



## Editorial

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This *JLDHE* edition comes on the heels of our recent Special Issue on [Liberating Learning](#), which attempted to offer encouragement to cultivate joy in academia and a glimmer of hope at a time when HE is dominated by survival concerns and a pervasive sense of fatalism. While we hope it helped lift some spirits, its purpose was never to argue with the bleak reality. As Maggie Smith's poem [Good Bones](#) reminds us,

'The world is at least 50% terrible, and that's a conservative estimate.'

The current world of HE is indeed half terrible. The [UCU live page](#) that tracks redundancies in the UK HE sector provides plenty of evidence for a disastrous 'shrinking' of academia. At the time of writing, at least 98 HEIs were seeking considerable cuts, with job losses exceeding ten thousand. Staff are forced to 'teach out' terminated courses,

accept 'downgraded' roles, and tolerate worse terms of employment and pensions. As a consequence, for every accomplished academic out there, there is one who has been broken. For every happy professional, there is one sunk in grief and despair. Though we try to keep this from our students, they suffer in an equal measure.

While universities proclaim quality student experience as their priority, Learning Developers – whose role and contributions are intrinsically tied to ensuring this quality experience – are not spared either. Despite ever more prominent assertions of LD's worth for HEIs (Bickle, Johnson and White, 2024), Learning Developers have closed ranks with academic staff who have been feeling increasingly disorientated, demoralised, de-professionalised, and hope-less (Mills, Megoran and Back, 2025). And according to the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), we haven't even reached 'the lowest point' yet, with things promising 'to get worse before they stabilise' (Taylor, 2025). It is still unclear how these cuts will affect not only the universities themselves but also the cities, regions, and communities they serve.

Looking at this ravaged landscape, academia *is* at least 50% terrible.

And yet, Smith encourages us to keep hope:

'You can make this place beautiful'

It's got 'good bones'.

In the midst of all this loss and pain, difficult to accept managerial decisions and drastically reduced ability to deliver on the promise of higher education, those who stay committed to student-centred approaches to teaching and learning remain the 'good bones' of academia. They are the ones capable of bringing hope and colour to university practices, so a collective reimagining of a better HE can be possible. bell hooks's (2003, p.91) words have never felt more appropriate: 'Teachers who care, who serve their students, are usually at odds with the environments wherein we teach'. The current environments could not make our mission more difficult; and yet we persist.

As a journal, we have always been committed to fostering courageous conversations about learning, to diversifying scholarly writing, and to cultivating scholarship that challenges conventional pedagogies and practices. In this time of crisis, our mission feels

all the more poignant and meaningful. While some of us are losing our jobs, our professional standing or institutional influence, our writing will always allow us to retain our scholarly voices and forward our vision for the purpose, shape, and future of higher education. As long as we continue to care, believe in education, and write, universities will stay alive.

In this issue, LD-adjacent scholars and teachers offer hope through writing. We bring you 17 papers, 2 case studies, 3 opinion pieces, 1 brief communication, and 6 book reviews, whose brief précis follow.

In the first paper of the collection, 'Enhancing graduate employability through interdisciplinary, work-based learning', Aisha Abuelmaatti and Leon Vinokur overview a challenge-based learning project at Queen Mary University of London. Multidisciplinary teams across Computer Science (qTech) and Economics (qNomics) collaborated to develop a financial literacy platform for public use. The paper provides an insight into how the project enabled students to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional experience, supporting their future employability.

The relationship between students and their supervisors underpins the doctoral journey, but this experience can be fraught with challenges caused by misunderstandings. In their paper, Lydia Bach, Emily Armstrong, and Matt Jones introduce the 'Let's Talk About' (LTA) toolkit as a structured intervention to enhance the crucial dynamic between doctoral students and their supervisors. The authors demonstrate how the LTA toolkit can facilitate structured conversations around expectations, career goals, and support needs. In turn, it fosters improved mutual understanding to help strengthen supervisory relationships and address key challenges inherent in doctoral education.

The benefits of peer mentoring are well characterised in undergraduate populations. Menna Brown and Nicole Chartier's paper instead evaluates a peer mentoring programme servicing international postgraduate coursework students. Their findings demonstrate the potential of peer mentoring programmes to enhance academic skills development and belonging in international postgraduate students. The authors use the insights gained from mentee surveys and mentor interviews to provide practical advice for learning developers looking to develop similar programmes in their institutions.

