Editorial

By Mary Malcolm, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)

I'm a very successful air-traffic controller. In the course of writing this introduction, I expect to land a number of planes successfully in either Hong Kong or Rio, refueling, repairing and parking them while scheduling their safe landings and departures on a limited number of runways. I try not to let this second career interfere with my working day, or to allow too many of my transiting charges to crash and burn, but the prospect of just 10 minutes' game play on a simple iPhone app is as refueling as an evening hour spent becoming a pro skateboarder with Tony Hawk's assistance.

Is it just me? Apparently not. It's estimated that one in four gamers is over fifty years old, and that a typical game player plays just one to two hours a day (McGonigal, 2011). And of course it's not new: the 1970's Rubik's cube with all its frustrative compulsion, was a very different executive toy from the hypnotic Newton's cradle. We enjoy being absorbed in an activity, and are fulfilled by a sense of making progress, even when that progress requires us to overcome obstacles, and even, as long as we feel we are on a purposeful quest in a responsive environment, to fail and to persist.

There are some rather extraordinary and unpalatable claims made that many who would not fit the profile of a traditional 'gamer' are now becoming regular players, among them the idea what Green (2006) describes as the 'emotional labour' of low-engagement service sector work can be made enjoyable by adding the intrigue of game-like rules and reward (Reeves and Read, 2009). But there's a significant and long-standing train of research across various fields that claims our satisfaction with present experience is enhanced by a sense of progress, of exploration and achievement - of learning. And this type of engagement forms part of the lure of digital games, from the small and straightforward apps to the much more complex online community-based game worlds, vastly different as the patters and demands of play, and the apparent significance of the quest are in each case.

There is much in higher education to distract us from this type of engagement in the moment (in its temporal and its qualitative meaning) of pedagogic practice. Curricular and quality assurance frameworks require us to position everything we do within a series of broader contexts - the documented course, the development of employable graduates, the assessment strategy, and a specified unit syllabus, and beyond these the contexts of sectoral standards and benchmarks. These contexts are essential to our provision of a consistent and coherent intellectual and educational experience for our students. But the significance of all rests on the quality of our pedagogic practice.

It is important to our personal satisfaction in pedagogical practice as a central component of our working lives that we continue to find it fulfilling, developmental; vital also to our sustained

engagement with that practice as an effective contribution to the learning experience that we maintain our engagement with the curriculum, not as static documentary product - the 'proto-curriculum' as Barnett and Coate (2005) term it but as 'a dynamic and interactive process of learning' (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006). If we recognise the extent to which our students enact with the proto-curriculum to create their own learning experience, then the extent to which we remain active in exploring the complex interactions of influences that drive and constitute their enactment of it is important in our capacity to guide and support that process.

The model of the critically reflective practitioner offers one approach to maintaining this active and questioning engagement. But it has its limitations. As presented, for example, by Brookfield (1995), critical reflection is a deeply personal quest for continual improvement, limited to developing individual performance in relation to given objectives. It does not invite exploration of the broader context of learning, learners, or teaching, or offer ready support to the questioning of power, tradition and vested interest within it.

Pedagogic research does invite these questions, and provides a more satisfactory framework for working towards answers, provisional as they must always be accounts of a 'dynamic interaction'. It offers a context for lived practice that is immediate, intellectually satisfactory, and amenable to sharing across communities of practice, rather than remedially demanding and isolating, as that of the critically reflective practitioner can be, or disengaging and diversionary as those of quality assurance and sector benchmarking can become when they lead us to by-pass the 'now' of practice.

And there is not much to explore and to share, as the articles in this first edition demonstrate. Mark Bowler and Andrea Raiker's work explores the basis on which we provide learning contexts consistent with learners' changing social (and gaming) experiences. Eve Rapley's work on peer-assisted learning will support our improved understanding of shared roles and responsibilities within the learning community. Helen Corkill's research examines the implications for us and for our learners in an institution that thrives on its partnerships, of continuing issues of equivalence and fit between the enduring categorization of learning experiences as primarily vocational or academic. Peter Norrington proposes to examine poster presentations as an assessment format, ripe for investigation and growth as the communication of point of view is shaped by social media. And Garry Layden reports on a cross-disciplinary project to extend the visualization of spatial design students from the static to the lived existence of their project.

All represent the value and potential of pedagogic research as the basis of an academic identity constituted by combining practice, enquiry, scholarship and experience shared through publication. They go beyond reflective practice to a scholarship informed by a well-researched position within current sector knowledge and practice, and have benefited from the developmental peer review offered to authors writing for this journal.

And so, in addition to enjoying exploring the implications of articles in the inaugural edition of The Journal of Pedagogic Development for your own practice, I would encourage you, whether you work at one of our campuses or a partner institution, to consider how your own pedagogic practice might inform academic enquiry in ways that will sustain and enrich your own pedagogic engagement and that of your colleagues. I hope you'll submit he results of that enquiry to the editors who have made this first edition so impressive and so engaging a read.

References

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