

Editor's Introduction

Our eighteenth issue of ***Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*** contains twenty-four papers representing opinion pieces, case studies, articles, conference reflections and technology reviews, all illustrative of issues affecting higher education today. This bumper issue has a broad scope, with something of interest to everyone. Here, the authors explore matters of teaching and learning - from poetry to banking and from group work to field work - as well as student engagement (through the lenses of classical storytelling and innovative technologies) and much more besides. Two articles, written by colleagues working in an Egyptian university, add an international flavour - they examine sector-wide pedagogical concerns similar to those experienced in the UK and show how their authors' interest in researching pedagogy led to an improved understanding of the impact of student-centred teaching on attainment and equity. This issue of *Compass* is delightfully varied and reflects the serious feelings of staff passionate about their practice and about student learning; it also demonstrates how their quest for evidence underpins critical and active responses to changing practices. Evident in these papers are such common patterns as increasing awareness of the importance of inclusivity, well-designed interventions and ways of supporting professional development and enhancing curriculum design; so too is a preoccupation with improving the student experience.

Peter Jones kicks off the issue with his opinion piece about the curriculum offer of post-1992 universities based upon his personal experiences of teaching in the social sciences. He is clear that these institutions, with their socially- and culturally-diverse intake from, for the most part, state-school and less-privileged backgrounds, should not be emulating their 'elite' counterparts and instead should, in his discipline at least, be focusing teaching, learning and assessment upon enhancing their students' employment prospects and treating their very diversity as an asset. The curriculum, he says, should be geared to them and their concerns, enabling them to enrich their cultural capital in ways connected to their own lives and supporting their social mobility; it should also include more 'issue-based' learning – still rigorous, but more likely undertaken as work-related learning.

An intriguing encounter with the future is provided by Poppy Gibson, who considers the possible transformation of education in a 'posthuman' world; she, a self-confessed transhumanist, says that, as technological developments have already shifted pedagogy from fact transmission to learner skills' development, resilience and creativity, the future learning experience of 'biotechnologically-enhanced' students will involve both artificial intelligence systems and teachers who are responsive nurturers of academic and personal potential. If we believe that programming of hardware may one day allow interactivity between the human brain and computers, the role of academics will be very different. Likewise, in a world where many current human roles have been taken by robots, educational curricula will need to be geared to the development of skills appropriate to intuitive, empathetic and ethical responsibilities beyond the reach of machines. The author concludes: "*it is common sense that we should aim to develop ourselves into faster, smarter, better-connected beings*". Institutions must adapt accordingly.

In the context of a workshop on the teaching of cancer biology, Lauren Pecorino, Richard Grose and Pinar Uysal-Ongane examine the value of subject-specific (rather than generic) teacher training where the teacher's deep knowledge of topics is highly likely to enthuse learners as well as subtly to accommodate students' varying levels of understanding and stages of development.

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Moreover, the workshop revealed advantages in networking amongst subject specialists, especially in the sharing of good practice and cross-institutional collaboration, as well as in disseminating how information technologies with direct relevance to content may be harnessed.

The relevance to other disciplines of a research paper exploring innovative methods best suited to assessing entrepreneurship lies in the author's emphasis upon the authenticity and formative nature of assessment. The findings confirm the inevitable challenge of aligning meaningful, deep-learning assessment strategies with regulations and acknowledge the time and effort needed to implement them. Track Dinning's conclusions are particularly interesting, in that educators, students, external practitioners and, strikingly, assessment design itself all have responsibilities in making the entire process logical, coherent, constructive, developmental of appropriate skills and, importantly, understood and accepted for its value in readying learners for their place in the working world.

An attempt to iron out perceived inequalities in the assessment of group work – in a Money and Banking module at an Egyptian university – involved the tutor's active intervention, first in subdividing topics with equal weight (for students to allocate as they wished) and second in requiring each student to upload her/his contribution to a personal Turnitin account. Despite the number of possible assessment techniques, fairness to individuals had previously been elusive. In her case study of this initiative, Heba Helmy pays scrupulous attention to practical detail, against the backdrop of a relevant range of literature, and conveys the method's effectiveness in achieving assessment accuracy and eliminating students' complaints of injustice. The paper clearly shows how previous assessment shortcomings were overcome.

