

FORUM

MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education



THE EVOLVING CLASSROOM

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EDITORIAL

We have become used to saying that change is a constant in our lives, and that the pace of change is getting faster and faster. We only have to look at the mobile phones that we carry to realise how communication and connectivity have been radically transformed in the digital age. In our professional lives, those of us working in international education also generally feel that we're at the forefront of leading or responding to change in our work environments, given the fundamental shifts which exposure to the international world has brought to students and staff, to our institutions and organisations.

However, for many of us, our direct experience of the classroom is now several years ago (or indeed a few more!) and we perhaps haven't spent a lot of time reflecting on how the classroom has evolved since then. For many of us, memories of secondary and higher education are fixed at a point in time, only perhaps to be revisited when a new generation in our community – our children, nephews and nieces – starts to discover them. In this way, we are like the alumni who return to their *alma mater* several years after graduation only to discover that there are new buildings, that favourite cafes or bars are no longer there, and some of the schools and departments have new names.

So, this issue of *Forum* gives us an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which the classroom has responded to a globalised world, as well as to re-frame our understanding of how institutions have moved to adjust to new forms of

diversity on our campuses. Presenting perspectives from Europe, North America and Asia, the authors in this edition look at technological innovations in the classroom and new ways of leveraging a more diverse community on our campuses. Some of the authors also look beyond the physical classroom to consider faculty development needs, for example, or to frame the learning environment as the campus as a whole, rather than its individual classrooms. We're also delighted that Prof Eric Mazur, a Dutch physicist and educator at Harvard University, accepted to be interviewed for this edition.

What we know, from the latest *EAIE Barometer* and other surveys, is that higher education institutions are now more internationally focused than ever before. A full 78% of respondents in the second edition of the *EAIE Barometer* (September 2018) indicated that their institution referenced internationalisation in its strategy in some way. And this focus on internationalisation has led to greater geographical and cultural diversity in our student and staff communities, as well as new approaches to the curriculum that make use of internationally-relevant subject matter, and pedagogical techniques designed for a new age. We started to reflect on what these changes meant in the Winter 2015 edition of *Forum* on Internationalisation at Home, and this edition allows us to examine these questions in more depth.

As new Chair of the EAIE Publications Committee, this is also the first issue of *Forum* which I have had



the honour to edit. With thanks to the other members of the Committee, to our Editorial Coordinator and, in particular, to Laura Rumbley (former Committee Chair and now Associate Director, Knowledge Development and Research for the EAIE) for all of their support and guidance.

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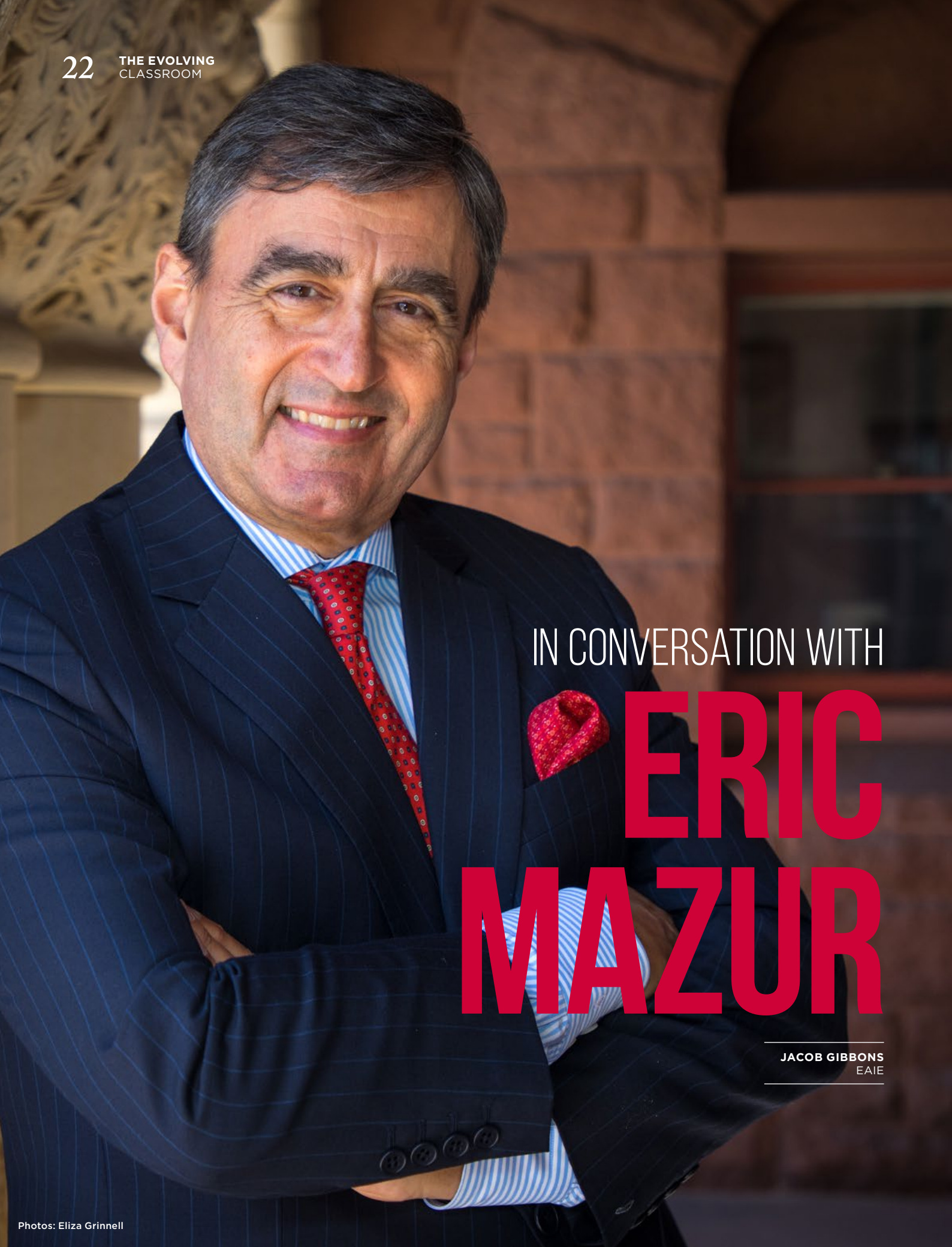
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IN CONVERSATION WITH

