Editorials: Sharing best practice in education – sharing the evidence from practitioners

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'Sharing best/good practice' is a common phrase used across almost all professional domains. Stakeholders in education such as teachers, academics and policy makers often agree that sharing best practice is essential to improve quality of teaching and learning in schools (Fieilding et al, 2005). However, there may be degrees of differences in views between these stakeholders on how sharing of good practice should progress. Teaching professionals often have a sense of what 'best practice' is and can easily recognise one when seen. As such, many teachers have had sustained engagements in improving their practice through drawing on good practice to effect changes in areas of practice such as in instructional methods and classroom management (Senge et al, 2012). However, the notion of best practice is very elusive and can vary in meaning from one context to another and sometimes from one practitioner to another (Fazey, 2004). Best practice is viewed as an existing practice that shows clear evidence of effectiveness (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012); it is often based on the notion of 'what works' with particular emphasis on a particular situation, context or environment.

How does a practitioner determine and adopt best/good practice in teaching and learning? The first consideration is contextual analysis – is the said 'best practice' relevant to my context? How will adopting it lead to improve my current practice? In what ways may this be applied to my current practice? The practitioner should also draw on her/his own experience/reflective practice as well as critically consider the evidence available to determine the efficacy and sustainability of the proposed best practice. This may involve asking questions such as: Has a similar practice been adopted in the past, with what outcomes? To what extent does the proposed practice inform and complement my current reflections in/on my practice? Is there sufficient evidence to support the efficacy and sustainability of the proposed best practice – research and theory? The papers in this issue present articles based on research and from practitioners' reflective views on practice as part of the means to facilitate and further discussions on our practice as educators.

The first paper in this issue, 'The creative use of cohesive devices: Exploring new roles' by Emad A. S. Abu-Ayyash, focuses on re-examining cohesive devices as one of the important linguistic tools. The paper highlights the one-way focus of most research on the

'gluing' role of the concept in discourse to the detriment of other potentially important roles. Abu-Ayyash draws on a number of works from the renowned writer, Thomas L. Friedman, to form the basis of analysis and conclusion. The paper concludes that cohesive devices play other roles at different levels including role as an organising tool and a clear role of situating cases in a broader context.

In the second paper, Senthilnathan Ramakrishnan and Abdulai Abukari set out to explore the degree to which leaders in a higher education institution in the UAE use the so-called distributed leadership style. The paper posits that distributed leadership is gradually becoming the most preferred and influential approach in the 21st century, especially in the education sector, due to its pragmatic approach to leadership. The paper argues that despite the views that distributed leadership has lots to offer leadership practice in the education sector, evidence from the research shows that the context in which leaders practice influences their leadership style and often involves a combination of a wide range of leadership styles.

Christopher Hill and Mona Mohammed's paper aims to understand the key issues and challenges students face in conducting qualitative research. The paper argues that research and research output are increasingly becoming crucial elements to determine excellence across higher education institutions and students research in many emerging sectors struggle to keep up to this due to limited experience. The finding in this research shows that challenges faced by students include issues related to selecting appropriate research topics and conducting interviews. The paper proposes a number of recommendations to help deal with the challenges.

Soulafa Ahmad Al Khatib examines formative walk-throughs and their impact on formative assessment and students' performance in the fourth paper. Assessment in teaching and learning has always been a central concern to almost all stakeholders in the education sector. Drawing on literature, the paper highlights the potential in formative assessment to improve students' learning and achievements. Based on empirical evidence, the paper concludes that formative walk-throughs are important vehicles to facilitate effective formative assessments and to improve student learning. It encourages school cultures to adopt more practical and effective approaches to assessing student learning.

The impact of supporting parents of children with disabilities is the fifth paper. Rawy A. Thabet; Eman Gaad and Emad A.S. Abu-Ayyash assess the impact, through research, a training programme for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities. The paper underscore the importance of such training to enhance the quality of care given and the overall development of the disabled child. The authors argue that evidence from the data shows that the training helped parents to avoid behavioural problems as well as deal effectively with existing undesirable behaviours. Policy makers are encouraged to open more trainings opportunities to parents/caregivers of children with disabilities due to the positive impact such training have.

The final paper in this issue reports on an action research project that aimed at using Solo Taxonomy and problem-based learning to facilitate students' learning in two curriculum programmes (Web Development Technologies and Report Writing Skills). In the paper, Ibtisam Yakub Mogul; Yakub Iqbal Mogul and Indranil Bose argue that modifying the teaching and learning process through including bridging sessions, problem-based learning, peer programming and learning through peers resulted in a productive learning experience for the students. The project also guided the team to understand how curriculum model can be selected and adapted to facilitate and improve students' report writing and web development skills.

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