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A warm welcome to the latest issue of the Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice. We are delighted to share with you a collection of articles written around the special issue theme of 'Transitions to remote and blended learning'. These 20 articles represent reflective practice accounts, original research, case studies and 'on the horizon' works undertaken at 10 different institutions across Scotland, England and Australia. Written at a time of great uncertainty in terms of the spread and impact of the Covid-19 variants, the articles are testament to the commitment of our colleagues (with students as partners, in some cases) to providing a high quality, supportive learning environment in relation to a necessary move to emergency remote teaching, followed by a more consolidated period of blended and online learning. Several themes emerge across the papers; these can be distilled as follows:

Early adopters

This was a theme encouraged by the special issue editors in the initial call for articles, and it is clear that early adopters have played a pivotal role in developing institutional digital capabilities, in terms of previous involvement in blended and online learning provision (e.g. Dale, Kubincova and colleagues, Huser and colleagues, and Macdiarmid and Rolinska). In addition, early adopters have acted as 'champions' in terms of sharing good practice and providing academic development opportunities for their colleagues who could previously be considered to be 'reluctant majority' (e.g. Honeychurch and Offord, Kimberley and Suvanzhieva, and McKerlie and colleagues) but who have successfully transitioned to remote and blended provision.

'In it together'

Several papers (e.g. Bellamy and colleagues, Howden and colleagues, Ishcova, and Specht and colleagues) all refer to being 'in it together'; whether as faculty level champions working together to support all staff, or bringing together organisational leaders to respond to the challenge, or working in partnership with students, or ensuring the successful transition of all staff (not just early adopters), to being confident in teaching online, this sentiment very much captures the difficult position that the sector found itself in. By working collaboratively and collectively, staff (and students) were able to overcome significant challenges.

Communities of practice

Consistent with the theme of 'togetherness', communities of practice (CoPs) have played a critical role in bringing together practitioners to share good practice and to learn from each other in a respectful environment; as Dale, McEwan and colleague note, this is the form of continued professional development that all staff engage in and value. The role of CoPs in shaping the response to the online pivot is also highlighted in papers by Breeze and Holford, Cunningham and colleagues, and Hunter and colleagues, empowering staff through trust and mutual respect.

Students as partners

Some of the articles highlight the very important role that students themselves have played in the response to the pivot online. For example, Ishcova and her student colleagues have reflected on their partnership approach to the redesign of one course towards a flipped model, and comment on the 'sharing of power' in terms of co-design of learning experiences. McKerlie and colleagues outline different approaches to using technology-enhanced learning and teaching (TELT) in student-centred innovative ways, including the adoption of student-produced learning resources, and the role of students as TELT partners in ongoing developmental events.

Consistent/template approaches

A 'templated' approach to remote provision appears in the papers by Honeychurch and Offord, Macdiarmid and Rolinska, and Pate, in terms of course design principles. This, and a focus on a limited set of reliable and robust technologies as outlined by Specht and colleagues, among others, has clearly allowed academics to focus on harnessing learning technologies for optimal pedagogical benefit in a tight timescale.

Evaluation and ongoing development

Austen's 10-point evaluation framework has been included as a resource for academics wishing to reflect on and enhance their digital practice. Despite the successes documented in this special issue, some of the articles highlight ongoing issues that need to

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be monitored and addressed appropriately. For example, Adekola, Siddiqui and colleague examine 'issues of power' in relation to who owns the curriculum, issues around digital equity, and blurring of personal/learning spaces. Issues such as these are also highlighted in Dickinson and Griffith's sociomateriality perspective study into student experiences of blended learning during the pandemic.

Empathy and leadership

Empathy and leadership are themes that run throughout the whole special issue. This is evident in the paper on complexity leadership theory by Howden and colleagues which examines the tension between operationalising the remote pivot while allowing staff freedom to innovate. Merry explores the benefits of emotional intelligence training to enhance the experience and sense of belonging of online distance learners.

We would like to conclude by arguing that leadership has been exhibited across the sector by all stakeholders, including students, academics, academic developers and professional support staff, mid-level and senior management. It is this collective leadership that has allowed us to respond effectively to the need for remote and blended learning in the pandemic, and this 'in it together' approach will be what sees us emerge – not just a little exhausted, but also hopeful, skilled and inspired – on the other side.

We would like to sincerely thank JPAAP for giving us the opportunity to commission this special issue, particularly Lorraine Anderson and Janis Davidson for their ongoing support and guidance (and also other members of the editorial team for their help with reviewing and copyediting). Thank you also to all contributors. We were not able to accommodate all proposed articles in this single issue, so please look out for other articles in the next issue that address this theme.

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