**ERIC
MAZUR**

JACOB GIBBONS
EAIE

As the classroom evolves, so does the role of the educator. Professor Eric Mazur's 'peer instruction' approach to pedagogy has reoriented the teacher-student relationship both within and beyond the Applied Physics classes at Harvard University. In these times of shifting student demographics and new technologies in the classroom, Professor Mazur is a firm believer in embracing change.

In the increasingly globalised, information-saturated and technology-enabled world in which we're living today, what does the notion of 'the evolving classroom' mean to you?

EM: Given my interest in pedagogy, the first answer that comes to mind would be moving away from learning as a spectator sport – where students are sitting theatre style, all watching the professor deliver a lecture – to a model which involves students actively in the learning process. So rather than a theatre style classroom, moving towards one that is flat, with round tables, where the focus of attention is not the professor but the students. And the professor's role changing from the 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side', someone who helps students achieve the most.

Before the internet, information was static and it was curated by universities, libraries and publishers

The second answer is that 'the evolving classroom' is largely driven by societal changes. Before the internet, information was static and it was curated by universities, libraries and publishers. You didn't have 24/7 instant access to information, so it was important to have a minimum of information inside your brain, so to speak. Nowadays, mobile phones provide instant access to any information we could

possibly want, and it's much harder to decide what is the information that we want our students to know. In fact, who are we to determine what information they should readily have inside their brain? Maybe it's much better to give them access to the tools they're going to use later and teach them how to use the information rather than to remember it. And, in any case, eventually they'll remember the information that they use over and over again. So in other words, memorisation should be a consequence of the use of information, rather than a perceived need in the brain of the professor, who probably cannot even fathom what kind of job the student will eventually end up in.

As a physicist, you've spent your academic career operating largely in a specific disciplinary domain. Do you think that effective learning and teaching adhere to some universal principles, or that the particular nature of specific fields or disciplines require different ways of thinking about learning processes?

EM: I'm convinced that, to put it very bluntly: learning is learning is learning, regardless of the context. What initially got me interested in teaching and learning was a problem in my own classroom. I discovered – after years of what I thought was sensible lecturing – that my students weren't learning. So I developed a new approach to instruction – 'peer instruction' – that solved my problem beautifully, and that permitted me to triple the learning gains. I got so excited about it I started giving presentations about it, and then other physicists started to adopt the method.

But then what has happened over the past three decades is that other disciplines adopted the method, in the sciences at first but then later in the humanities too. At first I couldn't imagine how someone who teaches French drama would use my approach to interactive teaching. But what peer instruction in the classroom does is that it brings the focus to the

let through the people who are like us. And in fact, I think if you look at most universities in the second half of the twentieth century, they were all not very diverse, dominated by one gender and certainly by one culture and one socioeconomic slice of society. If you stop to think about it, that's probably not the best approach, because you don't learn that

member. So in a sense, by supporting the diversity in a classroom, it's a win-win situation. It's not just that you pull up the lower tier at the expense of the higher tier. No; both win. You benefit when you explain it to me by virtue of putting it in your own words and in a sense sharpening your own thinking.

I think I probably would not have had the success with instruction that I had, had I not had a very diverse class. It is precisely the diversity – culturally, intellectually, socioeconomically – that permitted me to have the success I had.

It's not about storing the internet or a whole set of books in your brain, it's about learning how to think

thinking *process*, devaluing simply giving the desired answer. So whether you train people to think as a physicist or to think as an art historian, ultimately it is about the thought process: we want to train our students to become critical thinkers, to think like the people who are engaged in the discipline that we're trying to teach.

