

## Editorial

### *Poor is the Pupil who does not surpass his Master*

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In a conversation with members of a study abroad program last year, two students from the USA revealed their surprise at the casual nature of address used in third level education in Ireland. They were taken aback that students call lecturers by their first names and didn't seem to make reference much, or at all, to titles like 'Doctor' or 'Professor' when in the classroom. But this common practice of leaving titles outside the classroom is beneficial to faculty and students alike. It symbolises a commitment to an important principle of academic life: no one is above question. Ideas should be evaluated on their merits rather than accepted based on the academic credentials of the person expounding them.

What qualifications does one need to participate in intellectual life? Does one become a 'real' academic at some point during their PhD? Or maybe, with luck and the right supervisor, could one even start at master's level? Perhaps, like Jacob Keller, you could start at the age of 10 by successfully submitting your handwritten paper on recycling to *The Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*.<sup>1</sup> While the emergence of such abilities may vary from one person to another, great scholars, artists and inventors throughout history have flocked to universities as places to nurture and showcase their developing talents.

Yet entering academia as a career has never seemed a more implausible and distant goal for aspiring students than it does today. As summed up aptly by Murphy,

For those starting out in academia, it is an arduous climb, often with uncertain perspective; a career ladder moving in the wind, with few rungs, dangling from a helicopter being piloted by non-academic managers. And from this precarious position, it is expected that you offer students the best learning environment.<sup>2</sup>

For those still enterprising enough to hope or try to embark on an academic career anyway, competition for limited full-time teaching positions is stiff, and increasing casualisation of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Jacob Keller, 'The Recycling Solution: How I Increased Recycling on Dilworth Road', *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 24, no. 4 (1991): 617–19, doi:10.1901/jaba.1991.24-617.

<sup>2</sup> J. Murphy, 'The Health of Academic Psychology', *The Irish Psychologist* 43, no. 06 (2017).

lecturing and research work will lead to years of precarious contracts for many.<sup>3</sup> One of the most pressing expectations on would-be academics is to demonstrate their genuine enthusiasm for research with an impressive list of publications. On the other side of the fence, currently employed academics are also under unrelenting pressure to publish,<sup>4</sup> and due to the damaging effects of unchecked neoliberalism on third level education, they have never had less time to engage in the research necessary to do so.<sup>5</sup> Through collaborating on research together, undergraduates and academics can help each other overcome these obstacles.

For undergraduates especially it can be difficult to know where to start. The ‘career ladder’ perspective builds on the fear proposed by philosopher Slavoj Žižek, that universities will become ‘regressive factories’, with the primary purpose of churning out skilled experts.<sup>6</sup> A by-product of this production of ‘experts’ can be seen in the issue of excessively prescriptive assessments of our students. A strong focus on achievement of predetermined learning outcomes has been adopted broadly across third level education, but is not without criticism. Although learning outcomes can provide structure while planning programmes and assessments, they promote a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching (since all students are aiming for the same outcomes) and discourage a Socratic, dialogue-oriented approach to learning.<sup>7</sup> Such an emphasis on outcomes-focused learning and ‘box-ticking’ can diminish the development and nurturing of creativity and flexible thinking among students. A lack of exposure to alternative approaches and skill development can hinder a student’s ability to produce work that is of a standard and use beyond the learning objectives of their course. This is exemplified by the lamentation of tutors everywhere, notably including the hallowed halls of Oxford, concerning falling standards in performance of their students. For this they blamed ‘a culture of box ticking’, saying ‘the clotted residuum of A Level work’ was still evident even in final year students, unmotivated to think for themselves, as this tends not to be rewarded in rigid secondary level marking structures.<sup>8</sup>

The focus of our universities also reflects the role and purpose of the students within them. A recent exploration of this in an Irish context from Loxley, Seery and Walsh<sup>9</sup> argues that while students have gradually become more involved within universities, their contribution only applies to certain aspects of the student experience. For example, consideration for students as stakeholders has become increasingly important in relation to course content and structure. However, this role still circulates around the traditional educational paradigm whereby students are the ‘recipients’ and university faculty the ‘providers’ of higher education. Students can therefore become passive vessels to be filled with education rather than active contributors to academia, and a broadening schism between learners and instructors is often the result. Engagement between students and faculty in truly collaborative research is perhaps overlooked or disregarded beyond the obligatory supervision of student theses. Once again the outcome-focused strategy towards education

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<sup>3</sup> ‘About | 3lww’, accessed 18 May 2017, <https://3lww.wordpress.com/about/>.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Sarewitz, ‘The Pressure to Publish Pushes down Quality’, *Nature News* 533, no. 7602 (12 May 2016): 147, doi:10.1038/533147a.

<sup>5</sup> ‘The Slow Death of the University, by Terry Eagleton (UK)’, accessed 18 May 2017, <http://www.socjobrumors.com/topic/the-slow-death-of-the-university-by-terry-eagleton-uk>.

