

## **Editorial**

**Andrew Doig**

Southampton Solent University, UK

**Amanda French**

Birmingham City University, UK

**Andy Hagyard**

University of Lincoln, UK

**John Hilsdon**

Plymouth University, UK

**Stephanie McKendry**

Strathclyde University, UK

**Moira Maguire**

Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland

Issue 9 of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education has an international flavour, with contributions from Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, England and Scotland, and including material relating to online tutoring in Taiwan. A key theme of papers in this issue is how students approach learning, in terms of contested notions such as 'learning style' or 'self-efficacy' and via digital media. The contents of this issue also span a wide range of disciplines, contexts, and orientations to learning development practice, and from a variety of academic perspectives. These contrasting research reports, case studies and opinion pieces offer a wealth of insights, innovative ideas and strategies with the potential to enhance student learning; and make a valuable contribution to scholarship in learning development.

Yiu Kong Chan's paper, 'The impact of business school students' extracurricular activities on learning approaches and academic performance', focuses on the experiences of a sample of business school students from the University of Hong Kong. It explores the

relationship between seemingly disconnected variables which make up the undergraduate learning environment in higher education. The results suggest an interesting connection between high levels of involvement in extracurricular activities and a greater propensity on the part of students to use 'deep' approaches to learning, which in turn affects their academic performance positively. The implication - that encouraging students to get involved in a range of social and co-curricular activities whilst in higher education has positive impacts on learning – may not be new, but Chan's use of Biggs' 3P framework offers an interesting additional perspective.

Charteris et al., a group of pre-service teacher educators at the University of New England, Australia, worked together to produce the paper 'e-Assessment for Learning in Higher Education: Is it a wolf in sheep's clothing?' They offer a timely critique of the discourses of 'learnification', 'responsibilisation' and 'performativity' in relation to eAFL. Whilst acknowledging the potential of electronic assessment to support student agency, the authors oppose the increasingly commodified conceptions of learning implied in the more linear, knowledge transmission approaches. They argue for more socio-political awareness in eAFL so that students can be active participants in its development, rather than mere consumers of educational products.

In his thought-provoking paper, "Promoting self-efficacy through affective feedback and feedforward", John Cowan of Edinburgh Napier University, encourages us to consider the importance of how students perceive their abilities to perform and succeed in academic tasks. Linking a range of research findings on self-efficacy with his own experiences as an online tutor, he suggests that authentic interventions by tutors to nurture positive self-beliefs through feedback and feedforward mechanisms, can enhance learning potential and results, through factors such as improving motivation and the perception of control over performance.

In her case study, Avril Buchanan (De Montfort University) discusses the Centre for Learning and Study Support's investigation of data on student engagement with the learning development service. She highlights the importance of seeking evidence to understand and improve student engagement, and looks at the valuable data that can be harnessed when shaping activities, publicising services and communicating with colleagues. The investigation provides an analysis of Centre's reach, as well as bringing

issues of under-representation and diversity to the fore - useful as examples in any discussion around student engagement with learning support provision.

Christopher Holland and Claire Mills, of University College Birmingham and the University of Gloucestershire, write about a study profiling the preferred learning styles of sports therapy students. Highlighting the potential role of learning styles in learning, whilst mindful of the powerful critiques of such approaches, they note '... a lack of accumulated theoretical coherence and an absence of replicated findings...' in the area. Data from final year students on a clinical practice module demonstrated wide variety in learning styles with a preference for 'concrete' styles. There was also evidence of a gender difference, the nature of which differs from previous research. The authors point out that more research is needed on the interaction between gender and academic discipline. The implications of these findings are especially relevant to those involved in clinical education.

Fiona Roberts, of Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, presents the results of her research into students' views of e-learning tools in anatomy and physiology. Using a case study methodology, she investigated students' perceptions of online learning resources as a replacement for face to face sessions. Although there were no significant differences in student outcomes for topics delivered with and without workshop support, the paper concludes: 'Students do not want more independent learning and like the confidence provided by attending workshops'. Fiona suggests a positive solution, however: 'using more selective online resources may be beneficial and ensuring that materials addressed online are used in other classes may be a way forward, thus ensuring a constructive approach to learning while encouraging more independent learning'.

Chris Keenan, Learning and Teaching Fellow at Bournemouth University, reports on the development of a recently launched network and JISCmail discussion list concentrating on peer-led academic learning. She begins with a review of recent work in this field commissioned by the UK Higher Education Academy, and goes on to offer a vision for the remit of this new group. [ACADEMICPEERLEARNING@JISCMail.AC.UK](mailto:ACADEMICPEERLEARNING@JISCMail.AC.UK) involves subscribers in discussions of how to share best practice, conduct evaluation and promote research in this growing field; and to plan events for learning developers, other academics and students. She also proposes links between the new network and the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education.

Chris's opinion piece offers a timely opportunity for us to announce that the next edition of the JLDHE will be a 'special' focusing on practice and research in peer learning. This promises to be a rich collection of papers and case studies which we hope will help practitioners in the field peer learning to see their work in the broader context of learning development. We hope it will also provide learning developers with inspiration and ideas to develop their own practice in partnership with students and subject academics.