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Editorial

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Editorial

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Emerging from the depths of an unusually sunny and dry UK winter, AI's appearance on the HE landscape seemed as sudden as the first signs of prematurely re-awakened nature. And like the merciless wind and violent hails that welcomed the budding flowers and blossoming trees, we found ourselves shocked and awed by the overwhelming abilities of the new apparatus for knowledge creation with its seemingly boundless potential. The initial fascination with the market-leading ChatGPT quickly gave way to a relentless sprouting of ever more sophisticated and specialised platforms offering some novel powerful tool for every need and fancy, from content creation to research evaluation, and any type and style of writing. From fear to enthusiastic adoption, the challenges, threats, opportunities, and joys of generative AI have already spawned a range of rich responses in HE, including publications, training sessions and passionate debates, with educators far and wide producing materials aimed at understanding the implications of AI in terms of assessment, research, truth, and the production of knowledge. In this new digital transformation, it is still unclear whether what we are facing is merely a question of ethics or a wholesale and unstoppable epistemic revolution.

Like the Covid-19 pandemic three years ago, this profound disruption of the world of ideas within and beyond higher education has already dominated our thinking and planning for the future. While we keep developing our understanding of this new reality alongside the intensifying apocalyptic discourses, life nonetheless seems to go on and pressing problems

keep needing solutions. In this volume, we share eighteen creative analyses related to a phenomenal range of non-AI-related issues presenting in academia, from student diversity, technological opportunities and new modes of effective learning and teaching, to supporting student engagement and employability, with one opinion piece heralding the inevitable turn towards more AI-related research we expect to see in future editions.

It is undeniable that in recent decades the diversity of university students has increased, and it has been observed that degree results vary between student groups. This degree awarding gap is particularly high between White students on the one hand and Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority students on the other. Assessments are a key aspect of closing the degree awarding gap. In the first paper opening this issue, Katrin Bain makes a strong case for inclusive assessment as an alternative to reasonable adjustments. The demand that all assessment variants are offered to all students and that assessments enable all students to do well is simple and compelling.

In the second paper, David Busby and Cathy Malone explore research into a writing development used to support international students studying at Master's level. The authors examined the extent to which structured writing analysis and facilitated group feedback (through writing circles) influence the students' perceptions of confidence in their academic writing. This was achieved through student interviews and pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. From these results, Busby and Malone argue that the intervention had a positive impact on overall confidence in academic writing, increased perception of agency and a decrease in anxiety.

Debbie Holley and David Biggins present the technology that institutions require students to use as a source of 'technostress' in the current post-pandemic context. The authors argue that there are 'hidden learning spaces' outside of the formal institutional Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which its sophisticated learning analytics cannot fully access or capture, marking a schism between formal and informal spaces where students learn. The paper offers insights into accessing and interpreting data in ways that are more useful for academics, learning developers, and learning designers, and it suggests ways in which we can effectively frame student support by putting the 'real' student experience at the centre of our practice.

Daniel King's paper investigates the impact of online formative assessments on students' performance in an introductory Accounting module using regression modelling to test the relationship between formative assessment usage and exam performance. Accounting is acknowledged to be a technically difficult subject and in the context of an increased amount of online learning and the associated challenges with maintaining student engagement, this paper looks at the impact of formative assessment on non-accounting students undertaking an accounting module. The statistical analysis shows a significant correlation between formative assessment usage and examination performance, and the findings indicate that formative assessments can be useful tools to support students' learning even in the current context and with the specific challenges this particular subject holds.

Ingrid Potgieter, Melinde Coetzee and Nadia Ferreira's research explores the importance of students' levels of confidence in their readiness for the world of work. Following a comprehensive discussion of the factors that shape the requirements of the rapidly evolving modern workplace, the authors focus on discussions around the apparent correlation between a proactive, confident and self-aware approach to career development and work readiness. Taking a cross-sectional quantitative approach, the project utilised a self-administered questionnaire to capture students' evaluations of their own business ingenuity and sociodigital agility and the extent to which their studies contributed to their work readiness. The paper concludes with a valuable discussion of the complexities around work readiness. Drawing on the data, it highlights the importance of students having a growth mindset and universities responding to the requirements of the world of work, by providing the guidance and support to enable students to grow in confidence and develop relevant and timely career competencies.

Eva Shackel's study examines student preferences for written feedback in a UK university writing centre, with a focus on convenience and dyslexic students. Data was collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Results show that students, especially those with dyslexia, appreciate written feedback for its convenience and ability to foster self-paced reflection. The detailed nature of written feedback also enhances students' perception of institutional care. These findings hold implications for accommodating dyslexic students during in-person writing centre appointments.

