

Editorial

Christopher Drew
Teesside University, UK

Sue Eccles
Bournemouth University

Amanda French
Birmingham City University, UK

Andy Hagyard
University of Leeds, UK

John Hilsdon
University of Plymouth, UK

Christina Howell-Richardson
Birkbeck, University of London, UK

Craig Morley
University of Chester, UK

Lucy Rai
Open University, UK

Gita Sedghi
University of Liverpool, UK

Alicja Syska
University of Plymouth, UK

This special edition of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* brings together a collection of five papers, two case studies and two opinion pieces based on presentations delivered at the Learning Development Conference organised by ALDinHE and hosted at the University of Leicester in March 2018. A book review is also included in this issue.

In a provocative opinion piece, Sunny Dhillon (Bishop Grosseteste University, UK) considers the current focus in UK universities on student mental health and related issues, by asking 'Whose Wellbeing is it Anyway?'. He adopts an approach informed by Biesta's critical pedagogy and prompts Learning Developers to ask whether their key role (and that of other educators) is mainly to train students to 'fit in' with society – which, in wellbeing terms, he relates to the rhetoric of 'resilience' training – or whether it is more important to

encourage them to question the status quo. In arguing the latter, he suggests that mental distress is an understandable reaction to the many social and economic pressures of contemporary society, and that an educational response that focusses mostly on students' own responsibilities for their wellbeing 'exacerbates ... social problems by individualising them'.

In this edition several authors focus on issues of identity and specifically on how we can understand and work within a professional Learning Developer identity. In her opinion piece, Sarah Parkes draws on social theory to write about how charting her own history of working in HE and undertaking research has shed light on the role of Learning Developers as 'third space' professionals. This, she argues, despite involving us in contestation about practice, creates unique possibilities for us to 'comment on and critique the dominant practices and cultures operating within university spaces that inhibit students' understanding, progression and success'.

Ian Johnson from the University of Portsmouth, UK, also writes about the contested nature of Learning Development professional identities in a paper based on interviews conducted in the field with members of the professional association, ALDinHE. He applies theoretical ideas on the situated nature of professionalism to explore both internal and external drivers in professional development of Learning Developers, concluding that the strong focus on practitioner involvement via ALDinHE's own development and research aspirations offers a way to reconcile some of the conflicting demands. This, he argues, creates spaces for Learning Developers collectively to influence the future direction of their professional roles.

Tracy Slawson and Jason Eyre of De Montfort University offer a witty and insightful philosophical discussion that comments on the attempts to articulate the boundaries of Learning Development as a field, practice and *modus operandi*. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's (1994) conceptual philosophy, the authors present a lively exploration around the issues of identity, status, values and practices surrounding Learning Development, demonstrating the problematic nature of clear and distinct professional demarcations as erecting unnecessary boundaries and circumscribing disciplinary territories. The authors conclude that in order fully to recognise Learning Development we need not pursue its universal form but rather accept its obscure and ambiguous nature by keeping its definitional boundaries flexible and open.

Amanda Tinker and Pat Hill of Huddersfield University turn our attention to what they see as a neglected group of university students: second year undergraduates. Their paper explores the Learning Development role in supporting students who transition between first and final years, arguing for a progressive approach to developing a collaborative curriculum that brings together subject specialists and Learning Developers in an effort to ensure an optimal student journey. Through the use of focus groups designed to capture the perceptions of both staff and students – via discussions, poster prompts, and reflections – the authors demonstrate a range of conflicts between students and staff when it comes to academic expectations, autonomy in learning, as well as perceptions of assessment, collaboration and communication. While pointing out the possibilities for Learning Developers to serve as mediators that bridge gaps in these perceptions, the authors propose progressive Learning Development as a successful collaborative strategy for embedding the teaching of academic skills without neglecting the ‘forgotten’ second year.

James Wilkinson of Queen Mary University, UK makes a case for the importance of teaching that – instead of focusing on delivering knowledge – emphasises students’ competences and motivation by focusing on teaching that increases learner engagement. The paper has a strong self-reflective component that aids in revealing the assumptions that underlie the most widespread teaching orientations including ‘learning facilitation’ and ‘knowledge transmission’, which the author considers the bedrocks of undergraduate student experience. Applying Gow and Kember’s (1993) teaching orientations, Self-Determination Theory, and Rathje’s theory on cohesion (2007) allows the author not only to promote the principles of student-centred interactive teaching but also to shed light on the practical ways of supporting staff in increasing students’ engagement through enquiry-based learning.

The Learning Development team from the University of Leicester provide an engaging argument for the value of staff-student partnerships for learning development. Alexandra Patel, Mark Van Der Enden, Patsy Clarke, Frances Deepwell, Bethany Cox, Phil Marston, and Steve Rooney present the successes of their Digital Innovation Partnership. The partnership pairs staff and students and encourages them to innovate with digital learning and teaching interventions. The article shows how the partnerships empower students by embracing their enthusiasm and knowledge in digital innovation. The authors close with

recommendations for other practitioners, making the paper a relevant and thought-provoking read for Learning Developers.

In 'Facilitating learning about academic phraseology: teaching activities for student writers', Mary Davis and John Morley explore how exercises developed using *Academic Phrasebank*, an online, open-access compendium of formulaic phrases for academic writers developed at the University of Manchester, can be used to help students better understand the nature and role of academic phrases and to improve their own academic writing. They show how Learning Developers can use structured teaching activities to engage students in understanding how to construct and utilise phrases that will enhance and strengthen their academic writing style, and increase their confidence in writing for academic purposes. This positions the *Academic Phrasebank* both as a self-study or quick reference tool available to all students and as a resource that can be utilised by Learning Developers to structure teaching and learning around the conventions and expectations of academic writing.

Kim Shahabudin, Sonia Hood, and Michelle Reid's case study is an uplifting account of a pre-entry fully online course aimed to ease new undergraduates' transition into their university. The course was first offered to all incoming year 1 undergraduates in 2017 and although non-compulsory, uptake and completion rates were high. The primary aim of the course is to provide an interactive space where new students are introduced to the university as a community; offering opportunities for practice in the academic skills and literacies of academic communities, and structured discussions with student mentors where incoming students can debate with their new peers. Various design features, including flexibility in how participants can access and engage with the course, and working together to work on common tasks, promote a sense of community and familiarity with the ethos of Higher Education. The course offers a good example of how induction can be extended before entry and throughout the first transition year.

A new book by Trevor Day, *Success in academic writing* (Palgrave MacMillan) is reviewed in this issue by Christopher Little from Keele University, UK. Little judges this textbook to be a useful addition to any Learning Developer's library; it raises awareness of both discipline-specific academic writing conventions as well as positing some 'universal principles that can be shared and used by all disciplines' in the service of effective and critical writing. The book is aimed mainly at undergraduates but could be useful for

Learning Developers and academics generally. Topics covered include academic essays, reports, writing for research, avoiding plagiarism, editing and reviewing one's own writing.

We are sad to report that this will be the last edition of the JLDHE with Lucy Rai as one of the editors. Lucy has acted as lead editor for the last two and a half years and impressed us with her thoroughness, professionalism and good humour. She continues in her role at the Open University and has also been commissioned to write a new book. We wish Lucy well and would like to thank her publicly for her great contribution to this journal.

Lastly, we hope readers will enjoy this edition of the JLDHE and invite you to contact us via the journal homepage with any feedback or suggestions.