

Editor's Introduction

This issue of *Compass* is delightfully varied in content and tone, living up well to the journal's title. One of its opinion pieces considers how accelerated degrees need to evolve in a marketised Higher Education context; another takes a cynical stance to that very context; a contrasting third identifies an aspect of primary education policy and practice as the source of a possibly chronic failure by some students to use punctuation properly in their written submissions. Contrasting case studies demonstrate: the need for higher education institutions to understand better how to value those pursuing a doctorate and thus to engender in them identity and a true sense of belonging; the potency of play in transforming the way universities, their staff and their students interact, with correspondingly positive impact on teaching and learning, as well as on collaboration and morale.

The implications for the expansion of accelerated degree courses in higher education are helpfully explored by Iain Kitchener in his opinion piece, 'Are Accelerated Degrees the Future for Higher Education?' Reduced costs for students and quicker access to the graduate job market are significant drivers for this to happen, but Iain argues that a simple reduction of three years into two would be financially untenable in terms of staffing costs and, though accelerated, would not guarantee proportionate student learning gain. Fundamentally, the success of accelerated learning in the UK context is, Iain says, dependent upon adequate funding to support the well-researched creation of a relevant and appropriate pedagogy and thereby to ensure the development of academic skills, subject knowledge and effective learner transformation; furthermore, a compressed course must be achievable within the normal academic year and not impinge upon the summer period used by teachers for research and by students for earning money. To bring positive outcomes, a curriculum of this kind might well rely on such approaches as blended learning and transformative learning theory.

In the market state, argues Patrick Ainley in 'The management of business or the business of management?', there is a gradual process of devaluation and deprofessionalising: traditional academic courses are being reduced to business-orientated activities; students choose Business as the means of acquiring the skill sets to meet employment requirements, but eventually lose out to growing numbers of managers in an increasingly automated environment. Patrick comments that Management degrees ought to provide access to a higher level in the hierarchy of management, business and administration, but, in reality, managers are likewise reduced to semi-professional roles, being less expert in the context of high-performing technology. The market state resolves itself into a 'consolidation state', run in the interests of capital investors where the only real managers are the ex-politicians and senior civil servants who use their positions to secure elite boardroom roles, for which they are arguably the least qualified.

The deployment of the 'punctuation pyramid' as a means of encouraging primary school language learners to raise the 'level' (in National Curriculum terms) of their writing by choosing alternative punctuation marks from an artificial hierarchy of punctuation is regarded by Mark Bettaney in as responsible over time for the subsequent inability of students in higher education to punctuate properly. In the opinion piece, 'Where have all the full stops gone? The dangers of striving for 'University-level' punctuation', it is noted that instead of using the marks most appropriate to the conveying of their meaning in written submissions, many students still retain their early-acquired belief that one punctuation mark is somehow superior to another, regardless of its real purpose, with consequent deleterious impact upon

their work. Mark's piece draws on some examples of the attitudes of real students, who have been deluded by inappropriate primary education policy and practice into believing that the more complex the punctuation, the better the writing, despite their own intended meaning. Mark, as a marker of otherwise sound and perhaps insightful student work, is at pains to debunk the punctuation pyramid policy and to challenge the assumption of writers of books on academic literacy that students reach higher education in perfect command of punctuation skills.

How do PhD 'students' see themselves? They are beyond taught undergraduate and postgraduate degrees but have yet (if this is indeed their aim) to take up a role as a full academic: is their self-perception one of 'student', 'researcher', 'teacher' or 'member of staff'? A case study by Martin Compton and myself seeks, through the lens of self-identity, to discover how those in doctoral education – whether they be in unhelpful limbo or positive liminal space – really feel about their role/s and considers how an adequate understanding of their feelings about themselves can only help to improve institutional support for them and create greater consistency in the PhD experiences they have. Only then will their supervisors and their universities be able to ensure that they feel properly valued and have a true sense of belonging. Martin and I asked registered postgraduate researchers on the Postgraduate Teaching, Learning, and Assessment course at the University of Greenwich to create personal pie charts depicting the proportions of their roles as they saw them; the findings may have been raw impressions, but any reader will become absorbed in the messages they convey, which have serious implications for higher education institutions regarding identity and belonging amongst such colleagues.

The University of Winchester's 'Play and Creativity Festival' aimed to: celebrate and re-energise teaching and learning; find alternative ways of communicating complex ideas and important messages; generate fresh perspectives and new ideas; build connections and community. Alison James, author of this lively, personal and absolutely compelling portrayal of the power of play to enthuse large numbers of disparate staff and students may feel that not everything worked perfectly, but the case study certainly confirms that the aims were more than fulfilled. 'Why play matters in a world of REF, TEF and What the Jeff' is a heart-warming account of the process of planning for the event and of carrying out the various stages of preparation, giving insights into the astonishing range of activities eventually undertaken and providing some of the hugely positive reactions of participants. The interest generated beyond Winchester and the fact that the Festival is to run again, next time including the local community, are testament to how much play can transform professional practice, generate a sense of well-being (even at a very busy time of the academic year) and guarantee downright fun for all those involved. Readers of this case study will no doubt wish to access the blog and film records of the Festival.

The coming together of such a wide range of opinions and topics covered in this issue of *Compass* underlines how conversations concerning teaching and learning continue to surprise us, engage us, and provoke critical debate. I hope you enjoy reading through the opinion pieces and case studies as much as we have enjoyed putting this issue together.

Danielle Tran
Editor