1 Introduction:
Conversations on a journey

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Context and scene setting

'Enigma', the beautiful bronze figure that graces our cover, stands tall, poised and reflective. She is composed and dignified, looking out to the sea and beyond with quiet resolution. For us, she embodies a self-contained strength and an inner integrity; despite the hint of uncertainty in her outlook she remains grounded and stoic. She is framed in a landscape and is, we believe, an apt visual prompt for Emerging Issues in Higher Education III: From capacity building to sustainability. Higher Education in Ireland is at a crossroads, at a puzzling time in an uncertain climate with a range of important strategies, policies, missions and pedagogies contributing to the opportunities on the horizon and, sometimes, to the confusion of the moment. In this space, courageous goals can be achieved despite the unpredictablity. Though the ambiance is one of flux and change, collaborative efforts such as those by EDIN, and we hope the newly formed National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, can scaffold and mould the work which will collectively provide clarity for us as individuals and as a learning community. We hope that this publication will contribute to this journey and to the dialogue that will occur on the way.

'The original idea for producing this series of papers came about (as many ideas do) as the result of a conversation.' (EI-I: 1) Thus begins *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*, published in 2005. The conversation, which resulted in the book, began in 2003. At that time, O'Neill, Moore and Mc Mullin could not have known that the series of papers was to become a series of books, and that 10 years later colleagues from within higher education in Ireland would gather together to process and produce Emerging Issues in Higher Education III: From capacity building to sustainability. Given how far we have come as a community of scholar-teachers an examination of the capacity building that has taken place is a worthwhile exercise. In tandem, the sustainability of the community and of the valued, creative and collaborative way of working that has emerged merits consideration.

Emerging Issues in Higher Education III and its relationship to the landscape

None of our work exists in a vacuum and the capacity building of this network and the Emerging Issues initiative has been impacted by the Irish Higher Education landscape and

policy over the past ten years. When EI-I was published the area of educational/academic development was new in Ireland; it had a short history of sporadic interventions, project and funding-related initiatives and very few dedicated posts. In the late 1990s/early 2000s, institutions were beginning to make public commitments to this area through the appointment of staff under the general headings of educational/academic developer and teaching support/development. As these posts became established across the sector, a community emerged and the Educational Developers of Ireland Network (EDIN), held its first meeting in Kilkenny in 2002. A comprehensive picture of what EDIN is and how it developed is presented by O'Farrell in Emerging Issues II: The changing roles and identities of Teachers and Learners in Ireland (2008); and a contemporary record of the Network is provided in this book by Nuala Harding in her contribution.

Having lived the history of the network from 2002, we observe now that though our impulse to gather in the first place could not have been defined as capacity building, looking back that is essentially what we were trying to do. With many of us being new appointments to new roles, the desire to share experiences and expertise was very great indeed. Though at that time we were, for the most part, well funded in our individual institutions, particularly through the National Development Plan and Training of Trainers Programme (administered by the HEA), one of the things that we needed, specifically, was to build relationships and share practice. Funding received via the HEA enabled this activity. In interrogating the capacity building that occurred over the years it seems that it was positively impacted by the following:

- Needing and wanting – openness and risk-taking
- Timing
- The newness of the area and the network
- The size of the island and the fact that people could meet face-to-face as the foundation for remote relationship building
- The tradition of talk
- Funding and incentivized activity
- Variety of expertise and experience and the diversity of context and focus
- Shared goals
- Incremental development
- External critical friends
- Positioning in larger international networks
- Support from senior management in individual institutions
- Protected space and time.

Emerging Issues III – changing times

Without doubt, the context of Emerging Issues III is wholly different to that of the previous books. Though there has been significant capacity building over the past ten years, few of us could have predicted the utterly changed landscape with which we are faced. The current situation in higher education, and more widely in the country, means that sustainability is a key concern.   Since Emerging Issues II Ireland has been propelled into a recession. In 2009, the Employment Control Framework was imposed on the Higher Education sector which placed a moratorium on recruitment and promotions; this still exists as we write, despite ever-increasing student numbers, and it impacts in practical ways, on staff numbers, and on staff morale. Many of us work in shrinking departments, units or centres with smaller budgets and increased workloads; but the whole notion of

'being an academic' has also been deconstructed in this pressurised work environment where proving and accounting for our value is essential in what Scott describes as one of the 'most value-laden institutions in modern society' (2004, p.439 quoted in Winter, 2009). As academic developers we are challenged to demonstrate the importance of our work, to find creative and inspiring ways to reassert our beliefs and principles and to voice our contribution.

