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Editorial - Becoming Well Read: Charting the complexities of academic reading and navigating the reading journeys of undergraduate and postgraduate students

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Editorial - Becoming Well Read: Charting the complexities of academic reading and navigating the reading journeys of undergraduate and postgraduate students

Welcome to this special issue dedicated to the development of academic reading practices in higher education. We are particularly pleased to introduce this issue as it highlights a significant yet overlooked aspect of academic literacies. Emerging from our introduction of Academic Reading Retreats (Rhead 2019) and a UK-based 'Becoming Well Read' symposium in 2019, we seek, therefore, to shine a light on this area of academic practice with the curation of this collection of articles, which explore the learning and teaching of academic reading in more depth.

Many university students struggle to select, read and then use literature in their own research and writing. Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh (2008) respond locally to flawed undergraduate reading practices, but reflect a continuing wider concern in HE about the academic 'skills' students enter university with (Hermida 2009). A significant aspect of academic reading for undergraduates is the challenge of discerning the levels of credibility or influence of particular sources (Moore 2013). The requirement for independent reading, with increasing expectations of 'criticality', presents further challenges regarding the process of selection and the purpose of academic reading, compounded by the apparent discord between perspectives of students and staff on reading lists (Brewerton 2014). Additionally, the required development of 'networks of knowledge' key to higher level learning (MacMillan 2014), means that academic reading often addresses notions of HE cultural capital (Hockings 2010) by exposing the tacit codes and culture of academic disciplinary communities, which remain unexposed at an undergraduate level and beyond. Research into student and staff perspectives around academic reading therefore seems fundamental to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by those planning teaching and learning.

It has been argued (Lea and Street 2006; Wingate 2006; Hallett 2013) that HE's frequently remedial and non-inclusive approaches to addressing students' reading practices, often packaged as extra-curricular, generic, study 'skills', fail to address these issues adequately. Moreover, whilst the more recent discourse regarding 'academic literacies' ostensibly includes reading, it is often subordinated to writing practices, and it is noted (McAlpine 2012) that writing support is much more visible at universities than reading support. Although academic reading is its own practice, quite distinct from reading for narrative purposes, it is often overlooked and subordinated to writing in the development of academic literacies at university. However, practitioners in HE know that the quality of academic reading is a key determinant in the success of all other academic endeavours. Therefore, further research is also necessary to develop teaching practices and strategies that respond to the challenges uncovered from the exploration of perceptions.

Our first four papers explore views and perceptions of academic reading from students, academics, librarians and learning developers. Firstly, drawing on students' and learning developers' perspectives, **Kimberley and Thursby's** case study of a workshop for first year undergraduates explores the possible impact of emotion on students' academic reading practices. Identifying affective barriers that exist before reading begins, they argue that rather than real efficacy, a lack of confidence in academic reading and 'being a reader' is the primary barrier to engagement. They recommend increased support for reading through a framing of students' encounters with challenging texts that captures affective responses and breaks down negative perceptions. **Miller and Merdian's** survey of academics' views of their own and students' academic reading practices

explores five domains: definition; purpose; student practice; teaching and assessing; and engagement. The findings provide valuable insight for educators reflecting on their approaches to teaching academic reading: while students' academic reading is valued but felt to be wanting, it is often not explicitly taught; students' practices of strategic and rushed reading is both regretted and mirrored by the academics' reading practices. The paper argues for an increased commitment to valuing and rewarding academic reading within curriculum learning and assessment. **Morley** then uses online surveys and the Delphi method to explore threshold concepts across subject lecturers, learning developers, librarians and students, highlighting eight threshold concepts concerning academic reading that will interest a wide range of international university practitioners. **Maguire, Reynolds** and **Delahunt** bring us an interesting, and poignant, discussion of the role of academic reading in professionally-accredited medical programmes, in this case discussing the perspectives of Nursing and Midwifery students.

The edition then offers four further papers, which move our focus to practices and approaches to teaching and learning academic reading in universities. **Nguyen and Henderson** address the challenges around student's academic reading established in the earlier papers, with a review of literature that draws together three reading stances: instrumental, critical and aesthetic. Offering a definition of an 'engaged' reader, their paper argues that a broad approach to teaching academic reading, that complements instrumental pedagogical practices with critical and personal perspectives has the greatest capacity to increase student engagement with reading. Providing just such an example, **Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook** and **Sinfield** present their paper in quite a different style to what you might expect. Here, **Abegglen et al** discuss the use of text scrolls to challenge existing reading practices through a focus on the process of reading academic texts that is both participative and collaborative. Next, **Cowley-Haselden**, uses legitimation code theory to explore theory knowledgeability across academic reading circles. This paper argues the case for teaching methodologies such as academic reading circles, demonstrating that students can make extensive links between texts if these readings are given sufficient time and opportunity. **Crilly, Panesar** and **Suka-Bill**'s case study reports on a two-year collaborative *Liberate the Curriculum* project in a UK Arts university. Engaging students through collaboration with academics and librarians to audit and reimagine the reading list, this paper considers the part reading lists have to play in decolonising the curriculum and the potential for staff student collaboration in that endeavour. As such, their case study offers a model to engage students, and staff, in considering the purpose of academic reading and what it means to be 'well read'.

Finally, **Georgina Spencer** reviews a new addition to the Macmillan Study Skills Series, 'Reading at University', released in May 2020, by Jamie Q Roberts and Caitlin Hamilton to complete this special edition of JUTLP.

In addition to our authors, we would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the peer-reviewers recruited for this journal from across the international higher education sector:

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