Fostering deep and productive learning on an undergraduate marketing course in an Egyptian university was the aim of the authors of a paper which describes the process and impact on results of changing the learning environment. Samia El-Sheikh's personal experience of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education at the University of Greenwich prompted this focus and the meticulous review of the related literature, not to mention the thorough data comparison analysis of student performance before and after the intervention, are a tribute to sound scholarship. The approach involved the initial careful delineation of learning objectives, with checking for students' understanding of them, followed by a series of explicitly-related activities, such as mini case studies, to reinforce concepts and ensure their successful application. The authors' genuine critical self-scrutiny lends real credibility to this study.

David Hockham's opinion piece in response to a particular conundrum for the performing arts sector – viz. the lack of economic resources and a very limited number of available theatre placements for students – considers a very knotty practical and ethical problem. Industry rejection of the practice of free labour (the traditional performing arts career route – one that did not fairly serve the demographic of local communities) and the arrival of 'T levels' and 'contemporary apprenticeships' (both demanding work placements) represent an apparently irreconcilable difficulty for English universities to address if such students are to be supported in their transition into work and if the resulting workforce is truly to represent the community it serves. Fascinating!

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A refreshingly stimulating exploration of why significantly fewer students choose poetry modules or to write about poetry arises from one literature teacher's personal experiences in a range of UK higher education institutions. In a case study attentive to the spectrum of teaching and learning experiences about poetry – from formal technical analysis to participative group reading of and engagement with specific poems – Daniel Weston investigates students' own attitudes by means of focus groups and discovers what gut feeling has already deduced, namely that: reading poetry aloud enhances understanding; students recognise the importance of formal aspects in enabling their critical writing but don't feel that such technical information is always effectively presented; students feel that their affective response to poetry is often overlooked in the classroom; more time engaging with particular poems rather than the rules of poetry is more likely to foster enthusiasm and consequent confidence. There's plenty of food for thought here!

For Laurence Pattacini, author of a case study of a (landscape architecture) field study trip abroad, his personal experience of developing and delivering this type of student-centred learning confirms that there are huge benefits: active student participation at all stages; opportunities for students to become co-producers of knowledge and to engage in co-assessment and reflection; the integration of theory and practice; practical experience; collaborative, team-building and decision-making activities; development of such key qualities as adaptability, flexibility and resilience; independent experiential learning. He draws on qualitative data to demonstrate that the trip participants find the field study very constructive in shaping them as future professionals in planning and design.

Addressing conference presentation pressures and tensions – as experienced by female doctoral students with multi-faceted lives – and reflecting upon the opportunities for personal and professional development and growth of self-esteem thus derived are central to a paper which describes a 'third-space' online writing collaboration. Poppy Gibson and Suzie Dick sensitively depict how their remote article-writing partnership led them from a virtual relationship to an eventual face-to-face meeting and a joint presentation of their article to the Greenwich SHIFT 2018 Teaching and Learning conference. The mutual respect and peer-to-peer encouragement and support so clearly outlined here will serve as a considerable confidence boost for others (women **and** men) who are willing to share challenges and rationally overcome them.

Another paper presented at the University of Greenwich SHIFT 2018 Teaching and Learning conference outlines the contribution of in-class storytelling as an affective learning strategy, with focus on its promotion of phatic communication. This paper is very helpful in its provision of a range of suggested story-telling activities that include: self-disclosure by both tutor and students (a means of bonding and building trust); student narratives about their experiences of, say, Maths or History (a way of discovering attitudes and feelings); social media narratives (a way in to matters of self-presentation) and stories as a strategy for implicit communication of values and principles. The author, Maria Kamilaki, concludes: "*Storytelling... can elicit purposeful emotional involvement and bonding opportunities, transforming the university classroom into a participatory, interactional network of interdependent individuals.*"

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A group of staff and students in the department of Creative Professions and Digital Arts (the University of Greenwich) co-designed STEPS ('Support through Tutoring, Employability and Professional Skills') as a personal tutoring support solution to meeting the needs of a diverse student body faced with the challenges of a skills-focused curriculum. In her case study of STEPS, Miriam Sorrentino explains that it follows an iterative action-research process, taking one year's ideas and themes from student feedback to inform and shape the next; it is tailored, as appropriate, to all undergraduate year groups. She carefully charts the implementation and the progress of the project over three academic years, up to and including the current 2018-19 year and underlines the significance of creating a social dimension to the successful integration and retention of students.

