

Editorial

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This is the fourth year of our international collaborative newsletter about tertiary teaching in the life sciences. We said last year that whilst many changes are occurring in academia, one thing stays the same and that is the need to stress to our colleagues the importance of the current major teaching issues. We need to keep abreast of what is going on in our areas of science teaching and we need to share our ideas with our colleagues. This newsletter is one of the ways we can share our ideas, our hopes and our experiences.

In this issue, we have added a new dimension to *CAL-laborate* with the inclusion of a paper that has resulted from a partnership between Australian and Chinese academics. Since the middle of last year the University of Sydney has been involved in a partnership with the China Scholarship Council in Beijing in setting up a professional development course for teaching sciences in the English language and using contemporary teaching methodologies. More about this can be seen at <http://science.uniserve.edu.au/china/>. One of the outputs has been a set of papers written by the visiting scholars on how they will teach their discipline on return to the People's Republic of China. We have selected one of these collaborative papers for inclusion in this edition of *CAL-laborate*.

From Sweden we have a paper on the use of simulation as a teaching alternative for specialist training in laparoscopy which is becoming a much used method for internal investigation not only within the area of gynaecology but also for general surgery techniques. Also from Sweden we have a paper on the use of computer aided interactive histology in the training of medical students. This is a review of a ten year period of development and illustrates the evolution of the current materials. Evaluation of the use of the materials by the students reminds us that students prefer many opportunities to support them in their learning and not just web-based opportunities.

From the UK is a timely paper on the use of ICT in pharmacology teaching. This paper reports on a follow-up survey from a 1998 report. Whilst the survey only looks at the use of technology *per se* in the teaching of the discipline, with no discussion on the pedagogical uses of ICT, it nevertheless creates an important baseline for future investigations which should address the efficacy of the methods within a student-learning framework.

From Australia is a paper on the introduction of web-based formative assessment in medical science that used an action research approach to develop the materials and the delivery format. The paper is a good example of how such an approach can be used to develop better materials and should be of interest to all readers who are interested in improving the practice of teaching. Also from Australia is a paper on the challenges of teaching photosynthesis to undergraduate students and how this challenge has been addressed by the development of a CD-ROM to simulate five experiments.

From China and Australia we have reprinted a paper on the teaching of informatics using a student-centred and problem based approach. The paper is a collaboration between one of the visiting scholars from Zhongshan University and the University of Sydney and discusses the ways in which this emerging interdisciplinary science is being taught.