

Editorial

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As I write this editorial, I am sitting outside, in the glaring sun, having escaped my home desk with its ever-present computer screen. The weather is glorious, the streets are quiet, and the hustle and bustle of the campus – where we would normally spend our working days – seems like a distant memory. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, communicate, interact, think about issues, and even relate to our environment. It disrupted our spaces, practices, rituals and expectations, creating both unwelcome challenges and unanticipated opportunities. It also affected the Journal. Despite operating entirely online, we are not immune to the current turmoil. We only exist as long as our authors can write, our reviewers can review, and our editors can edit. And these long established and stable workflows have been suddenly obstructed and unsettled.

As a result, our current issue is the slimmest one in the Journal's history. But, as Randolph (Robin Williams) in *Death to Smoochy* (2002) put it, 'size doesn't matter, when you want some friendly patter from a pal who is true (and will lift you up when you're blue)'. It is all about quality. Thus, we bring you four splendid articles that investigate significant issues in the learning development community by evaluating the impact of the following LD

practices: dissertation writing courses on postgraduate students' confidence; LD tutorials on student attainment; and the flipped approach on developing students' academic skills. The Issue ends with a timely discussion of how Education 4.0 might influence learning in higher education.

The transition from undergraduate to postgraduate taught (PGT) studies has received increasing attention over the past decade as universities and educators have recognised that master's students do not necessarily begin their studies equipped with the academic skills essential to succeed. Although the need for specific transition support for PGT students has been recognised in recent literature, this is generally focused on the transition into PGT, and there has been little research to date on the transition from module assessment to writing the master's dissertation. Melanie Crisfield's paper evaluates the effectiveness of a short master's dissertation writing course on improving students' writing skills and increasing their confidence in their writing abilities, as reported in pre-course and post-course writing self-evaluations. The study confirms that dissertation writing support designed for PGT students can have a positive impact on students' confidence in their writing abilities, and thus help support them in making the transition to dissertation writing.

In another paper, Alison Loddick and Kate Coulson report on their investigation into the impact of learning development tutorials delivered at the University of Northampton. In an effort to demonstrate that these tutorials make a difference to students' attainment and thus provide the desired 'value for money', the LD team at Northampton set out to trace the academic fortunes of 16 thousand students over 3.5 years, looking for any indication of impact on grades. The large sample size, in comparison to previous studies, combined with statistical inference testing, give the authors confidence in the soundness of the conclusions drawn. Indeed, LD tutorials are shown to positively contribute to increases in students' grades, with the impact peaking at three tutorials. These findings not only align with, but also further extend, the claims made in the literature regarding the value of learning development support, although causality remains a thorny issue. We join the authors in their hope that this evidence will further contribute to promoting LD services and encouraging students to more readily seek academic support at their institutions.

Sheryl Mansfield's article assesses the effectiveness of the flipped approach in developing students' academic skills and transforming academic skills training from a passive to an

active learning experience. Her approach combined face-to-face sessions with asynchronous content to scaffold and feed-forward guidance to inform summative assessments. The success of this approach was measured by attendance data and evaluative surveys completed by students. Sheryl's findings show that the flipped approach used had a positive effect on the students' summative grades and academic confidence.

Finally, Alan R. Williams, Richard Windle and Heather Wharrad's opinion piece provides a timely discussion of how Education 4.0 influences learning in higher education. In the face of significant and rapid change, the piece explores factors that impact on how higher education responds to the challenges of education in the twenty-first century. In providing a wide-ranging discussion of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the subsequent advent of Education 4.0, the piece explores ways forward. Academics are encouraged to work with students to exploit the opportunities afforded by Education 4.0 while not falling into the trap of assuming homogeneity in the student body, particularly with regard to levels of digital literacy. The importance of attention to design in the development of learning objects and resources is highlighted as a key factor in the way we embrace technology in order to deliver education during the pandemic and beyond.

We hope that in this small but mighty collection of articles, our readers will find thought-provoking and inspiring material.

We also hope that in a future edition we will collectively reflect on what it means to work in a time of pandemic and how it affects the ways we practise learning development. The Covid-19 crisis certainly exposed and even magnified the existing inequalities in and outside the workplace. Depending on our living conditions, childcare responsibilities, health concerns and other worries, we have all coped and managed differently through this time. And so did our students. I am sure that many of you have stories which show that now, even more than ever, your assistance with an assignment, your advice on a project, your word of comfort and even your mere presence in the academic third space made a real difference to someone's life. Keep making a difference, keep writing about it, keep spreading the word by publishing. What we do matters.

With very best wishes,

The *JLDHE* Editorial Board