In the following paper, Maribel Canto-Lopez highlights the changed landscape of higher education and explores students' perspectives on why they joined university, and the benefits they expect to receive from obtaining a successful degree. Findings from student responses suggest that there is often misalignment between what students think the value of a university education is and what universities and employers expect. As a result, Canto-Lopez argues for the need to improve communication between higher education, employers, and students.

Reviewed through an action learning cycle, Sharon Davies and Val Morey's paper draws upon an approach used in the design and delivery of a professional learning programme to enable the transition of sessional staff into unit coordinator roles. The authors apply Brookfield's lenses to reflect on the importance of strong theory- practice links in professional learning, evaluating the experiences of participants new to the unit coordinator role. Focusing on the enhancement of student experience, this paper seeks to identify the characteristics, culture, and conditions of effective professional learning design that others may seek to implement in their own staff development activities.

The social and emotional aspects of discussion-based learning are explored through use of a professional development learning activity by Fufy Demissie, Jane Stacey and Kathy Baillie. They reflect on the role of Philosophy for Children (P4C) as a pedagogic tool using a participant-based study. In examining tutors' experiences of using the approach, they present the potential for P4C to be a valuable professional development tool for effective discussion-based learning.

Adam Finkel-Gate's paper examines the integration of ChatGPT into coursework and the implications for academic integrity and assessment practices in higher education. Students were required to use ChatGPT to write an essay, and then deliver a presentation based upon it. The findings of this study support emerging narratives around the use of AI in academic work, namely, the importance of using AI-generated content as a supplement to learning as opposed to a replacement of learning itself.

The paper by Tiago Horta Reis da Silva dives into innovative methods employed to embed compassion and empathy in nursing practice, focusing on the challenges and opportunities associated with embedding these values. A comprehensive framework is proposed, grounded in experiential learning, reflective practice, role modelling, and interdisciplinary

collaboration. Through this paper, the author provides actionable insights for curriculum developers and nursing educators to embed compassion and empathy into curricula to support greater patient-centred care in practice.

Nina Ivashinenko and Valentina Shatalina review the evolution of Education Technology over the years 2014-24 through an examination of the narratives from the international conference, the Bett Show, hosted each year in London, UK by the British Education Training and Technology (Bett). The study analyses printed and video materials produced by the Bett Show, using NVivo to study word frequencies and relationships. The work suggested a change of tone over time, from a more technology-driven to a more education-driven narrative, with the influence of the pandemic affecting the shift to a more human-centred focus. The authors provide a summary of seven points highlighting their views on how technology should be incorporated into education.

Louise Loder's timely and impactful paper provides an argument for trauma-informed human rights teaching in higher education. Drawing upon a broad base of literature, the paper develops three recommendations to embed this in practice. First, educators should clarify their values and reflect on their teaching personae. Secondly, experimental pedagogies should be used to embed trauma-informed principles into content design and planning. Finally, Loder centres the importance of dialogic approaches to connect students, practitioners and survivors of human rights abuses. This paper is a powerful call to educators to put wellbeing, agency and dignity at the heart of the learning experience.

Mohammad Bilal Nazir's paper explored the experiences of twelve British Pakistani male graduates to examine how they approached and felt about different assessment types at university. The author's discussions with these graduates uncovered, and reinforced, the understanding that choice of assessment types can play an important role in including or excluding students from different ethnic groups. Importantly, from a learning development perspective, the paper found that the graduate participants tended to avoid academic skills departments and instead rely on peer networks for support when working on assessments.

The paper by Ray O'Brien, Samuel Mann, and Richard Mitchell examines the benefits of engaging with complexity science, specifically through application of the Cynefin framework to Learning Design. Cynefin is derived from a Welsh word meaning 'habitat', and was originally conceptualised by Dave Snowden to translate the practices within an

organisation into contexts or domains (complex-chaotic -complicated-clear) as a means of devising solutions. The authors apply the concept to the process of decolonising teaching in Aotearoa/New Zealand, mapping elements of learning design against the Cynefin model, to better demonstrate the work necessary for each area requiring attention. They also propose this approach could be used to better understand many complex learning contexts.

In their paper, Pauldy Otermans, Sofia Barbosa Boucas, Laiba Nasar, and Stephanie Baines, examine the relationship between student engagement, assessment preferences and ethnicity among university students. The authors surveyed 64 students using the Student Engagement Inventory and the Assessment Preference Inventory. The findings suggested that there is no difference in student engagement across ethnicity. However, the authors did find that preferences for feedback and assessment types may differ across ethnic groups, and argue that this awareness could help design more tailored and inclusive teaching practices.

