Editorial

Jim Donohue
Independent Scholar

Nicola Grayson
University of Manchester

Jenny Hillman
Open University

Katharine Jewitt
Open University

Eleanor Loughlin
Nottingham Trent University

Cathy Malone
Leeds University

Craig Morley
University of Chester

Gita Sedghi
University of Liverpool

Alicja Syska
University of Plymouth

As post-postmodern, or digimodern (Alan Kirby, 2009), twenty-first century people, we are not good at waiting. Patience seems to be the virtue of the past in a reality where almost everything is instantly accessible, including knowledge, products, distant countries, places and people we want to see. It took a global crisis to disrupt and frustrate this largely taken-for-granted ease of access, forcing us to reluctantly reach into our long neglected stores of patience. Suddenly we had to wait for things – government decisions, institutional strategies, permission to enter the university library. And even though many aspects of our lives have now regained the pre-2020 rhythm, we still seem to be waiting for what the 'new normal' will be where we are.

This issue of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* has been for us a harbinger of this 'new normal' that no one can yet define. It is much larger than our 'pandemic issues' and a quick glance at the article titles shows little indication that we have just been through a global crisis. Have we already moved on? Have we fully assessed the last two years' impact on our work, our relationships, our morale and frame of mind? Or are we merely in a 'flight' mode, fleeing from the unending days, weeks and months of waiting and anticipating?

For we are certainly still waiting. Waiting to see what will change in higher education and how it might still redefine our roles and working practices. Waiting to understand the real impact of what we have been through and how it has shaped us in ways we still cannot fully appreciate. Something new is emerging and, while we might not be able to predict or force the change we desire, we need to be part of this emergence – through thinking, writing, exchanging ideas. It doesn't matter so much when, or even if, they will ever get adopted. Putting them out there in the world is like planting seeds that one day, when the ground is less dry and the winds less tempestuous, might be able to sprout and yield a crop beyond our imagination. One day, someone might click on that article, dust that book cover, rediscover that blog post, and that 'something' we quietly dreamed of implementing will become 'something more'.

As the famed 'spirituality of waiting' writer Henri Nouwen, whose books were revived and widely cited during the pandemic, writes in *Waiting for God* (1995, p.13), 'We can really wait only if what we are waiting for has already begun for us. So waiting is never a movement from nothing to something. It is always a movement from something to something more'. The moment we are ready to paint an image of the future is the moment when the present already shifts, ever so slightly, in our minds. It may not feel like a lot, but it has the potential to seed a revolution. The challenge is to not keep our heads down, pushing ahead as we always have, but to keep seeding, dreaming, actively waiting for that better future. We might have to accept that change never follows a clear, linear, and consistent path. Progress can be slow and sluggish, but every once in a while this dawdling gradual pace is interrupted by a radical intervention, leading to what palaeontologists Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge (1972) called 'punctuated equilibrium'. Our equilibrium has certainly been punctuated. Transformation is inevitable.

While we are still in unchartered waters, our fantastic authors are already reimagining and reinterpreting the aftermath, actively waiting for what higher education in general, and learning development in particular, will become. As a result, in this issue we feature a rich assortment of writing: nine research papers, two case studies, three opinion pieces, and four book reviews – eighteen articles in total.

The first paper, by Mary Davis and John Morley, sheds light on the ways students make use of academic phases and constructions in the 'Academic Phrasebank' resource to develop self-efficacy in academic writing. Davis and Morley interviewed 12 student users of the compendium to establish how they used formulaic phrases from the resource. The analysis shows that students felt enabled by the phrasebank as it helped their participation in academic discourse; it also reveals that this may be particularly the case for students with a specific learning difficulty. These insights will offer learning developers, and indeed all colleagues involved in teaching and learning, valuable guidance on when and how to refer students to the resource.

The tension between the reported student preference for reading printed texts and the increasing prevalence of digital texts for academic study, serves as the impetus for Helen Hargreaves' exploration of the different reading choices made, and strategies used, by students. Focus groups with undergraduates were used to explore both the benefits and challenges of reading digital texts and the methods employed. The author highlights that although the students associated printed text with higher levels of enjoyment and concentration, they adopted pragmatic approaches to reading digital texts, making practical use of the functionalities afforded. The discussion concludes with a useful summary of how the insights gained have resulted in awareness of the importance of providing students with space to reflect on both their personal preferences and the different options available and the development of resources to support this process.

