



JOURNAL OF Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice

Guest Editorial

A VIEW FROM TWO JOURNALS: PART I

This editorial article is the result of a 'swap of editorials' between David Mathew, Editor of the *Journal of Pedagogic Development* (JPD) and Keith Smyth, one of the Editors of the *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* (JPAAP). We agreed that it would be a good idea to introduce each journal to the readership of the other journal, especially as both publication share common intellectual ground and a similar way of looking at the subjects of teaching and learning. Part one of our 'editorial swap' from David Mathew comes below, with part two by Keith Smyth forthcoming in JPD later this year.

Although we might not be able to agree on a specific number (because there is no reliable way of quantifying the data, worldwide, and because the field keeps changing, and definitions become blurred), there would seem to be a broad consensus on the figure of *fifty million*. Fifty million is the number of journal articles that have been published since the beginning of what we might recognise as academic writing. Or at least... fifty million *was* the figure in 2010, when a colleague at the University of Ottawa, Arif E. Jinha, produced his findings on the topic (Jinha, 2010). Since then, academically speaking, all bets have been off.

'From the first model of the modern journal, *Le Journal des Sçavans*, published in France in 1665,' Jinha writes, 'followed by *Philosophical Transactions*, published by the Royal Society in London later that year, the number of active scholarly journal titles has increased steadily. In 2006 there were roughly 23,750 titles' (p. 258).

It takes only a few moments of mental arithmetic to arrive at a possible tally for how many might have been published since 2010, and the figure is huge. A 2012 report by Ware and Mabe suggests that approximately 1.8 million articles are published every year, in approximately 28,000 journals. This figure seems so great, perhaps, that we might ask ourselves, in a voice resembling Samuel Beckett's Estragon, or Douglas Adams's Marvin, or A.A. Milne's Eeyore (depending on our reading tastes), what is the point of *writing more*, simply to add to the landmass of pages already available?

This was a (rhetorical) question posed by Mark Atlay in the second ever issue of the journal that I edit, the *Journal of Pedagogic Development*, in an article plangently entitled 'Writing: Why Bother?' (Atlay, 2011). 'To start with,' he writes, 'there's the aspect of publishing that keeps academics in their jobs – it's one of the mechanisms by which we are judged, so publishing adds to job security. Both appointments and promotions hinge on it.'

'Making judgments about academic output is fraught with difficulty,' Atlay continues. 'Quality or quantity? How do you compare one seminal paper with another that may be twice as long but of much less value? How do you compare an article with a book? A consultancy report with an exhibition? Internally, disciplines may have their own metrics, but comparing across subject boundaries is problematic.'

Before we give up on the idea of publishing altogether, however, let us look at something more positive. Atlay writes: 'At an individual level it is very satisfying to see something that you have nurtured and slaved over finally making its way into print. The peer review process is a mechanism by which your work becomes 'validated' in the eyes of colleagues across the sector, adding to one's sense of identity and self-worth... [The] scholarship of teaching is also about bringing to bear the same qualities of critical analysis and evaluation that we apply to our discipline-based scholarship to our work with students. Articles in the *JPD* illustrate this dimension in action.'

Atlay's contribution to the *JPD* was ultimately positive in tone (as one might have expected from the Director of Teaching and Learning at the University of Bedfordshire!), and my own thoughts are similar in spirit. We cannot deny that a universe of words has been published in academic journals; this does not mean, however, that there are no new tales under the sun. There is always a new story to tell; a new piece of information to promote; a fresh way of presenting one's findings or opinions.

The submissions to the *JPD* that I often find the most satisfying are those that make discoveries and have an original voice, even if the subject area is not one with which I am familiar. As long as pedagogy (or teaching or learning, or any combination of the same) is at the core of the submission, then we will consider it for publication. And because I understand that the process of writing (for some) is pregnant with anxiety, we try to ensure that feedback is supportive and warm. We particularly like to encourage submissions from writers who have published little or not at all.

Anxiety is an important topic – for writers, learners and educators alike. So crucial, in fact, do I believe anxiety to be that I wrote a book on the subject: *Fragile Learning: The Influence of Anxiety* (Mathew, 2015), in which I argue that anxiety is at the root of education for adult learners. The book mirrors what I also submit on the subject of writing. In precisely the same way that adult learners might be veered away from their learning by circumstances such as age, illness, geographical location and language – any of

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which might make the process of learning 'fragile' and able to break easily – there are moments when we are writing, or trying to write, when anxiety is loud in our heads and affecting our progress – when any household chore or office query seems preferable to tackle, rather than what we are attempting to compose.

At the annual University of Bedfordshire Writing Retreat that I organise, I worked with colleagues who occasionally admitted to high levels of stress, and yet worked together most admirably in order to complete their individual papers. This was a wonderful example of how anxiety can be harnessed and used to achieve a positive outcome. Although I was clearly a container for group anxiety from time to time (and I had my own paper to complete), we were able to make excellent progress, which is how I like to work with the *JPD* Editorial Board (twenty colleagues in a variety of countries) when we discuss how to move forward with a particular submission that we would like to publish. We published our first issue in 2011 and so we are still young and growing, but we now receive submissions from around the world, so I believe we are getting the formula mostly correct. Even if the claims made by Rose Eveleth (2014) are valid – that 'half of academic papers are read only by their authors and journal editors' – I believe that academic publishing is important. If I did not think so, then I would not commit so much time on this labour of love, three times a year.

I hope to read your own contribution in due course!

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