

# Editorial

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This is the third year of our international collaborative newsletter about tertiary teaching in the life sciences. Three years seems to be a long time these days in academia but one thing stays constant and that is the need to review and appraise the way we teach our discipline. This newsletter is one of the ways we in the international teaching arena can share our experiences and ideas, our successes and failures in order to inform and support our peers around the world.

The contents of this newsletter are a smorgasbord of activities from Sweden, the UK and Australia. There is an emphasis on the use of online learning scenarios but with the accent on teaching and learning pedagogies, not 'nuts and bolts'. These include the use of Virtual Learning Environments for constructivist teaching, the facilitation of online discussions and online problem based learning and a collaboration involving six universities from five continents that has resulted in the delivery of an online course in bioinformatics.

From the UK we have an article on the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in the teaching of ecology to students from a range of departments within science, with differing content needs with respect to their professional focus. The VLE was used to stimulate reflection on the topics in a staged manner (facilitating constructivism) and for tutorial support for students in an asynchronous manner, especially prior to the examinations. Student response to the experience highlighted their desire to retain face-to-face learning situations - a comment we are hearing at many conferences and reading in published papers. Also from the UK is an article on the development of an online program to help nutrition students master the details of the main metabolic pathways.

From Sweden we have a review of the development of a PBL model for network-based teaching in Dentistry. One of the aims of the project was to provide quality distance education to oral health care students and professionals all over Europe, by using simple and affordable technology.

We have a collaborative report from Australia, Sweden, Singapore, the USA and South Africa, on the development of an online bioinformatics course that is available to anyone with Internet access. The cooperation between participants developed in response to a global demand for bioinformatics education. The S-Star Alliance provides a unified learning environment made up

of modular courses in the discipline of genomics, bioinformatics, and medical informatics. Students are able to select from a list of modules to build a comprehensive program in genomics and bioinformatics that suits their requirements.

From Australia we have two articles that involve the use of online discussions. One is on the evaluation of the use of online discussions in a campus-based psychology course in which three important questions on use and usefulness are addressed. The other is on the use of online discussions to support students in field placements in the health sciences (in this case in speech pathology). Also from Australia we have an article on the use of a decision making tool to support teaching and learning in ecosystem management.

We hope that this newsletter does, in some small way, help to inform and support our colleagues around the world.