'Exploring course components as predictors of academic success in an online psychology course' uses learning analytic data to investigate which factors may predict student success in online learning in higher education. John Mingoia and Brianna Le Busque seek to build on existing research by identifying which elements of course design can predict student success. Specifically, they explored which course components can predict final grade, continuous assessment grade and major assessment grade in an online, undergraduate psychology course. Through this investigation the authors argue that the

number of times students visit the course site, view activities and post in activities were the most powerful predictors. They also found that non-traditional, female, home students enrolled part-time engaged most regularly in these activities. Overall, Mingoia and Le Busque argue that online courses should provide students with regular activities and opportunities to participate in course content to encourage success.

The paper 'Advancing the understanding of the flipped classroom approach with students' perceptions of the learning environment: variation between academic disciplines' investigates the students' perceptions of the flipped classroom approach and whether disciplinary differences can be observed in these perceptions. The findings showed that students from the academic disciplines related to the application of knowledge evaluated the four components of exposure, incentive, assessment, and activities more positively than those whose academic disciplines focus more on theoretical exploration. The paper identifies potential approaches, activities and modifications to teach specific disciplines, such as mathematics, language literacy and politics, to ensure these students benefit from the flipped classroom and to make class time more effective.

Bryony Parsons and Heather Johnston's paper presents evidence for student preferences on platforms for academic writing appointments. The context of the study was to establish whether appointments with an academic writing tutor held on Microsoft Teams should be continued, after a move to online appointments during the Covid-19 pandemic saw a drop in the take-up of the service. Analysing the results from a survey of students, Parsons and Johnston make a strong case for a 'hybrid' approach to virtual and in-person appointment types but also highlight nuances in student preferences according to the stage of their study, and the subject or faculty area. Their findings will be of broad interest to academic and student services considering a hybrid support model.

The paper 'Spaces and places in online learning: perspectives from students and staff' investigates the suitability of the online teaching spaces to facilitate interactions that adhibit learning and teaching. The research brought learners, teachers and digital specialists together within online learning spaces and invited students to represent their experiences of the virtual space using simple analogue tools. The researchers stepped away from habitual online behaviours and captured personal and even emotional responses to digital experiences. The finding showed that such spaces could facilitate new kinds of interaction and not just mimic interactions from the physical world. They could

become places, not spaces, and embody their own vernacular memories. They would acquire a past and perhaps, a brighter future.

The paper 'Interrogating a collaborative instructional approach to academic literacy: the missing link in supporting students' language learning' uses narrative inquiry to explore language tutors' experiences of teaching discipline-specific academic literacies. It considers the internal conflicts and subjective experiences of language instructors themselves as a missing perspective in respect to a collaborative instructional approach and argues that these perspectives could advance a more holistic understanding of potential barriers to staff engagement with this approach. The findings show that feelings of undermined confidence or authority, constrained agency, resistance from students, and obligation, all constitute barriers to staff engagement. The study thereby illustrates the value of a more holistic appreciation of collaborative academic literacy instruction.

Higher education educators have implemented different pedagogical approaches to promote active learning and improve student engagement. The paper titled 'Improving student engagement using a video-enabled activity-based learning: an exploratory study to STEM preparatory education in UAE' proposes an activity-based learning (ABL) approach to enhance students' motivation, engagement and academic performance in STEM subjects, i.e., chemistry and physics. The findings of this study suggest that video-enabled ABL could significantly improve student engagement and academic performance. However, the sole use of educational videos itself will not have the best results. The key is to use these videos to develop activities to foster better interaction and self-directed learning. The framework proposed in this study will assist STEM educators to implement video-enabled ABL.

The last paper featuring Xue Zhou and Peter Wolstencroft's research shows that the traditional student support systems used within UK higher education are no longer fit for purpose and proposes an organic student support system that is based on five features: agility in the environment, a tutor-student partnership, informal two-way communication, a student-led community, and the inclusion of a knowledge-hub. The authors discuss an alternative support system for Chinese students at a large UK university who felt disenfranchised by the current support mechanisms. The system proved extremely successful and is something that could be replicated with other groups of students in the future in UK higher education.

