Being involved in this special issue of Synergy, with its focus on diversity, has been an exciting experience. The issue draws on a rich array of teaching initiatives, leaps of the pedagogic imagination, and systematic research into the very nature of student learning. With our usual aim of highlighting teaching and learning in relation to over 45,000 demographically and culturally diverse students, distributed over more than a dozen campuses, we have come across some inspiring examples of excellence in reflective, innovative and inclusive practice. While some may see a focus on cultural diversity as being at odds with the commonality we hope our students will achieve as they work towards their learning outcomes, others would argue that teaching with a sensitivity to difference is simply good teaching. If this is so, then exemplars of, and approaches to good teaching are plentiful in this issue.

Readers will immediately notice the strong Indigenous focus of this particular issue, a perhaps overdue first for Readers will immediately notice the strong Indigenous focus. Acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which our respective campuses are situated is something many of us do in our classes, as a matter of simple respect. The University itself acknowledges the connection to Country of nine different groups of Aboriginal peoples - Gadigal (of the Eora nation), Deerubbin, Tharawal, Ngunnawal, Wiradjuri, Gamilaroi, Bundjalung, Wiljali and Gureng Gureng. Awareness of such plurality, we feel, informs our own global understandings of the many diversities woven into our daily lives as educators in Australia today.

Our wide-ranging leading article by Yanuko Claremont, William Renner and Fredericka van der Lubbe reports on a research initiative investigating student and staff perspectives of Arts learners from designated equity groups. Findings from their study informed the setting up of what some of the students had specifically asked for: a web based resource where students could both share their stories and access resources, and where the student vignettes are accompanied by inclusive teaching strategies from which others can benefit.

Peter Dunbar-Hall adopts a research-enhanced perspective on dimensions of music teaching, sharing with his Conservatorium students (and with us), the research and learning outcomes he has achieved in studying with Balinese musicians. Peter’s subtly argued piece weaves together themes of the cultural specificity of teaching and learning styles; how to implement teaching and learning strategies that resonate with students’ diverse backgrounds; and how to address the aims of multiculturalism.

In her rigorous analysis of factors influencing Indigenous post-graduates’ chances of successful completion of higher degrees, Diana Day reminds us of facts which we may be aware of cognitively, yet which are easy to overlook in the personal dynamics of student-supervisor relationships. How many of us, for example, would connect published statistics on Indigenous health, to the impact of chronic illness on an Indigenous colleague’s chances of completing her thesis?

Richard Seymour uses problem-based learning and authentic activities to teach social entrepreneurship. Far from seeing student diversity as a potential ‘problem’ for teachers, he sees that very diversity as essential for the successful execution of open-ended student projects, with students’ new perceptions and insights acting as a catalyst for student learning and engagement.

How to apply elements of a Teaching Quality model to university teaching in Education is the subject of a piece by Michael Anderson, Robyn Ewing and Robyn Gibson. Insisting on an evidence base, they highlight the way non-traditional teaching approaches such as drama can bring into the learning process students who might otherwise have been left on the margins.

Focused on similar concerns is an account by Miranda Rose, Sally Farrington and David Rose of an intervention to scaffold the learning of students who have entered academia with few formal skills in academic literacy. Although the students in this group were all Indigenous, the authors argue strongly for broader applications of such an approach - including internationally.

The student voice is something we have consciously tried to foreground in this issue, including giving space to students who are also staff, such as Vicki Bradford, Paul Ishiguchi and Leah Lui-Chivisbe, who reflect on their experience of being mentored in the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education). We have also set aside our regular ‘Talking’ segment for undergraduate voices. In sharing with readers our conversation with just three of the University’s thousands of international students (Raja, Mun and Tai), we can hardly pretend to have dealt with all the burning issues. We simply hoped to signal that listening to students is an often under-utilised route towards understanding learning needs such as open-mindedness and flexibility on the part of teachers.

Our regular Profile feature focuses on Chris Roberts, much of whose work in educational research and reform in the Faculty of Medicine has been underpinned by a specific concern for the equity and fairness sought by so many colleagues in this issue. In the Teaching & Learning Focus we acknowledge, report on and congratulate all members of the university community who were successful in gaining national recognition for their excellence in teaching. We continue to bring you news about the work taking place in the ITL; and the usual odds and ends related to future conferences and some recent publications (on diversity), are all there in this issue.

As the year closes and academic activity begins to slow, we want to thank all those who offered their commitment, experience and wisdom to this issue of Synergy. Internationalisation, cultural diversity and Indigeneity are enriching but contested areas in university teaching and learning. Each of the contributors, we think, has shone a light on the very nature of that complexity. Collectively, their work signals a hopeful future.

From the ITL, a happy and safe holiday to all.

Christine Asmar
Institute for Teaching and Learning