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Editorial

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'We can't all be Marco Polo or Freya Stark but millions of us are travellers nonetheless', Martha Gellhorn writes in the opening to her wonderful book, *Travels with Myself and Another*. While her collection of stories is packed with exhilarating 'horror journeys' across the dangerous world, in comparison, most of our daily professional travels are relatively dull and uneventful. We are certainly not risking our lives on the front lines or taking treacherous trips into the depths of a totalitarian country to catch a conversation with an admired dissident writer. Still, the paths we travel along can be no less zig-zagged, as we forge our professional routes one step at a time, overcoming challenges, celebrating incremental achievements, and redefining those irksome failures. We do not get to the top of the mountain, however we define it, overnight, but slog intelligently day after day in an attempt to reach it. We sweat and strain and grind across the wild landscapes of learning and achievement, enjoying the ride while also working through the feelings of inadequacy or the occasional failure, to develop some semblance of mastery in what we do – thinking, writing, teaching, mentoring, collaborating, and communicating for growth and connection. And whether or not at some point we reach that ultimate reward of our own mountaintop experience, we are all 'travellers nonetheless'.

The truth, however, is that most of us spend most of our time in the valley. The moments of exhilaration are usually brief and sparse, and our days are consumed by often mundane tasks or recurrent activities, punctuated by precious moments of deep flow and productive concentration. How often do we think about rewards for our work? (If we were interested in chasing wealth, fame, and greatness we would have chosen different careers, I hear you.) What counts as rewards in our jobs, especially those additional roles we enthusiastically take on that go beyond the basic expectations and that involve a lot of unaccounted for effort, frequently given on a voluntary basis? We run working groups and communities of practice, lead and contribute to scholarly conversations – most of it in our own sweet time – why do we do it?

People. People and relationships are a big thing for us in Learning Development. What we are able to create with others, for others, and in others can make all the difference. Growing together as thought leaders, professional thinkers and writers, teachers and communicators, we engage in conversations on issues that matter to us, and we do it in a variety of agile ways, from publishing books and blogs, journal and magazine outputs (a friendly shout-out to the splendid *LoveLD* mag!), to posting on mailing lists (hello, LDHEN and SEDA!), to recording podcasts, videos, creative resources, and more. All of it brings us together into a constant exchange of ideas, where we negotiate meanings, stir provocations, and explore creative tensions in our vibrant field. Being part of the space for learning and connecting is an enormous reward for the effort put in.

Autonomy in professional expression is equally prized. We may be time poor but if we really want to, we have the freedom to produce knowledge outputs of the range and quality of our choosing. 'Quality' is the thorny word here, as what accounts for quality in research is highly contested (Langfeldt et al., 2019) and in the absence of strict objective measures (aside from institutional research excellence exercises), we constantly make very subjective, often subtle judgments about the quality of both our and others' work. Given the tacit criteria and ambiguous rules used to determine the worth of any given publication, what most scholars agree on as a benchmark of quality is the primacy of the work's usefulness for the knowledge community (Aksnes, Piro and Fossum, 2023). And this is where we excel in *JLDHE* as due to our dedicated and loyal readership our authors receive substantially more than the proverbial one reader and two reviewers' attention. Additionally, we are working on having the journal indexed so in the future our authors will be even more discoverable to other researchers in teaching and learning. Meanwhile, our publishing

inclusivity and the hybridity of Third Space (Whitchurch, 2013) we operate in invite blurring not only of the disciplinary boundaries but also of our collective conceptions of what accounts for good research. While promoting highest academic rigour, we embrace pluralistic approaches to scholarship, questioning and expanding its narrow but well entrenched institutionalised notions based on the competition for limited resources, such as funding or promotions, rather than the express needs of the field. In our evaluation systems at *JLDHE*, we try to be as nuanced as possible, privileging originality, rigour, and value of the outputs to our knowledge community and ensuring that the research we publish has ethical integrity. The results are rewarding for all involved.