Susan Smith et al. outline the findings of a small research project which examined the value of a Staff Associate scheme. In practice, this scheme draws staff from faculties and professional service who are seconded to a Centre for Teaching and Learning weekly for one year to focus on pedagogic projects. This paper reflects on the findings drawn from reflective diaries and survey responses which examined practice experiences and learning journeys. Findings showed a positive impact of the scheme on the Associate participants and their practice; of particular note were the building of unusual cross institution partnerships, and the role of the scheme in supporting innovation. The paper concludes by drawing together themes from the research, lessons learnt, transferability of findings to other universities, and consideration of the requirements for a successful future scheme.

In her paper, Brianna Vespone reports on a systematic review to examine the assumptions and practices taking place in co-constructed learning spaces within higher education research literature, with a specific focus on undergraduate students. The paper provides an overview of how co-constructed methods take shape in the university classroom and how those methods benefit student learning. The literature search was conducted via education-focused databases and the outcomes include four core themes, all holding significance to the learning development community to improve student engagement. Implications for teaching and training staff are considered, where this paper is rooted in theories of constructivist, sociocultural, and third space learning. The paper rationalises exploring alternatives to traditional pedagogical methods, highlighting barriers, facilitators, and potential downfalls of co-constructed learning spaces, and discusses implications for student learning and for teachers.

In the final paper, 'Choice matters: an investigation of students' experiences selecting dissertation projects', Isabelle Winder considers the implications of agency in students' decisions around selecting appropriate dissertation projects. Unsurprisingly, emotional and personal engagement with a topic seem to be the most motivating factors for students and lead to a more positive experience. However, agency in choosing one's project does not necessarily lead to increased satisfaction, with factors such as a supportive supervisory relationship often overriding the importance of choice. The author concludes that the choice process must be carefully guided in order to enable students' emotional engagement, motivation, and effective development of skills and knowledge.

The case studies presented by Daniel Connolly, Liam Dickinson and Luke Hellewell outline examples of authentic assessment used to develop undergraduate employability skills in a Higher Education in Further Education context (where undergraduate level courses are taught in local further education or community colleges). They reflect a trend towards embedding of skills development in the taught curriculum and are indicative of a wider move to explore more diverse, multimodal forms of assessment and the opportunities these present for learning. The examples are drawn from a range of subject areas: Criminology, Sport and Exercise, Health and Technology, and present innovative forms of assessment designed in collaboration with external stakeholders. The examples are analysed using principles of authentic assessment (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown, 2014) and authors use this to make further recommendations for practice.

At the heart of Pamela Donaghy, Chris Gillies and Niall McCann's case study is an initiative to support the academic literacies of nursing students, as part of a module on evidence-based practice (EBP), in the form of a digital escape room. EBP is essential to the formation of professional identity and competence in these students, and is founded on confidence and ability in academic literacies. A collaborative approach was chosen to frame the ways of 'being, thinking and writing' to develop a deep approach to reading, with gamified interactivity designed to promote engagement. Student feedback confirmed that they found it enjoyable and motivating, along with recognition that they had learned to critically search for and evaluate information. Despite the investment in time and resources to create a digital escape room, this case study suggests it was worth it.

The challenges of encouraging student engagement in face-to-face lectures have been brought to the fore post-lockdown. In his case study, Joe Greenwood focuses on how education technology, in this instance Vevox, can be used to engage students in what, for many, is an unfamiliar learning environment. Following a detailed discussion of factors that contribute to students' resistance to participating in lectures and approaches to building trust and encouraging engagement, the case study provides insights not only into students' engagement with Vevox but also the varied and creative ways it can be integrated into lectures. As acknowledged by the author, it is unfortunate that the study was impacted by external factors that led to a significant drop in attendance of the final two lectures, and although the encouraging conclusions are presented with an air of caution, the considered recommendations for further research provide a way forward.

The case study conducted by Rachael Harding, Robyn McWilliams and Tricia Bingham focused on enhancing the teaching practice of tertiary liaison librarians in information literacy workshops through a professional development (PD) program. At Auckland University of Technology (AUT), learning advisors with expertise in teaching and adaptability collaborated with liaison librarians to create bespoke workshops on workshop design, effective pedagogies, and lesson planning. The goal was to integrate relevant theory and learner advisor practices into the information literacy context. Sessions were offered both face-to-face and online, enabling librarians to develop suitable learning outcomes, content, activities, and pedagogical approaches while assessing and evaluating their current knowledge and skills. The collaboration resulted in shared knowledge among liaison librarians and the co-development of workshop design principles, leading to more consistent, sustainable, and measurable content. The success of this approach suggests that further exploration of knowledge-sharing between learning advisors and liaison librarians could be beneficial.