A scholarly presentation of a holistic strategy framework – as implemented at Leeds Beckett University for driving excellence in academic practice – engages fully with current higher education 'excellence'-related issues. Acknowledging the various expectations and needs of staff, institutions and stakeholders, Ruth Pickford provides the strategy's philosophy – that outcomes depend upon: 1) individuals' attributes at different career stages; 2) academic practice development opportunities at each stage; 3) alignment of both 1 and 2 through the joint agency of institution and individual colleague "*to engage with one another behaviourally, emotionally and/or cognitively*". The author recommends the framework of this strategy as being of transferable practical use; she emphasises that it provides a rewarding, supportive development environment with which individuals at any career point will wish to engage.

The use of an open online space – to encourage participants on an initial teacher education course to contribute posts and comments in response to an assigned topic of relevant interest – lies at the heart of an investigation into the value of a shared community of practice for higher education professional development purposes. Learners actively involved in this digital task, says Francesca Robinson (on the basis of qualitative research), found it worthwhile, as it engaged them with the literature and helped them to reflect on their own and others' practice. The paper carefully describes the continuing refinement of the method over three years and considers the rationale for applying an open digital space, which can motivate learners and foster innovation and experimentation.

How to drive innovation in learning and teaching? Chrissi Nerantzi and Peter Gossman regard conventional academic development unit approaches as constrictive and propose the transformative possibilities of collaborative open learning. Reflecting upon their compelling phenomenographic study of two open, cross-institutional courses, the authors offer suggested solutions to the question. Now that digital technologies have made open and social media readily available to all, unlimited opportunities for informal, decentralised and unconstrained communities exist, taking collaboration beyond any course and connecting academic staff, students and the public. The message in this opinion piece is clear: open cross-institutional collaborations are the means of generating genuinely continuous, practitioner-led academic development through extended communities that are inclusive, collegial and unthreatening and inspire trust and a sense of belonging.

The language of a paper which conjures up the spirit of the open course 'Creativity for Learning in Higher Education' (#creativeHE) says everything about the ethos and purpose of a creative community of learners: building capacity, capability and confidence; social interaction; co-creation; a collective; collaborative learning culture; active social context; partnership; trust; respect; significant relationships; cross-boundary networks; explorations. The reflective narratives offered by the four authors of this heart-warming celebration of creativity open a window on the possibilities of truly collaborative open learning. It is impossible not to be enthused.

A thought-provoking article – from Dominic Pates – considers just what it takes to realise the transformational potential of mobile devices for learning and teaching in higher education; it addresses the practical, logistical and human challenges involved. Appropriate technical infrastructure in learning spaces is, the author argues, fundamental to pedagogical change, but a complex range of preconditions must also be in place if truly immersive, highly-personalised learning is to flourish. The devices themselves afford tremendous opportunities, if all students have them and if staff collaborate to develop the skills to harness what they offer. Genuine engagement with mobile social media within a community of practice may socialise mobile device usage and convince staff as well as institutions that a re-imagined pedagogy, with learners genuinely at its heart, can be sustainably achieved.

The Greenwich SHIFT 2018 Teaching and Learning conference included presentations on a range of web applications that stimulate student engagement. One conference presenter, Emmanuel Mogaji, offers here a thoughtful appraisal of what is offered, respectively, by such apps as *Kahoot!*, *Mentimeter* and *Slack* and by his institution's virtual learning environment (VLE) – *Moodle*. He considers why, when the VLE offers all the capabilities of the apps, the latter remain more popular amongst staff and students. Recognising the obvious advantages of a central VLE hub (all is in one place and staff and student privacy is assured), he is nevertheless sharply aware that *Moodle* and other VLE platforms really do need to improve their user experience if they are to counter the undeniably greater appeal of the much more user-friendly and accessible apps.

