

Editorial

Why do we do what we do?

I have never tried this personally, but urban folklore says that a frog placed into a pan of boiling water will jump out and survive, but a frog placed in a pan of cold water which is then heated will die since it fails to detect changes in the environment in which it is immersed. The argument is extended to say that we are more likely to notice a dramatic change in our lives than one that slowly evolves around us.

In this volume of Bioscience Education, Les and Loretta Jervis ask whether we have unwittingly allowed the concept of constructive alignment to dominate our current practice in Higher Education, including the Biological Sciences, without adequate evidence for the validity of the underlying principles. Even if, perhaps especially if, you have no idea what constructive alignment entails, whether or not you end up agreeing with their thesis, it is a timely challenge to take a step back from the day-to-day busyness of education and ask whether we are doing what we think that we are. It is their hope, and mine, that this article prompts broader debate on the issue, and we would be very happy for correspondence via the journal on this subject.

Elsewhere in the current volume, both Jon Scott and Ian Hughes and colleagues (Brown *et al*) have been considering graduates' perception of their transferable skills development through the biological sciences curriculum. Scott has examined the importance of overtly "flagging up" the skills component of modules in order that students are conscious about the instruction that they have received. Brown *et al* have undertaken a telephone interview of graduates to determine aspects of their work life for which they felt adequately prepared by their courses, and which aspects they did not. Both studies offer interesting insights into generic skills development.

Peers can often be better equipped than staff to explain concepts to their fellow undergraduates – they may recently have gone through similar thought processes themselves, and the recipient student may feel less threatened by communication from someone in a similar situation. Vicki Tariq reports on the formal use of peer tutors in the problem-solving and numeracy component of a first-year microbiology. Her experience may provide inspiration for ways to introduce peer-assisted learning in our own institutions.

The importance of computing in bioscience has led to the development of bioinformatics as a discipline in its own right. Terri Attwood and her colleagues in the European Multimedia Bioinformatics Educational Resource (EMBER) project were early on the scene, and thus have a wealth of information and a range of tools to share. The modular nature of their materials means that staff and students with a variety of prior experience will find something helpful within their suite.

There seem to be fewer and fewer places these days where academic texts are reviewed. I am delighted, therefore, that this volume contains a particularly rich crop, both in quantity and quality. Books reviewed here include several recent additions to the “instant notes for undergraduates” genre, as well as reviews of two new introductions to the field of bioethics.

Finally, observant old friends will notice that the journal logo has evolved. The previous version, you may remember was an ‘hexagonal’ bee linked to the honeycomb logo of the former Learning and Teaching Support Network, now absorbed into the Higher Education Academy. To reflect this change and the journal’s growing sense of identity we now have a new logo based around the journal name.

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