EDIN – a collaborative model for sustainability

Since 2002, the EDIN group has been involved in building capacity and becoming a learning community. When the Network was established as a result of the fertile groundwork of early adopters and national and local champions, there were promising shoots of growth in the area of supporting teaching and learning in higher education. From that modest but determined beginning, an entirely different reality now exists where the professionalisation of teaching and learning for academic staff is growing; a range of accredited programmes is on offer; and the scholarship of teaching and learning is evidenced in locally-produced publications and contributions to international offerings alike. Despite the progress in this area, education development has by no means plateaued and in light of the current and predicted future challenges to higher education in Ireland, its existence has never been more necessary.

In these difficult times, support for academic staff is essential and the academic developer plays a key role in this regard. EDIN, in turn, has a dual function in this regard where the network helps us to support staff on campus and also provides a safe environment for members where we can support each other in our work as academics and academic developers. O'Farrell and Fitzmaurice (2013) argue for a need for those of us who are academic developers to sustain *our-selves* in our work, and to unpack the emotions and draw from the values that define us. They point to EDIN's importance in supporting both the self and the collective, in scaffolding and enhancing collegiality, and in driving sustainability. It is a network which is 'safe and welcoming, where its members can celebrate the affective dimension of our role, and request and partake in professional development that supports and nurtures our needs' (p.8).

The challenges expressed in the *Emerging Issues* series can be seen to mirror the struggle of the international academic development field with the implications of identity in the age of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000). This has more recently become relevant in terms of leadership, succession and the future (Lee and McWilliam, 2008) as academic life becomes more complex. As EDIN matures we are beginning to recognise the strength of our collective expertise and to harness the potential power of our diversity. As individual academic developers located in contracting units, in some cases to the extent of being the lone academic developer for whole institutions, it can sometimes feel that we are fighting a losing battle to be funded, to be heard, to make a difference – even to survive. But collectively, as a network, we have a strength that can not only inform and support, but potentially can lead. We are now confident that EDIN not only has a voice: it has a compelling one.

This book's contribution to the conversation on teaching and learning

The aims of *Emerging Issues III in Higher Education: From capacity building to sustainability* are to:

- Produce a text which reflects the situated reality of teaching and learning in

higher education in Ireland today, encompassing the hopes and ambitions for the area in the future and capturing the mood or *zeitgeist* which both supports and constrains it;

- Continue to give voice to those supporting teaching and learning in higher education;
- Provide an opportunity for experienced and new voices to contribute to the discussion about 'where to next' for higher education;
- Influence policy and practice;
- Produce a text which will be of national and international importance in this area;
- Build on the collaborative writing model that is a signature of the *Emerging Issues* publications;
- Initiate and continue conversations and relationships with international colleagues as part of our commitment to collaboration with our counterparts outside Ireland.

In terms of process, the editors of this book have expanded the writers' retreat and peer review process, and attempted to reinforce the connections that can be made between the authors of this collection, both within and across the Institutions, and internationally. Of the 15 chapters in this collection, 9 are co-authored, many of those being inter-institutional collaborations using a range of approaches and media. Currently in the Irish Higher Education system, deliberate and focused collaborations are being forged between institutions which have political ramifications and can be perceived to be influenced by a rationalisation agenda. What is represented in this book is a more organic collaboration where research and relationships are based on joint efforts, shared concerns and coinciding values.

The editors were determined that professional development be central to the writing processes associated with this book. The authors brought a range of writing proficiencies and dispositions; both novice and experienced writers participated in this journey. Part of the funding for the book was channelled into two short writing retreats where authors met, wrote and peer reviewed each others' work in progress. Within the structure of the writing sessions, we set and exchanged goals for our writing, we practised strategies for writing, for springboarding ourselves into our writing and for overcoming writer's block. Drawing from the literature on writing interventions, we unpacked the key benefits of our chapters and their contributions to the literature, and we discovered how our dialogue could inform each others' chapters.

