Editorial

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Issue 8 of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education offers a selection of papers, case studies and reviews that represent a wide range of topics and approaches, indicating a growing depth and breadth to LD as a field of study and practice. Adopting methodological stances of both quantitative and qualitative character, and with focuses on student, academic and professional practices, as well as on the environment in both the global and local senses, our authors offer an insight into how Learning Development is permeating Higher Education at all levels. In this edition, alongside material on 'traditional' LD topics such as how students learn, employability and digital literacies, readers will also find accounts involving narrative analysis and autoethnography, and promoting inter-professional collaborations, where the emphasis is on the formation and development of identity in academic and professional settings.

In his paper 'Assessments and the self: academic practice and character attributes' Stuart Hanscomb (University of Glasgow) argues for learning developers to give attention to the notion of "character attributes such as open-mindedness, enthusiasm and perseverance" in relation to students' "academic practice and outputs. He suggests use of narrative analysis to explore this relationship, and proposes case study activities to develop students' reflective capacity as a route to enhancing their learning.

In 'Maria's Story', Claire Hamshire, Kirsten Jack, Alicia Prowse and Christopher Wibberley (Manchester Metropolitan University) also adopt a narrative exploratory approach to investigate the experiences of a mature, international student during her first year of study. Their paper reinforces the critical importance of integration into the academic community, combined with peer support, while highlighting the wide-ranging challenges facing students and the need for transition to be seen as lasting well beyond the the formal induction period. Maria's narrative offers a fascinating and powerful insight into the complex nature of transition into Higher Education, especially for mature and international student.

A broad perspective on "students as researchers and experiential learning" is given in 'The Social Hubs project' by Carin Tunåker, Ian Bride and Daniela Peluso from the University of Kent. Their case study describes practice whose goal is to engage students across disciplines in academic and practical activities to contribute "meaningful positive changes to the University's physical environment", gaining research skills and work experience whilst co-creating the university community.

Jennie Winter, Graham Barton, Joseph Allison and Debbie Cotton (University of Plymouth) introduce the emerging discipline of Education for Sustainability (EfS) as well as its intersection and potential commonalities with Learning Development in their paper 'Learning Development and Education for Sustainability: what are the links'? From the starting point that both are relatively new disciplines, the authors argue that conscious discussion of the links between the two may result in the development of innovative ideas and practice. The two fields share a pedagogic focus, with emphasis on critical thinking and students' development of skills, and a commitment to holistic and embedded approaches within Higher Education. According to the authors, it should be possible for both to learn from one another and, indeed, together.

In their case study, conducted in a "typical UK HEI Biosciences department", Julie Furnell and Graham Scott from the University of Hull compare how teachers, current students and recent graduates perceive the importance of skills for employability. They argue that HEIs, employers and students are "partners in the development of a skilled workforce". Using a quantitative approach, Scott and Furnell compare the Likert scale rankings of a range of skills by representatives of the target groups. From the differences in perception identified, the authors conclude that the importance of certain skills only become apparent once they are being applied in the workplace. As a consequence, they argue, it is vital to ensure the understandings developed by those who have now joined the world of work are more communicated effectively to existing students, and to those designing programmes of study.

Arguing more specifically for use of quantitative methods, Jaime Hunt and Erika Spray (University of Newcastle, Australia) present an argument for such an approach to "gauge research students' academic literacies beliefs and sense of researcher identity." Their paper reports on a study into these issues involving 48 postgraduates. Their results show a link between the two concepts, confirming that "academic literacies beliefs and researcher identity were significantly but weakly correlated". Spray and Hunt discuss the importance of creating opportunities for postgraduates students, for whom no clear curriculum exists, to develop their researcher identity as a way to navigate the transition from undergraduate level work, and to face the challenges of adapting to the norms and conventions associated with their communities of practice, in order to gain effective membership. Their paper also offers interesting claims about the use of "quantitative instruments to measure individual beliefs and attitudes such as epistemic beliefs".

