

Editorial

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For anyone who attended the workshops and presentations at the 11th ALDinHE conference held in Huddersfield in April, it would have been apparent that the learning development community is engaged in an extremely wide range of interests and activities. This variety is driven by the different contexts that we each work in, and the diverse groups of students that we meet and support. What was also manifest at the conference was that underpinning the work of everybody in attendance, and the key characteristic that brings us all together (in a very convivial gathering) is a desire to help students to learn. With each successive conference, it is highly encouraging to see how the group identifying themselves as learning developers continues to grow, and to hear about the ways in which they are striving to improve the learning experience for students in HE. At the same time, it is clear that while we work in our own spheres of activity, similar challenges come up time and again for all of us, meaning that the experiences and approaches of our colleagues from different institutions, disciplines and countries can inspire us and provide insights into how we might respond to our own challenges.

Similarly, in the process of selecting and reviewing papers for each edition of the JLDHE, the diversity of contexts for LD becomes very apparent. Learning developers are working with very different groups of students, each facing their own challenges and needing support to meet their own specific needs. In the papers included in Issue 7, you will read about LDers striving to support students with their transition into HE; or working with student nurses; part-time mature students; and learners on an overseas campus of a UK University. The value of sharing these studies is that, invariably, the results and conclusions drawn by the authors provide examples and insights that are potentially of use to us all, and which contribute to the growing body of knowledge underpinning the field of LD.

Marion Bowman and Berni Addyman's paper examines work done with student nurses, and particularly on improving the quality of academic reflective writing in nursing. Addressing concerns such as staff perceptions of poor writing by student nurses and issues of plagiarism, it is a comparative study of three different initiatives: the use of example texts to make task requirements more explicit; the provision of formative peer feedback on draft texts; and facilitating increased dialogue between staff and students regarding expectations of the task. Bowman and Addyman report that there are indications that pass rates and grades improved in the three cohorts studied, and that there was an increase in uptake of academic supervision. They conclude that providing scaffolding learning activities for academic reflective writing remains a key need for students on programmes of study related to professions such as nursing.

Louise Frith and Allia Wilson from the University of Kent take on quite a different group of students in 'Returning to learning: what are the academic development needs of mature and part-time students?' They ask "what works to support and retain these students?" They describe the development of a programme offering self-assessment, one-to-one advice and targeted study skills sessions. Drawing upon ideas from social learning theory and appreciative inquiry, the authors conclude that, although successful in its own terms, the programme could be improved with greater attention given to students' prior knowledge and a stronger emphasis on building social learning networks, including via uses of web technology. This paper offers valuable insights and ideas that will be useful for those working with this expanding group of students.

Using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experience of healthcare students in a multi-disciplinary Masters programme, Catherine Hayes and Mark Davies' paper explores the use of a hybrid model of problem based learning. With data gathered from questionnaires and interviews, findings suggest that there is indeed value in such an approach to learning and teaching, particularly in promoting interdisciplinary learning. This has obvious implications for multidisciplinary working and for cross-disciplinary learning in general, with the cohort noting that it afforded them a means of feeling valued in their contribution to sessions.

Hargreaves, Bond, Dagg, Dawson, Kendrick and Potter present a case study of a process of collaboration on the development of an online self-assessment tool. Rather than analysing the tool itself, or its implementation, at this stage, the authors have analysed the process of development, focussing on the factors that made for a successful collaboration, and particularly 'the positive impact that involvement in the project had on the team members, particularly those who were students'. We can look forward to a future paper from the same team evaluating the impact that the implementation of their tool has had.

A different kind of collaborative process is described by Hoolash and Kodabux in their paper which evaluates the implementation of a Student Learning Assistant scheme in the Mauritius campus of Middlesex University. This work, which recruits students to work as facilitators to assist others in learning sessions, clearly has advantages on both sides, but the authors do describe significant challenges that this arrangement generates. The solutions they suggest will be helpful for academics or learning developers considering introducing similar schemes in any context.

In 'Fostering a sense of belonging: supporting the early formation of student identity as successful learners in Higher Education', Sarah Parkes discusses the recent experiences of students participating in HEADstart: a two week pre-entry blended learning course at Newman University, Birmingham. This case study explores the extent to which a sense of belonging in HE, a key element to successful student progression and success, can be successfully fostered in students before even they start university.

Finally, Simon Brownhill examines the tutorial as a means of learning, with an investigation of students' perceptions of an innovative 'Tutorial Stations' system. Students in the second year of their practice-based foundation degree were provided with tutorial support in the

form of 'stations' including: face-to-face support from the tutor; a station containing examples of literature; and a discussion area. Results suggest students were positive about these changes and it is clear that it would be useful to conduct further research to ascertain the impact on attainment.

The range of topics and activities examined in these papers makes for very interesting and enlightening reading, and we hope you enjoy taking some time to explore the work of your learning development colleagues. Whether examining strategies for effective reflective writing, or considering how to provide better tutorials, these papers, like the presentations at the Huddersfield conference all address in some way the fundamental learning development issues of how to engage learners, and how to help them to achieve their goals as learners.

In the last issue, we reported that the editorial team of the journal expanded, and in January 2014 we were able to have our first full editorial team meeting in one location. This gave us the opportunity to plan for the future development of the journal. We will shortly release a call for a special edition to be published in November, which will take a particular look at ways in which learning development can be supported by the use of learning technologies. However, we accept papers at any time, and if you have work that you wish to report on that is not a fit for the special edition, you should still submit as we aim to publish three issues each year from now on.