We also built a peer review process into the second day of the retreat where all writers formed small groups and offered parts of their work to colleagues for constructive and collegial peer review; critical guidance and affirmation were encouraged. Authors benefitted from seeing how their developing paper was understood by others, what interested others and what wasn't working, before feeding back these considerations into their writing towards the end of the retreat. Some months later, when first drafts were due, authors were invited to meet again to undertake a similar peer review process and to seek feedback on their full drafts. The peer reviews and the writing strategies that scaffolded the writing retreat were very deliberately conducted in a safe and protected space, where those newer to academic writing were supported by more seasoned writers, but where everyone had an equal voice and equal value. As writers, we left the retreat and returned to our institutions with a suite of strategies to inform and grow our academic writing as well as, it must be said, with renewed or newly forged friendships with colleagues from across the higher education sector.

Stemming from our aim to broaden our reach internationally, an initiative new to *Emerging Issues III* is the inclusion of contributions from international experts. In this book, each chapter is followed by a commentary from an international expert who considers the chapter's key benefits, its application in an international context and where further research might be merited. We hope that this international dimension will expand the vibrant conversation that exists in this community of practice. We thank those international experts who so willingly gave their time to write their commentaries, and whose reflections have enhanced this publication. Seeking those connections among our peers, and forging subsequent relationships based on commonalities and shared vision is, we would posit, an environment conducive to creativity, collegiality and ultimately to sustainability.

Overview of the book

Section 1: Collaboration as a way forward

Emerging Issues in Higher Education: From capacity building to sustainability begins with a focus on collaboration. Many of our colleagues who have contributed to the book have enjoyed successful and fruitful collaborative ventures. The collegiality that still exists in the sector, and particularly in the education/academic development community, is highlighted in all of the contributions to this publication but particularly so in this first section.

The section begins with the EDIN network and a chapter written by the current chair, Nuala Harding, entitled 'Conversations on an Emergent Professional Network'. This chapter charts the journey of EDIN, and thus will inform other networks of the process of establishing, and the challenges of sustaining, a network. Equally significant in this piece is the tone and spirit of the chapter, of its desire to present an honest and open appraisal of the various stages of that journey and of its resolution to remain true to the collaborative core of EDIN. In her exploration of the development of EDIN, Harding taps into the dialogue that has been central to the network's development and uses a conversation between herself and three previous EDIN chairs/co-ordinators in a collaborative effort to record the oral history of the group.

The voice of academics and academic developers is also the prompt for Fitzpatrick and Vaughan's chapter entitled, 'Developing a Regional Approach to Outstanding Teaching and Learning: A case study', where the collaboration is inter-institutional rather than national. Set in the context of a regional development in the mid-west of Ireland, this chapter discusses how four institutions successfully worked together to achieve a goal of developing and supporting excellence in teaching, and explores how initiatives like this can be sustained. The authors describe two 'bedrock' initiatives: the development of a regional award process as a way of recognising and rewarding teaching excellence; and, as a corollary, the establishment of a peer support network for academics to develop and learn from each other through peer observation of teaching.

The tone and theme of Fitzpatrick and Vaughan's chapter is echoed in O'Riordan et al., the final chapter in this section. Having identified a gap in the feedback loop with regards participation at and contribution to conferences, O'Riordan and colleagues in a chapter entitled, 'Discourse and Connectivity: Capturing the voice of educators' explore a new approach for tapping into both the ideas and the energy of staff attending a pedagogical conference. This informal collaboration recognises the importance of conversation and collegiality, neatly expressed by the authors in the comforting analogy of an 'armchair session' whereby academics gather together to discuss the themes and pedagogical issues

that have emerged from the papers presented at the conference. This chapter shows us the authors' endeavours to ensure that such conversation is charted and channelled and that the collective voice actually informs the development of future conference themes. However, it also explores the process of co-enquiry and the challenges the authors met in tackling the myriad data that they had gleaned. The framework presented and the pragmatic advice included towards the end of the piece will be useful for colleagues considering similar initiatives.