But what about more tangible rewards, such as money and recognition? Being involved in researching, writing, publishing, and reviewing, the standard activities of a research and scholarship oriented professional in academia, may both cost money (many publishers charge substantially for various forms of open access and running a research study can be expensive) and generate it (yes, this is not a typo). We would be remiss not to remind our readers of all the small but surprising ways in which they can build that barista coffee fund, not to mention the resume. Just like publishing books brings with it some royalties, writers can receive money for any of their work being used or copied, including books and book chapters, as well as pieces written for magazines and journals, and soon also websites and blogs. To benefit, it is worth considering joining the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society ([ALCS](#)), which collects such payments on behalf of its members – many of them will testify to the value of the joyfully startling transfers that arrive in their bank accounts every March. (All those little articles in our annual Conference Proceedings? They might just buy you a fancy coffee!) Our reviewers should also be mindful of Publons, which creates a free record of their peer reviews publicly tracking their contributions to the knowledge community. In the Journal, we have our own ways of recognising our authors and reviewers too – in addition to our Reviewer of the Year Award, this year we are introducing the Author of the Year Award to celebrate the most stunning, original, impactful and genuine output published by the *JLDHE*. The rewards are there, and that mountaintop experience is real.

There are other exciting developments in our Journal's journey as well. Our Editorial Board has expanded this year as we enthusiastically welcomed three new fabulous colleagues: Amy Sampson from the University of Greenwich, Dr Chad McDonald from Manchester Metropolitan University, and Dr Maggie Smith from the University of Salford (you can read

more about them in _LoveLD_ 4). As the Journal's strength lies in its editors' diligence, competence, and diversity of expertise, we did not stop there but have made steps to become more international too. We have established an Editorial Advisory Board (EAB) currently comprising three distinguished colleagues from international universities and research institutions: Dr Michelle Joubert from the University of the Free State, South Africa; Dr Izabela Gawłowicz, from the University of Zielona Góra, Poland; and Lauren Cross from Mount Royal University, Canada. Members of the EAB, which we are keen to continue expanding, will bring invaluable experience and unique perspectives to the work of _JLDHE_ and we are immensely grateful for their time, effort, and contributions to the quality and direction of our publications.

Augmenting these highlights of the year, we are currently working on two special issues – one on 'The contribution of HE third space professionals to educational practice and pedagogy', to be released later this year, and one on 'Liberating Learning', which we expect to be issued in winter 2024/25. You can read more about them on our website.

Meanwhile in the valley, our current Issue 30 brings you no fewer than eighteen scholarly analyses on a range of topics, from the issues involved in developing digital confidence, supporting academic attainment, fostering student belonging and introducing a range of pedagogic innovations, to the challenges of AI in Learning Development and rethinking our work in tutorials, doctoral supervision, and ensuring inclusivity. These topics are examined across nine papers, one case study, five opinion pieces, and three book reviews.

Digital confidence has been increasingly cited as key for staff and student development in tertiary education, often alongside concepts of digital competence or digital capabilities. In the first paper of this issue, Rachel Bancroft, Rachel Challen and Rosemary Pearce review the relevant literature, exploring whether there is a shared understanding of digital confidence in higher education and how its relationship to digital competence and similar concepts is understood. With the changes to learning and teaching currently unfolding in areas such as institutional digital transformation strategies, increasingly flexible course offers, and generative AI, we can expect to go through further periods of great change affecting how we use digital technology. The paper suggests digital confidence could be key in helping individuals respond to those challenges ahead. This is an area where learning developers could have a positive impact.

In the second paper, Michal Bobula explores the major debates for learning developers following the recent advent and advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) technology, with a specific focus on Large Language Models (LLMs). The author conducts a comprehensive literature review to assess the foreseen consequences and considerations of large adoption of such technologies, relating to educational assessment, potential threats to academic integrity, privacy concerns, the propagation of misinformation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) aspects, copyright concerns and inherent biases within the models. The author debates these challenges and themes, arguing the need for learning developers and wider higher education communities to not simply reject, but instead place attention and resources to respond appropriately to new approaches of knowledge access, synthesis and dissemination. This includes ensuring staff AI readiness and taking steps to modify their study programmes to align with the evolving educational landscape influenced by emerging technologies.

