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Editorial

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Simon Sneddon

Scott Turner

Anna Crouch

We would like to welcome readers to this edition of *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education* (ELEHE), and would like to thank all our authors and reviewers for their valuable contributions to the issue. The heart of this journal is the students' voice and learning experience, and how practitioners internationally are informed by these. The papers included in this edition reflect this agenda well, and demonstrate a sustained commitment to enhancing the experience of learners in higher education.

Again, we are pleased that we have been able to draw on and publish inter-disciplinary research, critical case studies, and works in progress related to current debates – all of which have an emphasis on improving students' experiences, and valuing students' voices.

We are also pleased to announce that the University of Northampton, which publishes ELEHE, has registered with [CrossRef](#) to allow us to allocate Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to published articles. Each ELEHE article now has a DOI and through this we hope to increase the reach and impact of the papers. We are extremely grateful to Miggie Pickton and Wes Homard-Roy for all of their work on this. For more information read Miggie's Blog [here](#) and the ELEHE blog [here](#).

This edition of the journal contains an eclectic selection of papers, examining a range of educational issues including employability, doctoral training, online learning, storytelling and academic failure.

Firstly, Clark's study (p.3) reports on students undertaking an employability and skills award. He highlights the value of using qualitative techniques to aid our understanding of 'subjectivities' in the student experience, which contrast to the '*predominant emphasis on quantifiable outcomes*' (p.16) underpinning measures of graduate employability. Challenging conventional approaches to studying an issue is also highlighted in Blair's paper about reducing high failure rates (p.21). He triggers debate into the way in which research in this field has traditionally been a '*focus on the positive*' (p.21) by exploring factors contributing to student success, rather than seeking to understand reasons for failure. On first glance, Blair's paper could be seen as being a 'how to' guide, and indeed it does make five useful recommendations for improving undergraduate courses with high failure rates. The inclusion of the student voice into this debate is crucial, and FitzPatrick *et al.* (p.38) draw on student feedback in order to evaluate the innovative use of photo-narrative storytelling in a large lecture class as a means of '*building connections between theory and the real-world*' (p.41). Smith McGloin (p.49) also draws on the student voice in her work in progress piece looking at the experience of postgraduate research students in a doctoral training partnership. In addition, and Fitzgerald and Corazzo (p.58) report on feedback from students participating in online focus groups in order to study the experience of distance learners.

Finally, Clarke (p.65) has reviewed Silverman's '*Very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book*' about quantitative research, and hails it to be a '*refreshing and valuable contribution*' (p.66) to the literature because of its concern '*with stimulating reflection and debate rather than providing a traditional 'how to' approach*' (p.66). This drive for reflection and debate underpins the ELEHE ethos, and the type of research which we are keen to promote.

One emerging theme arising from the papers is the issue of relevance, and the need for learning to be authentic for students. In the paper by FitzPatrick *et al.* exploring the benefits of storytelling using photo narrative, the feedback from students highlighted how the class activity enabled them to translate abstract theoretical concepts into the real world and make valuable theory-practice links which were related directly to their own knowledge and experience. The value of providing examples to learners is also discussed by Clark in his review of the Silverman book. In this text on qualitative research, case illustrations are used extensively to demonstrate the application of qualitative research practices - which Clark sees as a real strength of the resource. Similarly, in Smith McGloin's paper on experiences of doctoral training, doctoral students report how the training they receive needs to be relevant to their needs and pitched appropriately - with lower feedback ratings for 'generic' training which was not perceived to be appropriately tailored for them. Fitzgerald and Corazzo's study into the experience of distance learning highlighted the need for data collection tools (in this case, online focus groups) to be tailored to the needs of the group, taking into account factors such as time difference and technical issues. On courses with high failure rates, Blair recommends integrating more practical work to facilitate the application of knowledge to other situations. Additionally, Clark discusses employability awards designed to prepare students for the workplace, where student feedback emphasised the importance of careers activities being designed to fit around their lives, and the need for personalisation to their needs and aspirations. Such examples emphasise the importance of learning activities being useful, relevant, and practical, and designed with specific learner needs in mind.

We hope our readers enjoy this edition, and that it stimulates meaningful pedagogical reflection. Ongoing contributions to the journal are welcome at all times. We rely on author submissions for the continued development and success of the journal, so do please contact us if you have ideas for papers, or have a contribution that you would like to be considered for publication.