Our case studies section opens with a piece titled 'The process of adapting an online induction course to support distinct student cohorts'. Drawing on evidence of student engagement in a generic online induction course, Kirsty McIntyre and Jennifer O'Neill discuss the process and results of tailoring the course to meet the distinct needs of two particular cohorts of STEM students. Through detailed and frank accounts of collaborations, processes and student engagement and feedback, the authors explore the importance of appropriate timing in the release of prearrival induction, ways to encourage engagement and completion and different types of content. The concluding principles provide a distillation of the points discussed and serve as a very useful starting point for others seeking to implement online induction courses.

Our second case study, by Pamela Thomas et al., shares the journey of creating a Learning Development Toolkit at London South Bank University. The toolkit is available on the LSBU website and comprises a database of formative academic skills activities which are available for academic staff to adapt and deliver during lectures and seminars. The case study discusses the difficulties faced with building such a resource within the context of particular organisational and logistical constraints but ultimately describes the path to creating a successful tool which was developed, tested and revised with critical friends.

In the first of our three opinion pieces, Julia Bohlmann engages with the challenges that the Decolonising the Curriculum movement in universities presents for learning developers. She considers whether the goal of learning developers to support students to succeed in the curriculum is compatible with a commitment to challenging the colonial nature of that curriculum. She answers in the affirmative and proposes two ways in which the paradox can begin to be addressed: through 'reflective' and 'relational' practice by learning developers.

An outline of the benefits of collaboration within and between universities serves as a starting point for Richard Heller's discussion of a 'New Bloom', a revision of Bloom's Taxonomy that includes Collaborate. A very useful discussion of the evolution of Bloom's Taxonomy, since its inception in 1956, leads the author to suggest Collaborate and associated educational objectives be added between Apply and Analyse on the traditional pyramid hierarchy. The limitations of the sequential model are explored and it is proposed that because Collaborate is an important feature in each of the other components, it can

be positioned as the centre of a non-hierarchical structure. The author concludes by considering 'New Bloom' in practice through highlighting the effectiveness and value of collaboration to learning.

And finally, in the third opinion piece, Constantine Manolchev, Allen Alexander and Ruth Cherrington of the University of Exeter Business School, argue that 'employability' in HE needs to move beyond simply encouraging an individual's 'trajectory of personal development towards aspirational job outcomes'. This focus on individual practice may support neoliberal performance management initiatives (such as TEF), but is deficient in responding to diverse student backgrounds, and emphasises 'getting to the front of the queue' and graduate outcomes, rather than lifelong learning based on a range of critical skills and experiences. In pursuit of a more transformational model of employability, the authors turn to Freire's notion of praxis. This takes them beyond current models of 'employability 2.0', based on communities of practice, organisational learning and the connected curriculum. They claim that, in 'Employability 3.0', the focus on praxis supports learners towards a life of true self-determination.

We end our overview with insights into four book reviews. Firstly, Silvia Colaiacomo and Ivan Newman review the book *Study Skills for International Postgraduates*. The book aims to support postgraduate taught students across different disciplines to manage expectations and navigate the requirements of their studies in 'Western' academia, defined in the book as meaning English-speaking countries of Anglo-Saxon heritage. As the reviewers demonstrate, it delivers wisdom, both historic and forward-looking, making it ideal as a reference tool to take the newly arrived international postgrad, for whom it is primarily intended, from the early days of settling in and making friends through their academic programme, closing with suggestions about doctoral research. Offering the book to all incoming international students as part of a 'welcome pack' seems like an excellent idea.

To close, Maggie Scott and Retha Schwanke review the book *Changes in the Higher Education Sector: Contemporary Drivers and the Pursuit of Excellence*. Reflecting on the experiences of change within the English higher education sector, the book provides several essays that relate to the slippery concept of 'teaching excellence' and its achievement. The discussion builds on narratives engendered by the contemporary political and regulatory landscape, emphasising the role of the Office for Students, the UK

Department for Education, and the impact of the Teaching Excellence Framework. Various aspects of teaching excellence are discussed, from common measurements thereof to what exactly it constitutes and how to improve on it. Even though the focus is mainly on the United Kingdom context, it is an informative text that can be valuable in any setting.

As always, we hope that in this collection of articles and conversations, our subscribers and readers will find thought provoking and stimulating material.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful reviewers whose critical reading of submissions and thoughtful feedback and recommendations have made invaluable contributions to the quality of articles we publish.

Our heartfelt appreciation for the time, expertise, and work it took to review papers in this issue goes to the following reviewers:

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With best wishes,
The *JLDHE* Editorial Board

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