The research paper authored by Belinda Cooke, Mariana Kaiseler, Ben Robertson, Hugo Smith, Sarah Swann and Thalita Vergilio draws together two major student success themes in higher education, through sharing innovations in developing both belonging and employability skills. Focusing on facilitating learning communities which foster a sense of belonging is increasingly cited as best practice to support student retention, completion and satisfaction. In addition, building on these communities to develop students' employability can create opportunities to build skills such as networking, peer-support and career management in the core curriculum. The paper shares examples of curriculum design which aim to increase student engagement and adopt pedagogies that support belonging and employability. As increasing priorities for policy makers, university administrators and students themselves, sharing practice of pedagogies of student community and graduate success is now a central theme for learning developers. This qualitative research study presents four disciplinary case studies focusing on inclusive, self-directed, student-centred and authentic learning experiences, which are identified through reflective accounts from the authors.

The collection of four case studies that forms James Elliott's paper discusses the use of essay exemplars to support student understanding of academic writing conventions introduced to first year Radiography students, within the context of lecturer-guided active learning and discussion. By using deliberately absurd essays around baking, it was hoped to both provoke engagement whilst also overcoming any temptations around plagiarism.

Students reported increased confidence in writing, with active discussion in class being a key component. They enjoyed the light-hearted approach and appreciated seeing a piece of academic writing from an assessor's perspective. Although the use of exemplars is just one strategy amongst many, it has been shown to be a low-cost, low-tech option with positive student outcomes.

In their paper, Aisling Keane, Kathyrn McFerran, Blaise Acton, Samantha Taylor and Declan McLaughlin explore student experiences of blended learning approaches adopted by UK HEIs post-Covid-19. The findings highlight factors that influence students' learning experience in blended learning curricula and provide further insight into how the learner experience can be improved when curricula are designed for different learning modes. The study echoes the ethos and practice of learning development educators by emphasising the urgent need to support a blended learning model that forefronts students' knowledge of and engagement with self-regulated learning. Key recommendations also emphasise the importance of social bonding and a sense of belonging in supporting learning. This paper rationalises the need for educators and educational and learning developers who teach and undertake scholarship in teaching and learning to consider the sociocultural context of the student and their learning environment when designing teaching activities and curricula.

Although the rise in distance and online learning has allowed increasing numbers of non-traditional students to access higher education, attrition and completion rates remain problematic, particularly for postgraduate students. The solution offered by Lydia Mbati and Ramashego Mphahlele is an innovative multimodal community of practice, designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences between masters and doctoral students and their supervisors. Along with supporting students with the processes of carrying out their research and then writing it up, the multimodal environment also integrates them socially and institutionally through its structuring of shared practices, interactivity, and modelling. The study successfully highlights the transformative potential of technology, which it is well designed.

While the impact of undertaking a year in industry (YINI) on student employability has long been recognised, levels of post-placement academic attainment amongst diverse student groups has received relatively little attention. This ground-breaking paper co-authored by Kerry Traynor, Kate Evans, Chris Barlow, Amy Gerrard, Stefan Melgaard, Steph Kehoe

and Selina Churchill serves to redress the balance. In the study, the largest of its kind to date, the authors draw on secondary data relating to the sex, ethnicity, disability, POLAR group, grades and degree classifications of over thirty thousand students during a seven-year period to explore placement access and degree outcomes for diverse student groups. Adopting a granular approach enables exploration of the apparent correlation between YINI completion and the likelihood of students achieving good degrees and the narrowing of the awarding gap in comparison to the non-YINI population. The paper concludes with a valuable discussion of strategies to encourage and support YINI participation amongst diverse student groups and a call for further research into lived experiences of YINI and non-YINI students.