So it's really about *thinking*, not about memorising "if this, then that". It cuts across all disciplines and comes back to the point of what learning is really about: it's not about storing the internet or a whole set of books in your brain, it's about learning how to *think*.

In your academic life over the years, has 'diversity' among your students – international, intercultural, socioeconomic, linguistic or otherwise – been a contributing factor in the evolution of your approach to teaching?

EM: It has had an enormous impact. I think education throughout the centuries has very much been a socioeconomic and cultural gatekeeper: we're only going to

much from people who are like you. You tend to learn more from people who are different, because they provide a different perspective and push you to think about something in a different way.

The significance of diversity holds not only for cultural points of view, but also for diverse levels of mastery, intellectual diversity. For example, let's say that you and I are talking to each other about solving a problem, and you manage to

You tend to learn more from people who are different, because they provide a different perspective and push you to think about something in a different way

wrap your head around it and solve it. I have not because I'm not yet at your level of mastery. But let's say that we're forced to work on that problem together and talk to each other; then, you will bring me up to speed much more quickly than a faculty

You teach at Harvard University, which, among the global population of higher education institutions, is atypical in terms of its prestige, its resources, and its ability to attract top talent. Do you think that makes your teaching experience there 'atypical' in comparison to other instructors in higher education around the world? Or, can what you do with teaching at Harvard be relevant in other national or cultural contexts?

EM: Yes and no. Yes, Harvard University is different from, for example, a small rural college in Thailand. Top-tier universities have more resources and probably have a more select group of students than you would find in a rural area in a



Do you see any connection between your own international experience and approaches to learning and teaching? Is there something about your own international background that makes your classroom a particular kind of learning environment?

EM: I've sort of always felt like an outsider. I grew up in the Netherlands but my mother was French-speaking Belgian and my father was Austrian. I spoke French with my parents, German with my grandparents, and Dutch was sort of an adopted mother tongue, so in a sense I always felt different from the other kids. Later I moved to Paris and I thought I'd fit right in because it's my 'first' mother tongue, but of course in France I was considered the Dutch kid. So I've always, growing up, sort of felt different from the other people around me, and I think that does affect your brain in some way, in that you're more likely to think outside of the box because you're outside of the box anyways.

developing country. However, as I said before, from a cognitive point of view, from a learning point of view, things are not that different.

To give you an example, after I first had my first successes with peer instruction at Harvard, I thought it would be great to submit a proposal to the National Science Foundation (NSF) about improving education. So I wrote a proposal and the first thing that came to mind was exactly this question – I'm at Harvard, why would the NSF fund anything to improve education at Harvard, rather than a community college somewhere? So I included right from the start institutions that were

very different from ours, and a number of years later we actually published a study¹ that took place not only at Harvard, but also at a community college.

The interesting thing is that, yes, the students performed at a different level, but the relative gains were nearly identical. Which, if you stop to think about it, it's not that surprising. Yes, you have to adjust the material you use to the level of the students, but the same idea is that you bring them up, relatively speaking, by the same amount as you do the Harvard students. And because the students start much lower, the absolute change is much bigger than at Harvard.

1. Lasry, N., Mazur, E., & Watkins, J. (2008). Peer Instruction: From Harvard to Community Colleges. *American Journal of Physics*, 76, 1066-1069.



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JAN

Tips for using mindfulness to help international students adapt

Incorporating mindfulness in counselling and advising is one solution for helping international students adjust to life abroad.

<http://ow.ly/nOjh50pIGVY>



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JAN

Advancing Internationalisation at Home: 5 key insights

The recent EAIE Spotlight Seminar on Internationalisation at Home led to not only vigorous discussion, but also concrete takeaways about the path forward.

<http://ow.ly/YosA50pIHK4>

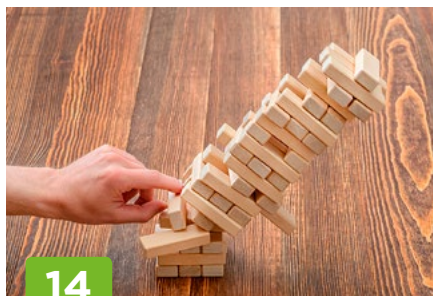


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FEB

Measuring our impact: mission impossible?

More than ever, we are being called upon to justify our internationalisation activities in terms of their relevance. What is our impact, and how do we measure it?

<http://ow.ly/Q4Q850pIIzG>



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10 mistakes to avoid in implementing a strategic internationalisation plan

If you've already finished drafting your strategic internationalisation plan, avoid making these 10 common mistakes during the implementation phase.

<http://ow.ly/yYES50pIJ6j>



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7 tips for evaluating credentials from disputed territories

Judging documents from disputed territories is often less than straightforward, but asking these seven questions should help you reach the right decision.

<http://ow.ly/VTmz50pIJcm>



06
MAR

5 challenges on the horizon for international education

What are the cross-cutting issues currently defining the work of internationalisation? They're too many to number, but here are five of the most important ones.

<http://ow.ly/xLK150pIJfH>



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