Section 2: Supporting Academic Development

The second section of the book explores how institutions, departments, initiatives and individuals support academic colleagues in their work. These chapters remind us of the importance of self-care, of making time for our professional development, and of providing a safe, environment in which to achieve this. What emerges in all three chapters in this section is confirmation of the principles or beliefs that led many of us to be teacher-scholars.

In the opening chapter in this sequence, Slowey and Kozina report on findings from an empirical study of academic staff designed to ascertain their professional development experiences and interests. In 'Practising what they preach? Academics' views on professional development for their teaching role' the reader is presented with an enviable dataset from which many opinions around academic development are drawn. In their survey of four Universities and four Institutes of Technology in the Dublin region of Ireland, the authors explore a number of key differences based on respondents' levels of engagement with professional development over the previous three years, suggest some possible implications for policy and practice, and draw conclusions around the current and predictable future professional development provision for academic staff.

The need for professional development for academic staff continues in the next chapter by Joyce and Boyle entitled 'Sustaining Academic Leadership in Higher Education'. The authors explore an area of professional development that has enjoyed limited success to date in the mainstream academic community - leadership. For reasons explored in the chapter, academics are often reluctant to see themselves as potential leaders in their institutions, in terms of people management, though they may recognize themselves and indeed strive to be discipline experts and leaders in their research fields. In this chapter Joyce and Boyle review the leadership literature and present models of leadership to an academic audience. The authors' approach demystifies leadership, explores the hero myth around contemporary leadership style and, through a case study, exemplifies how modern leadership approaches can contribute to successful team achievement in practical terms and to professional development programmes more generally in higher education institutions.

The final chapter in this section focuses on another form of professional development opportunity described by the author as a 'possibility portal'. Clancy's chapter, 'Possibility Portals: Building sustainability amongst academics in challenging times' focuses on the need for protected time and space for professional development. In the context of her institution, and a case study of a Diploma in Higher Education, Clancy argues for the need for slow time, where academics can debate and/or reflect on the complexities of their roles and identities. She recognises that academic identity is continuously shifting, necessarily so, and that it needs support at all levels to be effectively developed.

Section 3: Using technology to enhance teaching and learning

Though still a relatively recent phenomenon in the long history of higher education,

technology in education and its pervasiveness will continue to have a significant impact on the lives of HE teachers and learners alike. The following chapters present the voice and lived experiences of the learning technologist and those supporting the application of technology to enhance student learning.

This section which is devoted to exploring three aspects of technology in HE begins with another pool of longitudinal data, which constitutes the largest collection of student experiences in relation to technology-enhanced learning in Ireland. In 'An Investigation of Students' Experiences of Using Virtual Learning Environments: Implications for academic professional development', Risquez and colleagues explore data collected from 2008-2012. The sheer volume of responses (15,385 responses across 12 institutions) is indicative of the omnipresence of technology in contemporary HE. The data allows for comparisons between institutions of the VLE uptake; however, this chapter focuses on student opinions of VLE usage and the extent to which students have engaged with the VLE. The data gathered poses many questions about the potential of VLEs and the capacity for further exploitation of the current systems. The authors argue that the VLE needs to move beyond being a repository of content and posit that, with the help of academic developers and learning technologists, it can become a more sustainable and creative platform for blended learning.

A joint author of the previous chapter, Mc Nutt explores in an individual contribution the issues of identity and role for learning technologies and staff involved in supporting teaching and learning through technology. In a chapter entitled, 'A Critical Discourse on the Role, Motivations and Beliefs of the Educational Technologist in Higher Education', and spurred by his belief that the impact of educational technologists is often constrained by its discourse, Mc Nutt explores the values which underpin the work of this group. Drawing on data collected at regional focus groups with 23 staff from six institutions, and using Bordieu's notion of habitus as a theoretical framework, this chapter explores what it means to be an educational technologist today.

In Marcus Quinn's chapter entitled 'Digital Repositories and their Associated Services: From Capacity Building to Sustainability', the author maps Open Educational Resources (OERs) in the context of digital repositories with particular attention to the Irish National Digital Learning Resources (NDLR) service. Marcus Quinn tracks OER development, the issues involved with such resources (including copyright and intellectual property concerns) and the continuing need to share digital resources and services. She concludes with a positive look at the legacy of the NDLR and remarks on two key contributions it has made to Irish HE.