The outcome of the study by Tobias Alexander Bang Tretow-Fish, Bjarke Lindsø Andersen, Thilde Emilie Møller and Anne-Mette Nortvig, which focused on replacing physical books with an adaptive learning platform, demonstrates that preparation goes beyond mere adequacy; it encompasses qualitative distinctions. The research highlights the wide range of resources students utilise, including digital and analogue tools, the various temporal patterns of preparation, and students' spectrum of feelings in their preparation. The findings suggest the importance of understanding individual students' preparation habits to facilitate targeted teaching approaches that cater to diverse learning needs. The article contributes to the existing literature on study habits and strategies, emphasising the need for educators to recognise and adapt to students' unique preparation behaviours in order to enhance their academic success.

In our final paper in this issue, Peter Yidana and Sarah Darkwa explore university students' perceptions of how the classroom learning environment and Economics teachers' instructional practices promote learning in higher education. The researchers developed and empirically tested a framework that characterises quality Economics instruction. The outcomes of the study suggest that the conceptual framework is valid and reliable and can effectively be used to evaluate quality Economics instruction in higher education. The results indicate key areas that are beneficial concerning student perceptions of teacher effectiveness in promoting student learning. These include planning and preparation, scaffolding of instruction, classroom communication, classroom management, classroom learning environment, and teacher characteristics.

In their case study, Laura Key, Christopher Till and Joe Maxwell explore the development of Essay X-Ray – an in-house tool developed to support students' academic skills development at Leeds Beckett University. Essay X-Ray is an asynchronous, interactive online tool that was developed using Articulate Storyline 360. The purpose of the tool was to provide students with a self-paced tool that could be accessed 24/7 and help them to become familiar with the structure and style of academic writing. Following successful development, review and rollout, staff and students reported positively on the utility of Essay X-Ray not just as a self-paced tool, but also as a classroom resource.

The opinion piece by Hela Hassen explores students' reluctance to engage in group work and introduces strategies and tools to transform unproductive group work into a collaborative learning experience. With a primary focus on the challenges faced by distance-learning students, the opinion piece delves into the potential of Trello, a collaborative project management tool, to address these challenges and enhance collaborative learning. The author advocates for a shift in how academics approach group work, particularly in the realm of online education. Moreover, by leveraging AI features in conjunction with Trello, students can effectively manage their group projects, improve collaboration and predict and address potential challenges, thereby enhancing the overall group work experience.

Based on his experience of undertaking the United Kingdom Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) Recognised Practitioner Advisor (RPA) scheme, Pete King's opinion piece provides insights into both the process and value of engaging in formal mentor training. Focusing on his experiences of mentoring master's students, the piece begins with a discussion of the literature before outlining the findings from a review of the institutional guidance for mentors and mentees and surveys of mentors and mentees. The author draws on the UKAT framework to identify and explore some of the variations in institutional guidance, the levels of engagement with mentoring and the training and support for academic mentoring. The value of undertaking the programme is attested by the author's concluding reflections around the relevance of counselling skills to mentoring and the importance of mentoring to student learning and development.

The opinion piece by Constantine Manolchev, Ryan Nolan and Eleanor Hodgson debates and responds to the initial threat of generative AI technologies to higher education assessment. Through discussing the initial responses to these technologies and their

threat to traditional assessments such as the essay, the authors recommend staff proactivity and greater ownership of the agenda. The take the position that ensuring responsibility and ethical accountability is shared by students, academics and professional services, to directly address the use of generative AI in the university. The authors reflect on their experience as higher education lecturers and suggest ways in which generative AI can become an assessment ally in the name of impactful learning – by placing emphasis on critical skills, authentic assessment, and awareness. This paper endorses getting to know generative AI as opposed to outward rejection and return to the exam hall.

