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Editorial

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Abstract

The overarching theme for this special edition is academic integrity. The theme prompted papers which ranged widely in stance, purpose and methodology from authors in Australia and New Zealand. Many authors began by defining words (i.e. 'integrity', 'plagiarism' or 'original') and I propose doing the same in these opening remarks. The word that struck me in the JUTLP title was 'practice' and I kept that word in mind when selecting papers. I was asking myself: 'How might the special edition address the needs of practitioners themselves? What can the authors contribute to issues effecting teachers, students, university administrators and/or other researchers concerned with actions and interventions designed to encourage academic integrity? The result was accepting more papers than could be accommodated in a single issue. It may be that the volume of submissions just reflects academics' need to publish but more positively, it could also indicate how much energy and thought is being expended by practitioners in universities on this issue. These papers all offer something useful, I believe, to one or more of the practitioner groups.

Editorial

Guest Editor: Jude Carroll,
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The call went out for papers on academic integrity but the response overwhelmingly (but not universally) addressed issues of plagiarism. However, authors focused less on 'what' and 'why' questions (what is plagiarism? Why do students cheat? Is electronic detection of plagiarism possible? and so on) and more on 'how', 'when' and 'who' questions (e.g. How can students be helped to learn academic writing? Who is best placed to teach specific skills? What might be appropriate in a Year One programme?). Some papers do ask 'why' questions but unlike newcomers to the issue of plagiarism that address the 'why' at students' behaviour, the authors note that advice on deterring students unacceptable behaviour may be easy to find but hard to use. Underpinning questions might include: 'why is it proving so difficult to make an impact on students' ideas and actions?' or 'How can we ensure our colleagues see the issue of student plagiarism as complex and worth addressing rather than simple or irrelevant?

The special edition builds on a large and growing number of papers about academic integrity in general and plagiarism in particular. We are still far from having robust large-scale studies that will allow us to generalise about effective practice. In this issue, papers focuses on applying advice, clarifying the authors' own and others' ideas, tracking the impact of interventions, and reporting on practitioners' own experiences. The authors provide case studies, local data, personal reflections, and arguments for a different approach to teaching and supporting students' learning. Like medical colleagues who are concerned with disease prevention, we have difficulty showing that our efforts to encourage integrity and discourage manifestations of lack of integrity such as plagiarism have made a difference and Journalists always ask me, 'Is it working?' when I describe my own universities efforts and I have to admit that cases double year on year and the same old issues remain. We all as practitioners struggle to find the time, patience and data collection skills necessary to really document effect let alone speculate on what caused it.

We probably will not be able to generalise about practice outside of local contexts or the link between cause and effect until other kinds of studies have been published and those will probably be by non-practitioners. We need studies by those who are not constrained by limits in their own time and the scope of their investigations to investigating (however carefully) only local situations. We need theories about learning, institutional change or teaching that have been tested at national or international level in ways that is beyond the interest or experience of most 'chalk face' practitioners. This tension between evaluation and personal scholarship on the one hand and research that changes or documents our underpinning concepts and understanding as teachers on the other is currently a key topic of discussion here in the UK. I understand it is equally controversial in Australia/New Zealand. This special edition offers a useful example of the value and utility of the former. I would imagine, like myself, the authors and readers await with interest any further research data that can help us to shape and improve practice.

Jude Carroll
Guest Editor