

Practitioner Research in Higher Education Journal

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Editorial

This issue of the journal presents studies that give insight into both student learning and tutor learning. This is a key feature of practitioner research in higher education, that it contributes to the professional learning of academics and to the enhancement of student learning.

The first paper by Torres and Anguiano uses a framework of student identity formation with regard to the written tutor feedback on a piece of assessed coursework, an essay. In addition to the usual expectation of correction in relation to some kind of expected norm the feedback the analysis revealed two interesting features. First, the students saw the essay as a product of their creation and an extension of themselves whereas the tutors often preferred a metaphor of 'essay is the writer'. Second, the tutors tended to position themselves as more knowledgeable and the students fell into a defensive position of 'listener' to the feedback. The researchers suggest that tutors should be more sensitive to the identity formation influence of their written feedback and position it as a personalised conversation.

In the second paper James evaluates an intervention to the participation of students in classroom activity and discussion. She begins with a challenge for all academics arising from previous studies – that the vast majority of student participation is by a mere handful of students. The key challenges for students include confidence (or lack of it) and the sheer size of many classes. The issue of forcing participation is raised and the possibility is discussed that this might do more harm than good.

In paper three Brown explores the ambition of a professional education programme to challenge societal ageism and influence the beliefs and self-awareness of students on a programme focused on working with older adults. In this sense the module being explored was an attempt to bring about transformative learning in the students in relation to their views towards older adults. Brown argues that the analysis reveals some degree of transformation of perspective by the three student participants and suggests practical activities that would help students to more explicitly reflect on their developing beliefs and stance.

In paper four Thanaraj investigates the experiences of three academics who move from face to face teaching to facilitation of online learning. She uses Archer's modes of reflexivity to consider how the tutors move towards a more autonomous stance in handling this change in practice. Thanaraj emphasises the need to support identity formation in addition to technical training for academics making the shift to facilitation of online learning.

In the fifth paper Davis, Wright and Holly provide a useful and engaging review of the literature on academic writing or research retreats before reflecting on their own retreat designed to support doctoral students in their writing by developing skills but also beliefs and identities. The authors consider the pedagogical tensions faced by facilitators of academic retreats in providing structured activities, timed writing slots, formal tutor support or relying on expectations and informal peer support. They mention the possible higher level of participation in academic retreats by women and it might be interesting for future inquiry to consider who chooses to attend retreats and why but also who stays away.

In the final paper Austen analyses written tutor feedback to students on a variety of coursework within a case study academic programme. The study identified patterns of discourse that reflected the powerful position of the tutors in relation to the students. This is not a surprising finding but importantly it created tensions around the clarity of the feedback and the paper suggests alternative approaches to feedback to resolve these.

The papers in this issue reveal the ambition of teachers in higher education. They are going beyond the question 'what is my impact on learning?' to ask the more challenging question: 'what is my impact on learning and on learners?' These academics are considering the impact of higher education on the beliefs, dispositions and skills of students.

Pete Boyd Editor