similar online space for students to give feedback and comments.

Do you have a suggestion for ways to integrate research, teaching and learning in the classroom? Please email nairtl@ucc.ie and your suggestion may be featured in this column.

Threshold Concepts

Threshold Concepts are concepts which are central to the mastery of a subject. They have been described as being akin to a portal, and they open up new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking.

Examples of disciplinary Threshold Concepts include ‘evolution’ in Biology, ‘gravity’ in Physics, ‘ethical reading’ in Literary Studies, ‘precedence’ in Law, ‘opportunity cost’ in Economics and ‘geological time’ in Geology, to name but a few.

The Threshold Concepts International conference takes place every two years and was held in Kingston, Ontario in 2008, and in Sydney in 2010. The 2012 conference is being organised by NAIRTL and will take place in Dublin from 27-29 June.

The conference will examine the use of Threshold Concepts in personal practice. It will also highlight novel use of these ideas in communities of practice such as those that support professional development.

Registration is now open for this event and abstracts are invited for papers, workshops and posters under the following themes: interdisciplinary threshold concepts, new developments in Threshold Concepts, the intergration of research, teaching and learning as a Threshold Concept, and the use of Threshold Concepts in professional development.

There will be several events organised in advance of the 2012 conference to support the development of this research area. Details of upcoming events will be posted online at: www.nairtl.ie/conference2012

About NAIRTL

For details regarding any of our events or activities, please refer to our website www.nairtl.ie or contact us:
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NAIRTL is on facebook and twitter too.