Editor's Introduction

Welcome to volume 15, No 2, of Compass, Journal of Learning and Teaching in HE!

We are very pleased to bring you the 2022 summer edition of Compass. This issue contains a thought-provoking collection of papers, with topics including: an evaluation of the use of recap methods to support students' learning on a business module; a case study on using low stakes, online assessments to reduce mathematics anxiety and help students prepare for summative tasks in life science; the co-creation of a workshop to enhance primary education students' awareness of their digital footprint; an opinion piece on digital distance learning; a case study on co-teaching on a business module and a technology review of the social-learning video platform 'Flipgrid', as used in a third-year teaching practice module. A brief snapshot of each paper follows.

Students and staff at the University of Greenwich Business School participated in research to explore the effectiveness on learning of recap activities. The authors, **Duyen Chu, University of Greenwich, and Hien Nguyen, London South Bank University,** define 'recap' as *"an innovative pedagogical approach which can provide an interactive summary and revision of previous content to enable active learning"*, ensured that all participants had a shared prior understanding of this definition. This case study looks at perceptions of the value of recapping in the context of widening participation and its authors find that the method has benefits for both teachers and learners in meeting the diverse needs of students; the mixed-method approach adopted is, for research into this particular matter, innovative in seeking both student and staff opinion and some very informative qualitative data seems to confirm both groups' broadly positive attitude to recaps. The authors nevertheless highlight what were perceived as recapping's disadvantages, such as unnecessary repetition and greater initial workload, and so offer a balanced analysis helpful across higher education. As a whole, the study has much to interest staff determined 1) to encourage active engagement with what is taught and 2) to enhance continuity of student understanding from lectures to tutorials and seminars.

In the University of Greenwich Faculty of Engineering and Science in 2016, the new leader of a second-year undergraduate study skills module in Life Science established that students following the module needed to acquire confidence with basic descriptive and inferential statistics, in order to prepare themselves for exams and final-year projects. Finding that mathematics anxiety lay at the root of weaknesses in mathematical concepts and reasoning, the authors, **Susan Force, Mark Goss-Sampson and Sarah Harris**, sought agreement to include relevant assessed numeracy in the first-year curriculum. After experiencing an unthreatening online diagnostic quiz at the start of the first year, consequent tuition and mid-term formative 'low-stakes' testing (encouraging repeat attempts with minimal academic penalty), students were appropriately prepared for summative assessment of the same type. The authors describe, in an interesting case study here, the user-friendly, individually guided approach whose data outcomes indicate the likelihood of improved performance from engagement with the formative opportunities as preparation for the same kinds of question in summative tests. The authors are objective about possible confounding factors, but the availability of virtual learning environment quizzing tools indicates the potential transferability of the approach to subjects beyond science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The co-creation of a workshop about digital footprints, in order to protect students' professional identities, involved Primary Education Studies students. This workshop was intended to increase students' awareness of these footprints, to guide them to check and protect their own

footprints and to curate a positive personal digital identity, so that subsequent screening of social media footprints by potential employers would not be prejudicial. Furthermore, students might then access professional learning networks to greater personal effect. Five undergraduates formed an online (because of COVID) focus group to contribute to the creation of the workshop. The author, **John Parkin**, **Anglia Ruskin University**, summarises the varied and stimulating workshop activities, clearly designed to provide range and depth of understanding of the implications of digital footprints, and quotes some of the participants' comments, these constituting an interesting reflection on how well-designed, interactive activities can shape the thinking of those involved to their considerable advantage. Like the numeracy training already described, this particular approach, the author says, can improve students' understanding and awareness and equip them with skills that support their employability; it has relevance to higher education generally and could be included in personal tutor sessions.

In an opinion piece about digital distance learning (DDL), the author, **Peter Vlachos, University of Greenwich**, sets contemporary online technological learning opportunities against a historical backdrop of distance learning. The contrast between live theatre and television (the latter restricting performer autonomy) is compared with the contrast between in-class and online teaching. DDL and blended and hybrid delivery has, for this practitioner, significant challenges: increased workload, duplication, stress and exhaustion, as well as inadequate training for staff and information technology failures. The author is highly critical of DDL: the classroom is superior in many ways (reliance on DDL results in weaker analytical skills and source appraisal skills, as well as information overload); the digital medium enhances student inequalities; few students study full time; lack of engagement tends to be laid at the teacher's door; DDL is poorly serviced and lacks sufficient technical support. Nevertheless, this particular teacher acknowledges the inevitable longevity of DDL and – though its haphazard implementation during COVID and growing student dissatisfaction with it hardly help – seeks 1) a more critical assessment of ways to deploy it to benefit students, by considering which modules and which students it will best serve and 2) much better resourcing. The concluding comment is telling: "*How* we teach our students is at least as important, if not more important, than *what* we teach them."

The COVID effect had, by contrast to the critical tone of the DDL piece, a largely positive outcome for two experienced and clearly enthusiastic teachers in the University of Greenwich Business School, who decided to co-teach online a level 4 specialist transport and logistics module, the better to address the needs of a diverse student group. In a very informative case study, the authors, **Anusha Pappu and Alistair Bogaars**, compare student outcomes (across a range of parameters) for similar business school groups co-taught and taught by a single person, is based on a mixed-method approach. Tutor observations do suggest that there are benefits to students from co-teaching, as there was evidence of greater student engagement with two teachers than with one, while the quantitative measures indicate that co-taught students had improved outcomes in terms of attendance, results and satisfaction, all these consistent with tutor observations; it is suggested, too, that the methodology may contribute to a narrowing of the black, Asian and minority ethnic/white attainment gap. The authors are cautious about their results, drawn from what they call *"a rudimentary approach to co-teaching"*, and recognise that there is room for more research, but perhaps the main conclusion to be drawn here is that two teachers, with shared determination to address an identified challenge and the ability to work well together and support each other, are very likely

to be able to see improved engagement by students. The 'how we teach' of the opinion piece chimes well with this.

Finally, a South African university perspective of the COVID-driven move to online pedagogy concerns the tutoring of trainee teachers: a technology review of the social-learning video platform 'Flipgrid', as used in a third-year teaching practice module, has, according to the author, **Tiani Wepener, Sol Plaatje University**, the ability to enhance confidence in student teachers preparing to enter the profession. Flipgrid allowed these trainees to share – with their peers and education tutors – aspects of their teaching and lesson-planning for evaluation and feedback. The case study depends on a range of student teacher reflections on their use of Flipgrid, indicating that the platform allowed students to practise their competencies in a secure environment and to repeat their video productions to make improvements. There were issues of connectivity as well as practical challenges arising from unfamiliarity with the software, but the absence of a class rendered the experience far less authentic than the real interaction of the classroom. The author provides a balanced review and is realistic about the shortcomings of this platform in achieving its desired purpose in the teacher training context. Nevertheless, positive student comments do seem to indicate that the imposition of COVID restrictions could be overcome to some extent by this means.

We hope these papers will make enjoyable and informative reading.

With best wishes to all Compass readers, contributors and reviewers,

Rachel and the Compass team at the University of Greenwich