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Editor's Note

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A Note from the Editor

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Many readers of this journal will be familiar with John Dewey's oft-quoted statement from *Democracy in Education*, "They [effective teaching methods] give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; learning naturally results." This statement serves to establish the theme for this issue of *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education*, which contains articles about how students acquire knowledge and skills when given the opportunity to learn naturally by doing—in particular, by doing things outside the classroom that "demand the intentional noting of connections."

The authors of the four pieces printed in this number share the results of their observations and research about undergraduate students who accepted the challenge to learn by doing. Two of the articles describe, from different perspectives, the experiential learning of undergraduates in teacher education programs; one reports on the students' reflections on their cultural immersion experiences, the other on the students' assessment of their projects working with elementary and middle school students on science fair projects. Another article presents the self-assessments of students who worked in the local community to remove invasive plant species from trails. And a fourth article reports on a cross-disciplinary study of student reflections on their service projects.

I myself recently had the opportunity to "give the pupils something to do" and "learning naturally result[ed]" in a wonderful way. Tasked with creating an experiential learning activity for a national conference, I called upon several international students, young men and women who came to my rural Utah university from China and countries in Africa, for help. These ten students' first languages are not English; they grew up speaking French, Swahili, local dialects, and Mandarin Chinese. The challenge I gave the students was this: as a team, we needed to create an activity in which conference attendees—mostly post-secondary faculty and staff—would

experience, as much as possible, what it's like to be a student at a university in another country for the first time.

In our first meeting, the African and Chinese students shared the frustrations, the loneliness, and also the joys they felt during their first weeks in the U.S. We found that the cause of the frustrations and loneliness was due in part to the language barrier and in part to the strange new culture. Interestingly, the joys came largely from the kindness of strangers. Together, as a team, we prepared a learning activity that would force conference attendees to become frustrated and to feel isolated: they were to assume the role of "foreign student." The activity the international students ultimately created required conference attendees to complete application paperwork, register for classes, and interact with "university staff," all in a language other than English. (The cover photo captures one of the international students interacting with a couple of conference attendees.)

What resulted from this activity was that conference participants gained a new perspective on the unique challenges international students face. They learned not by simply listening to international students speak about their experiences, but by going through the experience themselves. Likewise, the international students who prepared the activity gained skills in teamwork, problem-solving, and creative thinking. I myself learned that if we give students a challenge and hand them the reins, they will take them, and they will rise to the occasion.

This is the third issue of *ELTHE*, and it will be my last as the journal's editor-in-chief. It has been my pleasure the past couple of years to work with colleagues across the country to help collect and share the research and observations of academics dedicated to the practice of experiential learning. I leave editorship of the journal in the very capable hands of Dr. Earl Mulderink, who has served on the *ELTHE* editorial board since its inception. While I will no longer be the editor of this journal, I will certainly continue to be a reader of it, and I hope you and your colleagues will too.