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## Editorial: Combined UALL special edition and general edition

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## **Editorial: combined UALL special and general edition**

Bill Jones, Executive member of the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL), University of Leicester, UK

Email: [wrjarion@aol.com](mailto:wrjarion@aol.com)

John Butcher, Managing editor of the *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* journal, The Open University, UK

Email: [john.butcher@open.ac.uk](mailto:john.butcher@open.ac.uk)

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This special issue of the journal combines our biennial Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) focus with a collection of wide-ranging articles representing the best work in widening participation and lifelong learning across the sector. The first half of this edition captures an important occasion in the calendar of the UALL. The opening papers arise from the UALL Annual Conference, which presents a platform for research and practice presentations by the higher education lifelong learning community. For this issue too, however, there is of course a significant divergence from the normal chronology, caused by the extreme and prolonged disruption of Covid-19. This has not only delayed publication of the UALL 2019 Conference papers but has reduced the number of papers submitted for publication. The pre-pandemic spring of 2019 can now seem somewhat remote, even otherworldly.

The 2019 UALL Conference was hosted by the University of Wolverhampton, an institution rightly proud of its widening participation credentials, as will be evident from Julie Hughes' article in this issue. The Conference was a notable success, admirably living up to its title of Lifelong Learning and Innovation, and appropriately held at the University's excellent Innovation Campus in Telford, close to the Ironbridge Gorge – the birthplace of the first Industrial Revolution. The Conference interrogated and celebrated a wide range of topics and practices across the theme of innovation, with papers, group and plenary presentations, seminars and reports, all illustrating the breadth and quality of

practice and research, as well as the creative energy, in the lifelong learning community.

The location of the conference at the University's Telford campus provided a link to the Industrial Revolution – Telford itself is a 'new town' named after one of the great pioneering engineers – and a visit to the Ironbridge Museum provided delegates with a memorable experience of the transformative innovation of that period. 2019 was also the centenary year of another transformative event in the history of the education of adults: the celebrated '1919 Report' which led directly to the establishment of university community education as a national funded movement, and to its first professional organisation – the Universities Council for Adult Education, now UALL – the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning. The '1919 Report' was a forward-looking manifesto for lifelong learning, and a feature of the 2019 Conference was a celebration and discussion of this anniversary, including the work of the 'Centenary Commission' to consider potential futures for lifelong learning.

The papers in this Special Issue have been selected both for their contribution to the literature of lifelong learning and for their reflection of the Conference's thematic strands.

'Lifelong learning in Rochdale: Building sustainable community voices' takes as its focus an issue which has beset lifelong learning throughout its history – indeed it was the subject of a paper in the first-ever issue of the journal *Adult Education* in 1926. This is the essential linking of practice and research in community provision, which can be especially tricky for a university, where institutional engagement may be clouded by a seeming 'ivory tower' remoteness. Too often research, as Katy Goldstraw, John Diamond, Helen Chicot and Dave Broome make clear in this paper, is 'in' and not 'with' communities, leading to top-down and time-limited interventions, or, in the colourful words of a respondent to this project: 'Promises, promises ... I'm cheesed off with do-gooders who pay lip-service to great ideas and then bugger off'. The authors give us their account of co-production of research and building community co-operation in which the university, with its academic expertise and status, can be a positive and respected community partner.

In 'Nurturing belonging in a diverse student group: Transition and transitioning innovations in the University of Opportunity', Julie Hughes and Derek Walton present two aspects of the work of Wolverhampton University – an institution deeply embedded in its communities, with the great majority of students living within a 25-mile radius, and a similar majority remaining in the region after graduation. Nevertheless, even in such a 'widening participation' university the transition to higher education can be challenging in this region of high unemployment and low qualifications. The two projects described in this paper address this challenging transition: Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Academic Coaches (ACs). GTAs are alumni who have recently completed their Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and can 'span the Further Education/Higher Education interface'. The academic coach role is similar and related to the GTA: ACs focus on personal tutoring and are well-placed to provide specific support, a sense of belonging and therefore enhanced retention.

In 'Chunked experiential learning – An innovative teaching methodology for a modern, diverse classroom,' Rod Brazier, Sam Airey and Regine Block address questions of the pedagogical implications of widening participation and of a 'diverse classroom'. These issues are in the foreground for an institution with a majority of mature students and a very large majority of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, many of whom are not native English speakers. A history of high failure rates and low aspiration led to the introduction of a new approach to classroom practice, here described as 'chunked experiential learning'. Academic content is broken down into 'chunks', which are then assimilated by student activity of the 'traditional' experiential learning kind. Assessment follows this informality, in an 'essay-free' environment, with an emphasis on detailed tutor feedback, and students' own reflection on their learning. This new pedagogy has so far shown significant improvement in student submission and success rates.