Section 4: Emerging approaches and pedagogies

This final section of the book emphasises the 'emerging issues' reflected in the publication's title. Higher education, with its several stakeholders, needs to be increasingly adaptable and fleet of foot. This agility is not typical of the sector, yet developments do occur and one can observe emerging trends, particularly with regards to pedagogies, that enrich the learning experience for teachers and students alike and which can prove transformative.

Huntley-Moore and colleagues open this section with a chapter entitled 'Promoting Student Engagement by Engaging Staff: Implementing a survey of student engagement', reminding us of the importance of the student voice. In this chapter, which explores the development of a student evaluation system based on the Australian model 'National Survey of Student Engagement' (NSSE), the authors sketch the design and implementation of a local student evaluation system. In a balanced manner, it examines the challenges and issues of implementing this type of survey, and discusses its value and possible

applications. Though all of the chapters in the book offer, we believe, timely and useful contributions to the dialogue around higher education in Ireland today, Huntley-Moore and colleagues' contribution was prescient given the recent launch of the Irish National Student Survey in March 2013.

In the second chapter of this section, Higgs and Cronin explore a theme which has gained ground in higher education over the past decade, the notion of threshold concepts. In 'Threshold Concepts: Informing the Curriculum' the authors outline the characteristics of threshold concepts and how they can inform curriculum design. The explanation offered by this chapter, which draws on the key texts in the area, is illustrated and elaborated upon in a case study of the application of threshold concepts in a 'Teaching History Seminars' series which took place in the authors' institution. Here Threshold Concepts are used with postgraduate students, who tutor undergraduate students, to decode a discipline approach and make explicit tacit discipline knowledge, and to encourage connections with other disciplines.

While Higgs and Cronin draw on the postgraduate voice in their dataset, the voice of first year undergraduates is brought to the fore in Diggins and colleagues' chapter entitled, 'Supporting First Year Students in their Academic and Social Adjustment to Higher Education: A case study of the First Seven Weeks Programme at the University of Limerick'. In what might be considered a threshold itself, the transition from second level to third level is the theme for this contribution. The development of a phased induction programme to help students to manage the move from one social/pedagogical environment to another, and the associated challenges of this shift, are explored and addressed in the provision of the First Seven Weeks Programme. The chapter explores the establishment, implementation and evaluation of this Facebook-enabled programme over two years (2010-2012) and shares the experience and lessons learned in providing such an intervention.

Donnelly and Fitzmaurice present an innovative approach to supporting writing which brings the reader back to the postgraduate voice. Their chapter, 'Development of a Model for Blended Postgraduate Research Supervision in Irish Higher Education', presents a comprehensive and much needed alternative to the single supervisor model for postgraduate study. It discusses a practical and research-informed project that suggests postgraduate supervision might be better tackled through a blended supervision model. Whereas much has been written on doctoral supervision, the authors focus on the gap that exists with regards variety and new approaches to supervision at masters level. This chapter challenges current models and provides a springboard for further conversations on this topic.

The final chapter in this section concludes this book with an important focus on two fundamental issues in higher education that are both inspirational and practical: civic engagement and curriculum design. Boland's chapter, 'Curriculum Development for Sustainable Civic Engagement', explores capacity building for students and community partners in the area of service learning. The author argues that integral to the success of this pedagogy is a planned curriculum that focuses on process and attends to values, outcomes, methodologies, assessment and evaluation. In this chapter Boland provides a number of approaches to designing service learning programmes. In our national strategy for HE in Ireland, and at our core as professionals, we articulate unapologetically that higher education should serve society and the public good. Our institutions aim to inspire our graduates to have a readiness to contribute to an inclusive society in a full and meaningful way, in both their professional and personal roles as members of local, national and global communities.

To return our gaze to 'Enigma': we stand with her in a context of uncertainty but look towards the future, composed, prepared and quietly determined. Her textured and organic qualities reflect the grassroots approach of EDIN, and our commitment to creative, values-oriented work which embodies our mission. Enigma encapsulates the essence and the spirit of higher education today and reminds us of the privilege and responsibility that it is to be part of this community.

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Section 1

Collaboration as a way forward