

Editorial

A note on the guest editors

This special edition of the journal focuses on Liverpool John Moores University's Post-graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme. All contributing authors have a connection to the programme, with many being its graduates. The guest editors Clare Milsom & Philip Carey have both worked on the programme for several years. They have tutored a number of Peer Learning Groups and have helped many colleagues through the programme. Clare, who is herself a graduate of the programme, is Head of Teaching & Learning and Philip is Head of Learning & Teaching in the Faculty of Health and Applied Social Sciences.

The Post-graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching Higher Education (LTHE) has been running for fifteen years and has seen over 500 colleagues from Liverpool John Moores University and partner institutions qualify. It has Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) accreditation, and since 2007 a dedicated route has Nursing & Midwifery Council approval. As such, it makes a significant contribution to the professional development of university teaching, research and student support staff. Crucially, we believe, it has contributed to the success of our students. The course is very well respected, both within this University and across the Higher Education sector with external reviewers reporting that it was at the "forefront nationally" in 2007. When we were approached to act as guest editors for this special edition of *Innovations in Education*, we jumped at the chance. As long-standing tutors we were aware of the quality of work done by course members and how it reflected their passion for education and commitment to enhancing the student experience. Our only concern was that a single issue of the journal could never do justice to the range of excellent work we have seen over the years. Hence, what we have here is just a snapshot of the sort of issues former LTHE members have explored over the last 3 years.

To all intents and purposes, this issue celebrates the LTHE programme... and there is much to celebrate. At the 2009 Liverpool John Moores University Learning and Teaching Conference we presented a paper looking at the legacy of this programme for the university. Tellingly, at that same conference, 29 of the 45 papers presented involved former or current course members. This alone indicates the value of the programme in the development of a teaching & learning community in Liverpool John Moores University. The findings we presented also suggested that former course members have made a significant contribution to the strategic and operational development of this university. Some have gone on to promotion within the university, others have taken additional education-related qualifications, but many, many more have changed the way they teach and assess. On the whole, former course members have embraced learner-led, active learning approaches to classroom and on-line activities. They have felt empowered to be innovative, take risks and challenge entrenched practices. Many also reported that they have changed their view of students – now seeing them as partners in the educational process. In general, we found that the LTHE has created more confident and reflective practitioners.

The articles in this journal are a direct output from the programme's course work. Contributors have reviewed and revised assignments produced by them as part of the programme's assessment requirements. Inevitably, much of this work relates to localised concerns in individual programmes, Schools and Faculties. However, all the papers reflect key issues that are challenging Higher Education providers in the current environment, and we feel, particularly those in post 1992 institutions.

Widening participation, diversity and inclusion is high on the agenda in Higher Education, and even with anticipated revisions to Widening Participation and a possible change of government, this is likely to continue. It forces practitioners to revisit assumptions about what makes for effective teaching and learning. With this in mind, in the opening paper, Bella Adams explores issues of racism in the educational environment and calls for tutors to adopt culturally sensitive practices. Tackling discrimination, in whatever form, has challenged all tutors, regardless of the constituency of their classes. However, the increasing diversity of the student body throws this into sharp relief. Liz Mahon considers this in relation to multiculturalism in Higher Education and Lynne Boddy's paper develops this by exploring the experiences of international students in the UK university culture. Diversity is just one outcome of a Widening Participation agenda and Chris Mason contextualises this in his thorough exploration of the development of approaches to increasing participation in Higher Education. Widening Participation often focuses on the non-traditional entrant into university, however, it is recognised that a significant proportion of students in universities access Higher Education via the traditional A' level route. With this in mind, Helen Burrell offers a valuable consideration of the link between A' level results and student achievement.

