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# Editorial

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## **Editorial**

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**Andy Hagyard**

Independent Scholar

**Jenny Hillman**

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**Eleanor Loughlin**

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**Cathy Malone**

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**Craig Morley**

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**Gita Sedghi**

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A fairly consistent thread in current – optimistically often referred to as ‘post-pandemic’ – discussions around teaching in higher education is the theme of ‘reinvention’. Academia must change; we must reinvent the way we teach, rethink how we design learning, and reconsider how we support our students. Responding to these calls, critical realists in particular look beyond individual actions, calling for meaningful structural change and systemic shifts. But institutions rarely change overnight. Change is often an accumulation of small acts by brave, determined people, who believe that their actions matter.

As the Dutch scientist J.M.J. van Leeuwen has demonstrated, even a tiny object can knock over a significant mass if you trigger the right chain reaction. To illustrate it, van Leeuwen created a domino with 13 planks ranging from 5mm to 45kg in size, each 1.5

times larger than the previous one. In his experiment, the push and fall of the smallest plank, one by one, led to tumbling the giant. He also claimed that it would only take an extra 16 planks to knock over a skyscraper.

The point is that little things matter. Teaching better matters. Writing more matters. Reading with others matters. Publishing and disseminating one's practice matters. We bring change through small acts that have large reverberations. And it is those small acts that can help reinvent academia.

We have seen the impact of small acts through our Compendium, a special issue (October 2021) documenting the ramifications of Covid-19 with regard to our teaching practices. These short reflections have so far attracted over 12,500 views, with readers looking to them for inspiration, leadership, and encouragement to practise better and, in turn, to influence their little corner of academia. We would like to invite colleagues to continue to write and submit these short pieces (we call them 'brief communications') so the more time-consuming and stringent requirements of research papers do not stop anyone communicating and sharing innovative ideas.

This month was very inspiring to our Editorial Board as we met with colleagues to talk about our work in a 'Meet the Editor' event organised by the Marketing Education Special Interest Group at Royal Holloway, London. We would like to thank Dr Lucy Gill-Simmen for inviting us to speak and for creating an opportunity for new colleagues to join our efforts to further the LD research and scholarship mission. We are also pleased to say that the [JLDHE Reading Club](#) is going strong. In January, we discussed a selection of Compendium articles related to wellbeing, and in March, we focused on fostering student engagement. Our next Reading Club will meet on 11 May 2022 and everyone's invited – please contact [Jenny Hillman](#) for details on how to join.

While we celebrate the positive difference we make, as a journal we also go through constant change. This month we are saying the final farewell to our technical editor, Andy Hagyard. Andy has been with us since the inception of the journal, working closely with John Hilsdon on making *JLDHE* a success. It is fair to say that without his contributions and expertise, we would not be what we are, not mentioning the number of times Andy saved us from a complete technical disaster! We would like to extend our deepest gratitude for all the time, patience, and effort he gave to the journal – it was priceless. We

now look forward to welcoming Dr Katharine Jewitt as our new technical editor – we are thrilled to have her in the team.

In this issue we feature eight articles: five research papers and three case studies, whose summaries follow.

In her paper, 'Engaging Students Online: An Analysis of Students' Motivations for Seeking Individual Learning Development Support', Arina Cirstea explores students' reasons for engaging with self-selecting learning development online tutorials. Cirstea used a mixed methods approach, which included an online survey and online interviews, to understand students' perspectives. The research discovered that students' motivation was constantly linked to attainment and confidence in their writing, and that students' engagement in learning development support is often mediated by academic authority figures.

Joe Greenwood's paper proposes a framework for the design of English for very specific academic purposes (EVSAP) materials. The research is based on a Digital Marketing MSc, where there is a strong rationale for embedded EVSAP provision. The research looks at related literature in EAP, ESP and ESAP, conducts a multi-stakeholder needs analysis, and incorporates the students into the materials design process itself. Finally, the conclusion discusses the scope and limitation of the proposed framework – such as its application in other contexts or with different cohort sizes. The paper presents a compelling case for focussed and embedded EAP provision.

Doug Specht's paper, 'Between the office and the coffee shop: an examination of spaces used for research degree supervision', investigates the importance and impact learning spaces can have on doctoral researchers, a group often overlooked in this area of study. The paper examines theories around space-making and the experiences and opinions of doctoral researchers themselves to come to an understanding of how spaces can impact on the pedagogical approach to supervision. Specht's findings suggest that researchers feel more comfortable in traditional learning spaces rather than more public spaces.

In their paper on student engagement and student voice in HE, Xiaomei Sun and Deborah Holt bring our attention to the importance of finding sustainable and inclusive channels to make the student voice count. Their research project elicited students' perspectives on student voice mechanisms and the extent to which they are effective in reflecting and

responding to the needs of students. The findings reveal not only the occasionally limited or erroneous understandings of student voice, but also the challenges in enhancing existing SV mechanisms. In particular, it becomes clear that one-way communications, such as emails, are rarely effective and can be burdensome, while dialogic and live communication seem to be both preferred by students and more productive.

The last paper featuring Huan Zhang and Bob Fisher's research focuses on how the experience of teachers engaged in active blended learning (ABL) at a British university might inform developments in College English teaching at a Chinese university. Following an outline of the models used at the respective universities, the authors discuss how semi-structured interviews provided insights into current practice and attitudes to ABL at both institutions. The case study further includes discussion of the inherent challenges for both tutors and students in moving to an ABL model and emphasises the importance of institutional support, additional resources and incentivisation to both enable and embed developments. The authors conclude by emphasising the importance of a student-centred approach to ABL and by highlighting five areas in which institutional support is key, namely pedagogical design, policy, staff development, technical infrastructure, and small class sizes.

Our case studies section opens with Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, and Sandra Sinfield's exploration of collaborative writing as a method of inquiry. The authors challenge the prevailing focus on writing as a 'skill' and encourage promotion of writing as emancipatory practice, not only for students but for academic staff as well. They argue that taking a 'different' approach to writing, for example by collaborating or using visual modes, can be both more powerful and more productive when it comes to stimulating writing projects particularly within the Learning Development community. The piece is an extension of, and a reflection on, the authors' 2021 *Staff Writing Guide: Supporting student writing and other methods of learning and assessment*.

Geraldine Huzar and Hossam Kassem's case study, 'Supporting Open University Students in Prison' provides a fascinating insight into how the Open University uses student volunteers to ensure students in prison can access the library resources they need to succeed in their studies. It examines why and how the scheme was established and reflects on the experience of running the service. It provides a peer-support approach that other university libraries may potentially look to emulate to support other student groups

who have limited access to library resources. It is hoped that this case study will be the first step in towards more research in this area.

And finally, Matt Offord, Sarah Honeychurch, Nick Quinn, Matt Barr, and Helen Mullen focus on the implementation of an escape room game in an undergraduate business course. Escape room games can be used to familiarise players with aspects of technology in a fun and challenging way, which avoids the anxieties or pressures associated with other teaching methods. They are popular games in which participants solve puzzles to 'escape' a fictitious situation. The authors highlight the ease of use of an escape room game and its robustness against connectivity issues and accessibility. They show that from a facilitator's perspective, the game is simple to run and can cope with large cohorts, with feedback confirming its positive perceptions among the students.

As always, we hope that in this collection of articles, 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:

Aileen Breed Harnahan

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Annie Bryan

Charlie Reis

Donna Grundy

Ei Rudinow Saetnan

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With best wishes,

The *JLDHE* Editorial Board