This paper explores the use of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in a private HE institution in the UK. Jennifer Park uses primary data collected via interviews with six teaching staff at the institution to determine their views and experiences of culturally relevant pedagogy. The paper highlights that teachers are more hesitant to address the critical consciousness aspect of CRP but willing or able to incorporate cultural competence.

Ellis Parkman's timely paper considers educators' perceptions of contract cheating following the introduction of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022. Drawing on interviews with ten academics across ten HEIs, Ellis's study found that contract cheating was widely understood, but that many educators were unaware of its criminal status. There is also acknowledgement that the landscape has widely changed following the introduction of Generative AI services and the use for academic misconduct. Indifference, confusion and support were also identified as key themes.

Daniel Preece discusses the merits of podcast assessments as a contemporary, contextualised and inclusive alternative to oral presentations. With a focus on the importance of emergent professional practices for forensic science students, Preece's research highlights contributions that podcasting as assessment might offer for

engagement and creativity, and through his disciplinary lens considers how the approach might ignite curiosity and provide learner agency in the interpretation of new knowledge and the curation/ creation of learning artefacts. As potentially impactful an approach to assessment as podcasting might be, however, Preece cautions for the need for scaffolding of guidance to ensure optimum conditions to fully enable students to participate.

In the final paper, Katherine Williams, Lena Grinstead, Tom Lowe, and Joanne Brindley reflect on and explore embedding reflection into the science curriculum at the University of Portsmouth. They outline a pilot intervention which incorporated a reflective element into an existing group assessment. Across the paper, the authors make a strong case for the benefits of adding reflection into the science curricula, and the advantages developing critical reflection can have for science-based students. From the pilot, they identified several advantages and areas for further development that would enhance embedding reflection in the science curriculum.

Rebecca Nash's case study details a suite of workshops developed at the University of Southampton to enhance academic preparedness and belonging in postgraduate research students, specifically, the delivery of academic skills training in these workshops centred on group dialogues. The author provides a detailed rationale for this design, alongside an analysis of participant focus groups. The case study highlights the potential of integrating dialogic activities into research support training in order to empower postgraduate research students.

Reviewing the literature and drawing on their own experiences, this opinion piece contrasts two particular styles of feedback: personal vs neutral. Rachel Player evaluates the impact dialogue, emotion and personalised feedback can have on students and how changes to approach can help feedback provided become more effective. Focusing specifically on tone, this piece highlights the importance of reflecting on how feedback is approached with suggestions for practice.

In the first opinion piece, Angelos Bakogiannis puts forward that inclusivity is a key feature in the creation of HE learning, and that organisation competency frameworks highlight the need for inclusive practices. However, these competency frameworks frequently lack guidance on how inclusive practices should be implemented. Using the BALEAP

framework as an example, Bakogiannis proposes how inclusivity could be integrated into these competency frameworks.

The opinion piece by Melike Bulut Albaba highlights how students whose first language is not English may be considered in deficit to first language English speakers in Anglophone institutions. The piece calls for the adoption of 'linguistic repertoires' to allow students to use their existing linguistic practices to aid their learning. The author proposes that doing this should be central to decolonisation practices and could act as an asset in education through increased sharing of knowledge.

In the final opinion piece, Luan Shaw addresses viewpoints of conservatoire learning, which traditionally sees performance as the pinnacle of the curriculum. Shaw points out that there is a growing awareness of how learning by other means could have favourable results. The article shows that conservatoire students may see that developing as a music educator rather than a performer can also be a valuable outcome.

In her brief communication, Laura Dyer suggests that Marion Heron's use of Listening Rooms for data collection could be adapted as an assessment method in higher education. The author demonstrates how this approach can be applied across disciplines to foster collaborative and inclusive assessment practices that allow students to demonstrate their capabilities in ways that are not captured in written assignments.

In this issue's book reviews section, our reviewers offer an insight into six recent publications relevant to learning developers and other higher education practitioners.

Pasan Athapaththu reviews *Using generative AI effectively in higher education* (2024, Routledge), a timely and comprehensive guide to integrating GenAI into teaching, learning, and assessment. Athapaththu praises the book written by Sue Beckingham, Jenny Lawrence, Stephen Powell, and Peter Hartley as an accessible guide to GenAI that skilfully combines global perspectives with an emphasis on upholding ethical standards. He highlights the book's evidence-based approach, which is applied consistently across its four sections exploring institutional readiness, GenAI literacy, curriculum design, and assessment. Athapaththu recommends the text as a valuable resource for educators aiming to implement GenAI responsibly and sustainably into their practice.