'Breathing Life into Information Literacy Skills' reports the results of a Faculty-Librarian Collaboration undertaken in US colleges. Divonna Stebick, Janelle Wertzberger, Margaret Flora and Joseph Miller describe the development of a joint approach by the reference librarian and a professor who agreed that a "better research process would lead to a better literature review". They asked students to create fifteen-minute online audio-visual recordings of their research practices, including audio and screen movements. These gave a critical baseline on existing information seeking strategies. They report that their subsequent structured inputs, including use of rubrics and critical reflection on individual reflective practices, helped students improve their overall information literacy.

Heather Conboy, Sukhtinder Kaur, Julie Lowe, Ian Pettit and Rob Weale report on work done to develop digital literacies at De Montfort University. Their case study describes practices and strategic approaches to supporting both staff and students. They descibe the successes they have achieved in applying a co-operative, connected and distributed model for development. In doing so, they share strategies that will undoubtedly be of interest and use to colleagues in other institutions seeking to carry out similar digital literacies work. However, in examining the outcomes of their work they advise that the difficulty, as always, is in reaching those who need support most: the staff and students who most lack confidence in their uptake and use of digital technologies.

Two, very different, papers are united by the fact that they deal with the educational potential of techniques and methodologies that are not widely used in the field of learning development:

Dawne Gurbutt and Russell Gurbutt (University of Central Lancashire and University of Leeds respectively), report on an initiative that used coaching skills with healthcare students. While coaching is well established in fields such as management, it is less widely used in education. They authors argue that, given coaching's focus on learning and development, it offers a valuable means to promote ownership of learning. This was a small-scale initiative but the evaluation suggests that coaching has the potential to add educational value. Gurbutt and Gurbutt conclude that '*Coaching has the potential to deliver real benefit in educational context, as it does in management contexts, fusing successful goal achievement with growth, learning and development*' (p. 14).

Catherine Hayes and John Fulton (University of Sunderland) explore the use of autoethnography in the professional doctorate as a means of '…*linking theory to the practical situation*' (p. 1).   They begin by outlining the growth of professional doctorates that are focused on work-based practice and identifying the challenges sometimes faced in selecting appropriate methodological frameworks for this kind of work. They argue that autoethnography is particularly relevant to this kind of work and has a legitimacy that is rooted in its capacity to theorise process and outcome, facilitating critical reflexivity.   The authors offer a thoughtful exploration of the conventional and post-modern approaches to autoethnography. They highlight the potential contribution of this methodology in providing a rigorous framework for professional doctorates while acknowledging that it is not universally accepted.

Issue 8 also contains two reviews of recent books of interest to learning developers:

Marie Nadia Jasim (St George's, University of London) reviews Helen Owton's recent book 'Studying as a Parent: A Handbook for Success'. A parent and mature student herself, Jasim offers a very thorough and constructively critical review of a book she judges accessible and upliftingly optimistic. The review summarises the book's practical content and offers some suggestions for improved use of testimony and experience from a range of student parents; she also indicates where updated information would be needed for a 2015 readership – which, she suggests, should include academics and support staff in HE as well as student parents.

Ronan Bree (Dundalk Institute of Technology) reviews 'The Lazy Teacher's Handbook' edited by Ian Gilbert. He makes clear that this is a specific use of the term 'lazy', not one concerned with deliberately lessening workload but, instead, with adopting a smart approach to learning and teaching and thus facilitating independent learning amongst students. He recommends the text for anyone involved in teaching in higher education arguing that its content can help educators introduce metacognition, critical and reflective thinking. The review then describes ten specific concepts and activities in the book before discussing how these could be introduced within teaching.

As issue 8 goes to print, we are already working on our forthcoming special edition on Peer Learning, and making plans for a JLDHE Student Special consisting of writing by and for a predominantly student audience. As always, the editors would be very pleased to hear views about this and other editions of the journal from readers, potential authors and reviewers; we welcome thoughts about our content, layout and design. or suggestions for future special editions. Finally, we'd like to thank the authors of this edition, all our hard-working reviewers, and our dedicated and meticulous copy-editors, Natalie Bates and Susie Powell.