In 'Inventive, interactive and individualised teaching and learning practice in higher and lifelong education' Agnieszka Uflewka, Soumi Dey and Catherine Lido stand back somewhat from the front line of provision and reflect on the changing state of teaching and learning in an increasingly digital and internationalised world, within the context of 'creative teaching

and learning methods' as developed in the Glasgow University Psychology of Adult Learning postgraduate course. This course 'aims to integrate theory and evidence-based research from two main disciplines, Psychology and Adult Education, synthesising the two domains through our inventive, interactive and individualised approach'. This is a conceptual paper which nevertheless aims to stimulate educators into reflection on their practice, especially in cross-cultural activity and creativity.

Megan Lawton, Zena Blower and Phil Gravestock consider another revision of traditional pedagogy, this time that of 'flipped' learning, in 'Exploring different perspectives of flipped learning in a work- based context.' The learning context is one of full-time workers who are fitting this course alongside a 'day job' and for whom time is precious, and classroom contact hours have to be supplemented by individual, online, content. Evaluation has been by 'appreciative enquiry', a not-uncontested methodology, as the authors acknowledge, but which, from an ethical and practical perspective, respects the fact that 'a work-based researcher is unable to separate themselves from their research context.'

We are delighted to 'sandwich' this edition with a fine book review by Bill Jones, a key member of UALL for many years. Bill reviews *Reclaiming the university for the public good: Experiments and futures in co-operative higher education*, edited by Noble and Ross, published by Palgrave in 2019. He notes the key theme running through the book as a forensic exposure of the ills of neo-liberal higher education, exemplified by the shift to the language of 'customers', the decline of part-time higher education (HE) and the cynicism of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In contrast, he supports the authors' emphasis on the possibilities offered by co-operative approaches to HE, building on a rich history and featuring contemporary global case studies. Like all the best reviews, this really does make you want to read the original book.

The edition is completed with a strong collection of full articles, and a research note, the latter in particular prompting an aspiration for further empirical research. We commend the article by Tracey Peace-Hughes, Jill Marchbank and John H McKendrick 'Beyond bridging: The prospects for porosity in widening

participation work with parents', which offers a stimulating study of widening participation (WP) activity with parents/carers from multiply-deprived communities. Tracing the psychological journey between University campus and home environment/local community, the authors use the concept of 'porosity' as a lens through which to identify impact. Interestingly, they express concern as to the extent to which the impact of such activities can be sustained but recommend mutual co-creation as one way forward.

In addition, we are pleased to publish Karen Forbes, Katie B Howard and Sonia Ilie's article 'Individual and institutional perspectives on barriers to progression to higher education for students with English as an additional language', which offers some perceptive and original findings on an under-researched topic. Starting from an awareness that attainment gaps between English as an additional language (EAL) and first language speakers diminish through schooling, the authors explored why, despite that data, some EAL pupils were less likely to study beyond the age of 16. Utilising the perceptions of staff and students in two schools, recommendations emerging from the research included: the need for linguistic and cultural sensitivity in sources of information, the need to engage parents and the need to increase awareness of the non-linear paths taken by EAL students.

Engaging with an area of increasing importance in HE policy and practice, Mary Larkin and Chris Kubiak's article 'Carers and higher education: The next steps' contributes fresh ideas to sector understanding. Positioned to stimulate further debate, the article identifies the pressing need for institutions to develop flexible study programmes to include students who have, or have had, experience of caring. The authors also recommend financial assistance and the recognition of carers' unique career trajectories. Importantly, a proposal is made for the universal adoption of the term 'caring experienced students', accompanied by recognition and an improved recording system to facilitate the development of the existing evidence base.

Finally, we are pleased to include a short research note by Andy Kardasz, Enam Haque and Louise Alldridge 'What impact does teaching in Outreach activities have on medical students'

own learning and teaching skills? A Pilot Study'. The authors offer some tentative findings from a study of Medical student ambassadors (an under-researched area) for whom the impact of their outreach role was a positive improvement in self-perceived teaching skills and self-confidence.

As ever, we are grateful to the journal's editorial board and reviewers for their commitment in producing this selection of articles, illustrating the breadth of research being undertaken in lifelong learning and widening participation.

The editorial board would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of Derek Walton as co-author of the article 'Nurturing belonging in a diverse student group: Transition and transitioning innovations in the University of Opportunity' who sadly died prior to publication.

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