Innovation with escape rooms in higher education as a mechanism to facilitate playful learning and gamification are explored in the last case study by Stefano Licchelli and Laura Barnett. With aspirations to enhanced students' learning experiences, the analysis goes beyond engagement to assess the potential of escape rooms for formative assessment with postgraduate students. This innovation conducted within the School of Psychology at the University of Surrey invited students to complete an online escape room as a form of formative assessment and evaluate the experience through a qualitative feedback survey. The practice highlights a positive experience from students, the importance of peer-involvement which the experience supported, and challenge in the activity. The authors encourage higher education professionals and academics to explore how such practices could enhance students' learning experiences in their own teaching contexts.

Our first opinion piece deals with multiple choice quizzes, which are widely used in formative and summative online assessments. While research shows that these quizzes are effective assessment tools that promote student learning, conducting these assessments online raises questions about their validity and academic integrity. Chahna Gonsalves discusses the recent release of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence agent trained on a large language model that responds quickly and largely accurately to multiple choices. The opinion piece argues that there is still a place for multiple choice assessment and

outlines how ChatGPT's limitations can inform effective question design with the provision of examples.

At the heart of the opinion piece by Ralitsa Kantcheva, a learning development practitioner (LD) and Kiu Sum, a PhD Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTAs), is a fascinating and thought-provoking dialogue; in essence, a valuable snapshot of the barriers to engagement between GTAs and learning developers. Although heartening to see how, for Kiu Sum, ALDinHE served as a route to a deeper understanding of learning development, the piece explores the challenges and barriers, at programme, institutional and sector level, that can both diminish GTA awareness of the role of learning developers as well as minimising opportunities for productive interaction. The piece concludes with a call for raising awareness through GTA professional development and opening channels for direct communication between GTAs and LDs.

Reducing inequality in academic success has long been a concern in education, and in her opinion piece, Frantzeska Kolyda provides a compelling argument for the role of learning developers in creating learning environments that serve to foster a growth mindset. Focussing on students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic or other minorities, especially in STEM, the piece discusses research supporting a correlation between the teacher's mindset, the learning culture and environment, and the levels of achievement and motivation among their students. Although recognising the need for further research into growth mindset interventions, the piece serves as a call for learning developer involvement in the cultivation of growth mindset through supporting teaching colleagues in the design and delivery of appropriate interventions and inclusive teaching practices.

The last opinion piece by Eileen Pollard reflects on the journey of one practitioner's move from academia to the third space with reference to the challenges and realisations experienced as a 'recovering academic'. Beginning with her work on an experimental module she taught as an academic and combining this with theories of 'community learning' the author shares her powerful story and lived experience within and without 'communities' presenting a *conscious* intervention into critical pedagogy and an *unconscious* one into the third space, beginning with learning development.

Our current volume closes with two book reviews. Carina Buckley explores *Voices from the Digital Classroom*, a book that delves into the Teaching and Learning Online Network (TALON), which emerged during the 2020 global pandemic lockdown to address the challenges of teaching and learning online. TALON is a hub for sharing resources and knowledge to support the shift to online learning, compile ideas for approaches, and give updates and themed readings in monthly newsletters. Each chapter of this remarkable book draws on the experiences of a total of 27 members of the dispersed TALON community, interviewed via Zoom in the first year of the pandemic. The book captures a snapshot of life shifted online for those already fully immersed and confident in the technology and those who were brand new to it. This is a positive book, recounting inspiring and creative ways for connection, presence and authenticity, and co-construction, all of which demonstrate how constraints can stimulate and support innovation and how online teaching can resolutely have community at its heart.

Finally, Gary Fisher's review of Chryssa Themelis's monograph *Pedagogy of Tele-Proximity for eLearning: Bridging the Distance with Social Physics*, a significant contribution to e-learning and learning development within higher education. The book's focus on tele-proximity as a pedagogical approach recognises the importance of human-to-human contact in online learning contexts. A valuable aspect of the book is linking these principles to lived reality, providing practical insight for e-learning practitioners on implementing tele-proximity pedagogy in their teaching. The book proposes a novel approach to online learning that emphasises the role of networked social interactions within e-learning and provides a robust theoretical framework for tele-proximity pedagogy. It is recommended for anyone interested in exploring new ways of approaching online learning contexts and willing to engage with the theoretical and conceptual principles underpinning e-learning pedagogy.

We hope that this collection of papers, case studies, opinion pieces and book reviews will be a fitting response to our community's need for intellectual stimulation and practical inspiration, and that it will open up new conversations around the issues that matter to all those invested in learning and teaching.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank our magnificent reviewers whose critical reading of submissions and thoughtful feedback and recommendations have made

invaluable contributions to the quality of the articles in this volume. Our heartfelt appreciation for the time, expertise, and work it took to review articles in this issue goes to the following reviewers:

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With best wishes,

The *JLDHE* Editorial Board

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