From Widening Participation, the Journal turns to teaching, learning & assessment and explores a variety of methods and perspectives. Many of which can easily be adopted by individuals or teams. Elsie Gaskell addresses an issue that will be of interest to many practitioners – the relationship between the provision of notes on VLEs, attendance and performance. Her careful analysis suggests that it is not simply the provision of materials that matters, but the type of materials. The link between attendance and performance is explored further in Elaine Hemers' study of the first year experience in Bioscience. This suggests a direct link between how often a student attends and their module mark. A broader perspective on teaching is provided by Jane Fisher, whose small-scale study explores the impact of Research Informed Teaching, concluding that approaches to facilitating student learning that encourages students to actively engage with problems are both interesting and rewarding. Engagement in teaching and learning can take many forms and challenge us to address our day-to-day practices. However, when utilised in assessment, engagement becomes yet more taxing. An assessment system that requires students to be active participants in the process may place an additional burden on the tutor, but when that system relates to qualities that are not easily measured, the demands are greater still. Charlie Smith's case study of the 'crit' demonstrates this and reminds us all of the importance of quality assurance processes in assessment, no matter how unusual the method. Although the 'crit' is a technique that is dominant in Architecture, Charlie's findings will be of interest to practitioners in many other areas where assessment is required of the intrinsic value of somewhat intangible concepts (for example, the delivery of a dramatic performance, the demonstration of communication skills or the production of a piece of art). Quality assurances may focus on consistency in the marking process,

but often overlooks the provision of valuable feedback. Yet, feedback turns the outcome of assessment into a learning opportunity. To do this, it must offer the students clear instruction of what they need to improve their future performance, not what they should have done to produce something better in the first place. Sharon Moore reminds us of this through her exploration of the impact of feed forward. High quality, appropriate and respectful feedback or feed forward should promote in students a desire to refine and develop their studies. This is reflected in Liverpool John Moores University's WoW agenda and its focus on Personal Development Planning as a central method by which students monitor and assess their overall academic and personal growth. Hence, Roberston & Scott's consideration of PDP and students' perceptions of it offers us a timely reminder that this process does not always mean the same thing to students as tutors might assume and that we need to change some of our practices to encourage engagement. The journal closes on feedback by offering an analysis of a major survey we were involved with along with Liverpool John Moores University colleague Simon Brooman and former colleague Esther Jubb. This institution-wide study of student views of feedback highlights the somewhat surprising finding that students, no matter what background, have remarkably similar views on what makes good feedback. This offers a lesson we sometimes forget – students are first and foremost students and really want the same thing – timely, personalised feedback.

We hope that you enjoy reading this journal as much as we have enjoyed editing it. The process has affirmed to us just how good the Liverpool John Moores University Post-graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching Higher Education programme is. We would like to extend our thanks to all the contributors and all course tutors and students – past and present.

However, significant thanks are due to the programme leader, Carol Maynard, whose enthusiasm and vision has been crucial in maintaining the quality and breadth of the programme.

A Postscript from the programme leader

I would like to add my thanks to all the contributors to this journal and especially to Clare and Philip as editors. Although I am familiar with the contributors' work through the marking process it is rewarding to view the papers in published form.

As is the case for all programmes the quality of the curriculum and hence the student experience is assured through the teaching and learning strategies provided by the course team. Feedback from LTHE course members always includes positive comments about the diversity of the tutoring team. The core team is drawn from across the university with subject specialisms ranging from Sociology to Palaeontology – although not unique in the sector it is fairly unusual for courses like the LTHE to be supported by staff from a range of disciplines. We believe this to be a huge strength of the course. We are also fortunate to receive support from Faculty observers and work based support colleagues many of who are LTHE graduates themselves – their contributions are invaluable.

There is much written about what might make a good university teacher (Eriksen 1984; Prosser & Trigwell 1999, 2005; Akerlind 2007; Kreber 2007 and Entwistle 2009) and the LTHE programme's assessment strategy is structured to enable participants to explore their own notions of good teaching. Entwistle (2009, p75) makes the distinction between "*teacher-focused and student-focused approaches*". In the former teachers view the main focus of their role to be presenting their subject matter in an organised and logical way. Student focused approaches are not just

about techniques (although these are important) but about creating an environment for active learning where students are encouraged to think critically about the subjects they are studying. The LTHE project assessment, where these papers have been drawn from, is one example of where course members are required to engage in critical enquiry drawing on both pedagogical and subject research to inform discussion. This scholarly approach to professional development is seen as central to the programme.

"The scholarship of teaching and learning focuses on a conception of teaching...not just as a technique...but an enactment of our understanding of a disciplinary, interdisciplinary or professional field and what it means to know deeply."

(Hutchings, Babb & Bjork 2002, p2-3)

The papers in this journal celebrate student focused approaches to teaching and provide just one set of scholarship of teaching and learning examples from the wealth of evidence across LJMU.

■ Carol Maynard

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