<sup>6</sup> ‘A University Is Not a Factory’, accessed 18 May 2017, <http://trinitynews.ie/a-university-is-not-a-factory/>.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Learning Outcomes Are Corrosive’, accessed 18 May 2017, [https://www.cautbulletin.ca/en\\_article.asp?articleid=3575](https://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?articleid=3575).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Oxford Finalists Are “Little Better than A Level Students”, Claim Tutors’, accessed 18 May 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/9014154/Oxford-finalists-are-little-better-than-A-level-students-claim-tutors.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Loxley, Aidan Seery and John Walsh, *Higher Education in Ireland: Practices, Policies and Possibilities* (Springer, 2014).

diminishes the relationship between students and faculty and the potential benefits of these partnerships.

Considering these issues, how exactly can students showcase their ability and work? One solution includes providing a platform for exemplary work produced by these students in their respected fields, such as this journal. To give one subject-specific example, the ‘Many Labs’ Replication Experiment in 2014<sup>10</sup> was a multinational collaboration aiming to replicate a variety of novel or influential research findings in psychology. Such projects, built around the very important scientific concept of replication, do not warrant a unique and novel research concept, and often do not require much if anything in the way of funding. Engagement in such projects may take the pressure off faculty to design and conceive of original research proposals in which their students can participate. Students can gain valuable real-life research experience by conducting such small scale projects, honing their abilities and developing their intellectual curiosity without the pressure of assessment or a set objective that they must meet. Students can also understand the importance of the growth and accomplishment that is an inherent part of involvement in research, perhaps even reminding faculty of these important motivators in the process.

Apart from individual projects there are specific examples of higher education institutes welcoming student-faculty collaboration. The University of Wisconsin-EauClaire welcomes the inclusion of faculty-mentored undergraduate scholarly projects. The idea behind these projects is to showcase student ability during the academic year, while supplementing their work with various awards and stipends. This is an example of how the rigid regime of course content can be augmented by other work opportunities. In addition, it provides an incentive for both students and faculty to partake in these projects. This relates to the point that it is vital for students themselves to take the initiative towards involvement and academic collaboration. However, it is equally important for our universities to facilitate and empower students to do so.

Given the lack of structural opportunity for collaboration such as this in most universities, what are the ways in which we can initiate this student-faculty engagement? Students with an interest in research are often unsure of the avenues they must explore to become involved. One such avenue includes lecturers showcasing or referencing their current research projects to students during their taught classes. This presents students with an idea of the research being conducted at their university as well as an opportunity for lecturers to express interest in recruiting students for collaboration. Where this strategy is used it often leads to collaboration towards research publication as well as the development of essential, long-term research skills for these students. In order for this strategy to work, lecturers must have the time and resources to keep their research interests alive.

Apart from the opportunity for students to be published, collaboration strategies also highlight the importance of having ideas challenged by fresh-thinking students. Drawing from Kuhn’s structure of scientific revolutions, such fresh thinking can assist in bringing about paradigm shifts, specifically in the context of education.<sup>11</sup> The acceptance of fresh thinking can raise universities to a level above that of a factory, ensuring they have a critical, comprehensive outlook to innovate and create scholarly work. In addition, this provides students the very platform needed to nurture and make use of their abilities.

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Investigating Variation in Replicability: A “Many Labs” Replication Project’, accessed 18 May 2017, <https://osf.io/wx7ck/>.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1962).

Perhaps when setting learning outcomes or writing out graduate attributes, we would do well to keep Da Vinci's words in mind that 'poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master'.<sup>12</sup> We could even go so far as to stop setting predetermined goals and outcomes for students and see what happens when they set their own. The current issue of SAH complements these ideas by celebrating growing up, learning from experience, and coming of age. In this first issue of Volume 3, we present a broad and creative collection of scholarly and general-interest output covering a range of media and subject matter, from film to organic food, poetry to public health. Ian Toner's script *Animalia* reminds us powerfully how hard it is to grow up with a story of friendship and betrayal, seen through the eyes of eleven-year-olds Danielle and Sarah. In *The Radical Habitus and the Knowledge Practices of the Irish Organic Food Movement*, Annette Jorgensen uses a Bourdieusian framework to explore knowledge and skill-sharing practices in the organic movement, based on observation, interview and social media activity over a ten-year period. In *Psychoanalyzing Theresa: Telling It Slant in Alice McDermott's Child of My Heart*, Gail Corso examines the words, images and symbols used in this coming of age novel to describe how we tell stories through both what is said and what goes unsaid. In *Public Health in Colonial Ghana: Lesson-drawing for Twenty-first century Ghana*, Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, Edward Brenya and Peter Nana Egyir use records of successful attempts to improve public health in the early 20th century to find inspiration for public health planning today. A compellingly personal interview with Jim Sheridan gives insight into some of the experiences that shaped his life and films, and Jane Buggle interviews Juanita Wilson on her recently released film 'Tomato Red'. 'Lumiere Word Cloud', a short film directed by Barnaby Taylor, explores the parallels between early cinema and the modern gif file. Offerings also include a review of Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane* by recent graduate Laoise Darragh, as well as poems by Toronto-based doctoral student Terry Trowbridge and Irish language poet and academic Caitríona Ní Chléirchín. In addition we are delighted to be able to showcase recent work from painter and poet Padhraig Nolan, along with an interview conducted by SAH Journal poetry editor Patrick Chapman.

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<sup>12</sup> Jean Paul Richter, *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci* (Dover, 1970).

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