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Practitioner Research in Higher Education

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Editorial

Welcome to Practitioner Research in Higher Education. The aim of the publication is to disseminate and debate practitioner research and evaluation in higher education.

In the first paper Bloxham, Cerevkova and Waddelove describe and critically evaluate the development of an embedded personal development planning (PDP) process within a first year undergraduate module in Law. This useful case study demonstrates the benefits of fully integrating PDP within a taught module. It also highlights the need to develop understanding of reflective writing amongst staff and students and shows how modifying the use of their virtual learning environment is moving the programme towards an eportfolio approach.

Effective briefings and review sessions with students can contribute to strengthening of links between taught modules and work placements. Callister outlines the development of placement preparation and debrief within an undergraduate Occupational Therapy programme and argues that the sessions have become more effective through adopting a more student-focused approach.

Chapman, Parmar and Trotter investigate the first year experiences of mature students in a comparative study across three universities. The findings suggest that there is a need for further action to ensure that induction experiences for all students are inclusive and effective.

Copping uses a quasi-experimental approach by teaching two parallel groups using different levels of tutor dominance and relates this to the literature on conceptions of learning and teaching. As a self-study by a teacher educator this interesting study delves in to the layered nature of teaching to teach and also challenges us all in terms of what feedback we hope to gain from student evaluations; maybe 'a challenging module' is better than 'a really well-supported module in which everything was very clear and helpful'?

Jackson investigates lack of confidence and negative attitudes towards mathematics amongst student teachers and considers strategies to tackle this widespread issue. There are lessons from this case study that are relevant to teaching of statistics, applied mathematics and numeracy key skills across a wide range of programmes.

In an example of blended learning (combining face to face, self study and elearning) Lawson investigates the analysis and online discussion of video clips, delivered through a virtual learning environment, as a preparation task for students prior to attending a taught session. He argues that this stimulating and interactive preparation task raised the level of discussion in the taught sessions.

In analysing student motivation Lee challenges the idea of 'setting high expectations' and uses the concept of 'satisficing', originally from economics, to argue for an alternative and perhaps more pragmatic approach. He proposes practical strategies that may raise the level of satisficing behaviour.

Marshall evaluates a postgraduate course with respect to the development of participants as independent learners. She argues that the embedding of academic writing and presentation skills supported by formative feedback plus a gradually increasing expectation of independent learning has helped to raise the level of much of the assessed work produced, bringing it at or close to publishable standards.

In analysing his own marking and feedback practice Plater's paper reports on three different interventions made to the assessment process experienced by his students and helpfully relates these to the existing literature. Plater reports his experiments with peer assessment and looks forward to engaging students with formative peer assessment of their academic writing.

In moving towards more flexible and blended learning Watts evaluates a switch to online delivery of a previously face to face taught module on an undergraduate initial teacher education programme. He argues that the online module raised the level of engagement of students and their achievements in the assessed work.

Yearsley presents a literature review of research into interprofessional learning within health and social care programmes. She draws conclusions from the literature concerning the timing, the link to work placements, and the assessment of interprofessional learning.

Hurford and Metcalfe present an evaluation of their positive approach to supporting student learning which focuses on identifying and building on existing knowledge and skills. They argue that recognising and valuing students' prior knowledge and the emotional aspects of learning helps to raise engagement by students.

Finally, as editors of this first volume, we would like to thank the authors who have shared their practice with us, the peer reviewers for their work, and the editorial assistant for her hard work and attention to detail.

Pete Boyd and Sue Bloxham