Elaine Hills reflects on her experience as a Learning Developer working with students on nursing and health courses as she reviews David Bedford's *Finding and using information: a guide for nursing, health and social care* (2025, Lantern Publishing). Hills praises the book's accessible approach to navigating academic research through its focus on helping students to identify, evaluate, and communicate information effectively. She highlights its 'BREAD' acronym as an effective alternative to traditional evaluation methods like the 'CRAAP' test. Hills finds the book to be a practical starting point that will help students to develop confidence in research skills that will be vital not just at university but in their future professional practice.

Karen Hudson explores how *Transformative Practice in Higher Education* (2025, Routledge) captures higher education's creative and compassionate responses to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlights the volume's focus on radical pedagogic reinvention, inclusive practices, and the role of reflective, collaborative microcultures. Hudson commends the volume edited by Alicja Syska, Carina Buckley, Gita Sedghi, and Nicola Grayson for balancing theory and actionable insight, resisting neoliberal norms, and advocating for a post-pandemic sector that centres wellbeing, human agency, and hopeful change.

Stacey Mottershaw examines how the anthology *Academic misfits: questioned belongings in higher education* (2025, Routledge) edited by Magnus Hoppe, Steffi Siegert, Serdar Temiz, Anton Hasselgren, and Fatemeh Seifan challenges dominant academic norms through the exploration of personal narratives of marginalisation and misfitting. She highlights the book's call for a more inclusive, humane academic culture that values vulnerability and divergence. Mottershaw commends the collection for its emotional depth, editorial reflexivity, and potential to inspire institutional change.

Matt O'Connor examines how Sam Illingworth's book *Bridging scholarship and practice in higher education: fostering innovative research and enhancing teaching* (2025, Routledge) guides new and experienced university teachers into meaningful research and evaluation of their practice. Extensive literature review underpins this work, modelling its overall approach and building on best practice within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Covering ways of creating knowledge within education, developing research ideas and the methodologies and ethics of effective scholarship, this text is likely to have a significant

impact on university teachers' ability to evaluate what works in their teaching and how existing practice can be best understood and developed.

Finally, Julie Taylor reviews *University and you* (2025, Routledge) by Rebecca Wilson and Catriona Wilson. She highlights the book's holistic approach to academic and professional skill development, underpinned by reflective activities and scholarly models. Taylor praises the book's accessible tone, inclusive focus on diversity and wellbeing, and emphasis on building confidence and resilience. She finds its motivational style and practical tools valuable for fostering self-awareness and future employability. Taylor recommends the book to students who are transitioning into higher education and for practitioners supporting students' personal and academic growth.

In closing, we wish to thank our reviewers, whose expertise and constructive critiques have elevated the quality of the works published in this volume. Their continued dedication to facilitating good scholarship is the foundation of our scholarly community. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to:

Abbi Shaw	Heather McClean	Marina Harvey
Alice Stamatakis	Heather Pennington	Matt O'Connor
Angela Murphy-Thomas	Helen Briscoe	Matt Offord
Anita Fromm	James Williams	Natalie Quinn-Walker
Ariana Phillips-Hutton	Jessica Cooper	Panagiota Tzanni
Barry Matthews	Joshua Bluteau	Robert Ping-Nan Chang
Carolyn Cooke	Joshua Wang	Salah Omar
Charlotte Evans	Katerina Loukopoulou	Samantha Aston
Charlotte Haberstroh	Kathleen Nthakomwa-	Sarah Donkin
Claire Hughes	Cassidy	Sheldon Chow
Clare Brown	Laura Christie	Simon Webster
Clare Tyrer	Laura Dyer	Sonja Rewhorn
Cristina Pennarola	Laura Milne	Sunny Dhillon
Deidre Murphy	Leda Mirbahai	Suparna Ghose
Eliana Elkhoury	Lian Ephgrave	Susan Lindsay
Emma-Lee Steindl	Lynn Gribble	Vanessa Mar-Molinero
Finley Issac Lawson	Malgorzata Drewniok	
Gayle Pringle Barnes	Maria O'Hara	

We hope that our journal's mission to champion excellence while nurturing emerging voices comes through on the pages of this issue. In this spirit, we invite our readers to immerse themselves in work that both challenges and expands their thinking of, with each piece contributing to the evolving dialogue in our field.

With very best wishes,

Alicja Syska

*JLDHE* Editorial Board

## ***Acknowledgements***

The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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