A technology review by of 'Google Classroom', a free collaborative tool allowing users to create virtual classrooms, recounts its application at Keele University "to create a blended approach to university-wide, freestanding, academic skills-development workshops". Like the staff and students at her institution, Kizzy Beaumont is largely positive about this tool: she regards it as accessible and intuitive; enrolment is easy; students engage comfortably in discussion and provide useful feedback; posts can be scheduled and released at chosen times; many Google apps are available for collaborative work. This paper helpfully charts both positive and negative aspects of Google Classroom and summarises the Keele Student Learning Department's application of it to support all areas of its practice.

The freely-available video discussion platform '*Flipgrid*' has much to offer educators, as its deployment with a cohort of final-year undergraduate sports coaching students at the University of Central Lancashire seems to show. In his technology review of '*Flipgrid*', John Stoszkowski carefully considers its potential for engaging groups of students in creating and discussing

themed video posts and for providing regular formative feedback to each student. Participants like it and tutors can monitor their contribution levels; it is also simple and intuitive to use. It does require an appropriate personal digital device and a good internet connection and tutors need to be alert to possible competitiveness and individual confidence levels related to on-screen appearances. All in all, the author rates the platform very favourably.

Achieving the active engagement of students in their learning was also the objective of Wendy Garnham, and Tab Betts, who teach a foundation-year Psychology cohort at the University of Sussex. In this case, students in seminar groups were asked to use the multimedia *Padlet* wall to respond to aspects of their reading of key papers. Qualitative and quantitative data collected confirm that collaborating in weekly-changing small groups promoted social interaction and genuine involvement with the material and had, ultimately, significant positive impact on exam scores. This paper is of considerable interest to any seminar leader who wishes to create a learning context that truly engages all members of a group and shifts the emphasis from passive presence to active participation, with concomitant acquisition of deeper understanding and transferable skills.

A very positive technology review of the student response system *Mentimeter*, as deployed by a teacher education department, reinforces the views of others who have found it helpful in engaging students. Kat Vallely and Poppy Gibson demonstrate its capabilities through three strategies – gauging opinion, engaging discussion and voicing concerns – and list its advantages and disadvantages. Perhaps the most striking aspect of what *Mentimeter* variously offers is that it can be applied to good effect by both tutors – who can use participant feedback to shape their future teaching – and by education students on placement – as a teaching tool in the school classroom. Furthermore, its capability for anonymous submission of questions enables unthreatening student/tutor dialogue to develop.

Another student response system, the free, game-based *Kahoot!*, finds favour with Maria Gebbels in her case study of this tool's use in tutorials on a research methods course. Its multiple-choice format, she finds, reinforces often very abstract concepts, provides instant feedback and thus builds user confidence in relation to subject matter. Against an exemplary theoretical background, the author uses a small-scale exploratory research sample to collect data on student reactions. Students' responses confirm their enjoyment, engagement and awareness of the tool's positive impact upon their learning development. The paper's conclusion indicates that *Kahoot!* could be widely applied to higher education teaching if students have internet-enabled devices, but counsels against over-use!

In their technology review of '*Quizlet*' – a mobile learning application with various quiz modes facilitating different approaches to learning – Richie Ryan, Gina Noonan and Eddie McElheron report finding this app easy to set up and flexible as an independent learning resource. They use it to increase student engagement in craft apprenticeship programmes and here outline a selection of the quiz modes, how students use them and how tutors embed them into classroom activities. As a part of a formative assessment process, the use of this app is of benefit in its provision of feedback on learning to both students and staff. As with other technological means

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of enthusing learners, 'Quizlet', conclude the authors, should not be over-used, but form part of a wider assessment strategy.

We hope that you find these articles interesting and provocative and that they stimulate reflections on aspects of our teaching, learning and professional development in a global context. With so many articles in one issue, the wide range of opinions and topics echoes conversations inside and outside institutions which continue to engage us and provoke critical debate. I hope you enjoy reading through the articles as much as we have enjoyed collaborating with hard-working authors and reviewers to put this issue together.