

# Practitioner Research In Higher Education

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## Editorial

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Practitioner research, action research, the scholarship of learning and teaching, the research-teaching nexus and developing evidence for practice all attract advocates and critics in the educational research and educational development communities. Whatever your views on these varying approaches and emphases, one cannot deny the enthusiasm and engagement amongst university teachers which is often found to be generated by this kind of endeavour. Lecturers who work away at the daily routines of academic practice become enlivened and inspired by taking a closer look at elements of that practice, whether through innovation, evaluation or more traditional research enquiries. This edition of Practitioner Research in Higher Education reflects that variety of ways in which we investigate forms of practice in higher education, both our own and that of others. Whilst the outcomes may be significant for the individual researcher, there are often important ideas or lessons for the wider disciplinary, university or higher education community and, therefore, publication in PRHE is a useful medium for disseminating these outcomes.

The first research article takes a survey approach to investigating lecturers' perspectives on grading student coursework. Norton, Norton and Sadler using an attitude scale tool referred to as the 'assessment, marking and feedback inventory'. They found that lecturers are sceptical about the value of formal training in assessment and feedback, especially those working in 'hard' subject disciplines. Not surprisingly lecturers in their study complained about lack of time and heavy grading workloads that constrained their potential learning from good quality moderation discussions with colleagues.

In the second research article, using a phenomenographic approach, Thanaraj provides insight into student conceptions of an e-portfolio used within a Law degree as an innovative approach to developing students' employability in a competitive graduate market. The study was prompted by sense that students do not see the value in e-portfolios despite the strong support for them in the relevant literature. The study identifies three conceptions held by students: as a gauge of self-improvement; as a learner-centred depository; and as a showcase of reflections. The article usefully links these conceptions to students' perspectives on the benefits and problems of using e-portfolios.

The possibility of work-based learning 'as' higher education is considered in the research study of school-embedded postgraduate teacher education by Boyd and Tibke which forms the third article. They argue that basing the programme and the teacher educator within the employer institution has possibilities for powerful learning but faces risks unless the workplace environment welcomes a questioning approach and both the teacher educator and the student teachers are given sufficient time and space to be learners as well as teachers.

Using focus groups and an online survey Tulley-Pitchford investigated students' understanding of plagiarism and their engagement with Turnitin™ plagiarism software. She found that paraphrasing was a problematic area and argues that, with supportive training, Turnitin™ could become a useful tool for students rather than a vague threat.

In the fifth article, located in the professional field of teacher education, Copping uses a case study approach to evaluate the potential role of co-teaching with a tutor to support the learning of student teachers. The article argues that the purpose of co-teaching must be clarified beforehand and that the tutor needs to take some risks with their own teaching so that they are seen by the students to be learning alongside the student teacher.

The importance of students grasping tutors' expectations regarding quality in academic work was identified as a fundamental condition for improvement as long ago as 1989 (Sadler). It is only in recent years, that serious efforts have been made to introduce such an approach into higher education pedagogy and one of the ways in which this is being done is through engaging students with exemplar assignments although there is limited evaluation of this method. The penultimate article adds to our understanding of value of this approach in illuminating lecturers' sense of quality. Kean evaluates the use of exemplars combined with peer and tutor marking in a journalism programme. The article argues that providing opportunities for students to make judgements of exemplars in the company of others is a help in grasping the meaning of 'quality' within the subject discipline. Finally, the promotion of autonomous learning is explored by Hay and Mathers in the seventh article. They evaluate an assessment and feedback framework that has been developed for student performances. Working with dance and media production students they show how their approach helps to lead students to reflection and self-assessment.

Sadler, D.R. (1989) Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems, *Instructional Science*, 18 (2), 119-144.

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