In addition to improving academic skills, Learning Development one-to-one tutorials have the potential to build student confidence and wellbeing, and in the last opinion piece, Kate Swinton shares insights into the theory of positive reframing and how techniques can be integrated into learning developers' professional practice. Following a useful discussion of the theoretical background in which the author discusses synergies between positive reframing and the PERMA model, she outlines two approaches for using positive reframing in tutorials, emphasising the importance of adopting an approach that feels natural and authentic for the tutor. The piece concludes with the positive message that once embedded, these approaches soon become second nature and that the benefits of positive reframing are attested for both students and LD tutors.

In their last opinion piece, Xue Zhou and Lilian Schofield highlight how generative AI can be an effective stakeholder in learning. By drawing on theories in social constructivism, academic literacies and belonging, the authors argue that the use of generative AI by learners can support active learning, supplement the learning experience, and enhance learner engagement. While acknowledging generative AI cannot replace the benefits of learning traditionally associated with socialisation, it can facilitate constructivist learning, serving as a study buddy that can offer personalised feedback. In this capacity, generative AI can contribute to effective learning and knowledge co-creation. In fact, Zhou and Schofield suggest a number of practical ways generative AI can be used, including (1) supporting reading to help build knowledge and comprehension, (2) adapting resources to cater for different learning preferences, and (3) gamifying learning exercises to build engagement.

Our current volume closes with three book reviews. First, the eminent Sally Brown offers her thoughts on *Inclusive Learning Design in Higher Education: A Practical Guide to*

Creating Equitable Learning Experiences, by Virna Rossi. As Brown points out, a highly original feature of this book is the sheer range of contributors, with inputs from over eighty worldwide experts who build on their own practice to offer invaluable insights and advice to readers who want to make their own learning design more inclusive. The book's scope is substantial, and its scholarship is extensive, but at heart this is a very practical book which will help colleagues to be better informed, enabling them to get down to designing and implementing good learning experiences with genuine enthusiasm and interest.

Kiu Sum provides a concise overview of Alicja Syska and Carina Buckley's edited collection, *How to Be a Learning Developer in Higher Education: Critical Perspectives, Community and Practice*, which was published by Routledge late last year. Sum draws key threads from the five parts of the edited collection and its 28 distinctive contributions. She emphasises how the book has adopted a polyphonic approach that is intended to support readers in navigating the different journeys to becoming a learning developer. The book's contributions explore a paradox of questions that foreground the essentiality of Learning Development's place in higher education spaces. Alongside being an essential read for learning developers, Sum demonstrates that the book has wider resonances for individuals working in the broader Third Space and beyond in contemporary higher education.

Finally, Joshua Wang reviews the book, *Deconstructing Doctoral Discourses: Stories and Strategies for Success*. This collection is edited by Australian academics and written by a multinational, multidisciplinary group of Ph.D. students, supervisors, and academics reflecting on their doctoral journeys. The book aims to probe, expose, and reimagine the normalised shortcomings of doctoral education. While this collection is a worthwhile read for doctoral education researchers, it also serves a radical function for existing doctoral students who are often considered powerless to change their circumstances. This book is a rare collation of exemplars for doctoral students considering making contributions to doctoral studies. The book configures a call to action for doctoral students and educators to publish their stories. Such an approach will enable better understanding of the uniqueness of doctoral study for marginalised people, including LGBTIQA+ students, First Nations students, students attempting the doctorate for a second time, and students who change supervisory teams.

We hope that this collection of papers, case studies, opinion pieces, and book reviews will be a fitting response to our community's need for intellectual stimulation and practical inspiration, and that it will open up new conversations around the issues that matter to all those invested in learning and teaching.

With this volume, we are also saying goodbye to our editor and colleague, Cathy Malone, who was an important presence on our Editorial Board for three years. We would like to thank her for her service to the journal and the community, and wish her well on the new stage of her professional journey.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank our magnificent reviewers whose critical reading of submissions and thoughtful feedback and recommendations have made invaluable contributions to the quality of the articles in this volume. Our heartfelt appreciation for the time, expertise, and work it took to review articles in this issue goes to the following reviewers:

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With very best wishes,

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