

Journal of Impact Cultures

Statement of Intent: From the Founding Co-Editors

Authors

Earle Abrahamson
Jonathan Mann

Corresponding Authors:

Earle Abrahamson and Jonathan Mann, *Journal of Impact Cultures*, University of East London, University Way, London, E16 2RD, United Kingdom

The Journey to Our Journal

What are the challenges, opportunities, value, reach and impact that belie the creation of new pedagogical journey? These questions, often rhetoric in nature, form the learnscape (landscape of the learner and learned environment), that brought together collaborative ideas and visions, that culminated in the journal of impact cultures (JIC). As an academic I worked closely with colleagues to probe questions around scholarly output and how best we evaluate the impact of the output. After working to develop the journal, I realised that impact is a complex word fraught with different and difficult definitional constraints. Whilst the journal highlights a culture of impactful outcomes and changes, who gets to impact, and how is the impact viewed by those on the receiving end? The creation of this open access journal enabled colleagues to enter discussions around the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a vehicle to enhance classroom dynamics, institutional policies around teaching and learning, and national agendas on change and impact. Initially it was important to speak to the right people, pitch our ideas carefully so that constructive alignment between institutional objectives were satisfied and embedded in the philosophy of the journal. This involved revision to the journal identity, conversations with colleagues, and advocacy from international scholars.

In designing the Journal, our journey focussed simultaneously on developing an innovative adjunct to the published output in the form of the contributor's blog. It was important to capture the person or people behind the paper, and for the author to narrate how the publication evolved. This provides a unique feature that serves to not only garner the human element to publication, but more importantly build the community of practice network to support early career as well as experienced academics. The Journal envelopes the concepts of the lived versus the learned experience and works to make vocal how researchers reach, dissect, and value different research questions. A defining feature of the journal is the connection to students as co-creators of the output. By attending events and conferences and understanding the protagonists in the field, the journal serves to give voice to those who may not ordinarily consider publication in a pedagogic journal. It enables conversation around scholarship and interrogates analytics for assessing impact in traditional ways. To be part of the journey together with my co-creator has been a privilege. Together we have reflected on themes and variations of pedagogical challenges and how the journal has the potential to change institutional awareness and recognition of SoTL. The journal further supports scholarship through writing groups, conferences, and networking with national and

international scholars. The Journey has only just begun as we continue to pave the path with ideas, knowledge, questions, contributors, and innovation. We ask you to join our journey, to help survey the learnscape, and work with us to develop a journal that truly represents the value, reach and impact of SoTL in HE and beyond.

Why This, Why Now?

Of course, when launching a journal, it is prudent to first carefully assess one's *market*, and address that directly with an ambitious mission statement. This is especially important when the sheer volume of academic research might be seen as problematic (Albach and de Wit, 2018), or when the notion of research impact itself is being carefully re-evaluated (Fire and Guestrin, 2019). With this in mind, and learning from more careful meta-analyses, search terms can provide a quantitative assessment of the size and scope of the field. As a start, typing the very vague term 'education' into SCOPUS UK provides 1,900,000 articles. 'Teaching and learning', by comparison, yields a more modest 39,000 articles; adding 'scholarship', 'student', and 'partnership' to this heady Boolean mix, and SCOPUS yields 360 articles from 268 journals. The addition of 'impact' gives 204 articles from 163 journal titles. When 'open access' is selected as a limiter, just 24 articles from 2015-2019 become available (Scopus.com, 2020).

Having dispensed with the keywords and statistics (whilst acknowledging the absence of careful assessment of the keyword search), we can now turn to our journal's *raison d'être*. Primarily, we want to understand how changes to policy and practices in HE can result in impactful changes to students' learning experiences. Of course, a multiplicity of journals can assist with this question. However, we are keen to look at student-centred inquiries, hopefully with students as primary or co-researchers, as we place value on students' own roles and voices (they do outnumber practitioners after all). Again, this is not a particularly new perspective: John Dewey's participatory and democratic model has influenced educators since the 19th century, as informed by earlier philosophers (Jenlink, 2009; Noddings, 2015).

To this, then, we must add a more substantially instrumentalist mix to our cocktail of perspectives: in the UK (where our journal is published), the TEF framework places specific value on connecting research to teaching, and on emphasising student voice and choice within the course of their studies (Department for Education, 2019). Critical evaluation of these changes is therefore increasingly necessary from both the student and practitioner perspective. Moreover, interventions from both parties are needed to ensure that the *impacts* of such sweeping changes (resulting from marketisation and privatisation) are carefully responded to. From a philosophical and socio-economic perspective, we hope that reflective dialogues and methodologically sound inquiries into student experiences (Felten, 2013) arising from both students and practitioners can be liberating in the Freirian sense, and provide a more meaningful engagement with a rapidly changing landscape. Our aim is nothing less than to influence policy through reporting of practices that are meaningful for both student and practitioner.

Given our stated emphasis on democracy in education, we hope to provide a journal that helps students make better use of these partnerships so as to develop their professional identities in a changing world. Our journal, then, is not just a rigorously peer assessed dissemination of knowledge; it is also a productivity and an experiment in student-staff

partnerships. From this humble beginning (a small-scale special edition), we intend to showcase and benefit from student-staff partnerships in the production of these ideas. We are, then, a community more than journal, and we are *open*.

Post Script

It is entirely apposite for the intentions of this journal that it was produced during a global crisis. We have had to opt for a leaner edition in light of many difficulties. At the same time, we have been supporting students and an institution navigate rapid disruptions to the previous way of working. Indeed, innovation, adaptation, and informed improvisation are now part of every day routines in HE and beyond. Our host institution – which has over 150 years of proud history – was born in a time when Britain was an empire that was still benefitting from its trade in human traffic and its oppression and occupation of other nations. The present emergency is a significant point of departure from those Victorian traditions and is a moment where super-accelerated evolution of values and pedagogies are thrust upon us all. We were already changing, but that change is now real and its sustainability is yet to be tested. We must critically evaluate how we work with our students, and carefully identify the residue of colonising practices. Moreover, we much rework this into every human interaction in our learning spaces (be they online or on campus). We cannot meaningfully enact change without close partnership and dialogue with our students. Through this emphasis on democratising and decolonising learning spaces, we now have the opportunity to use the pandemic to promote a better *pandemos*.

References

Altbach, G. and de Wit, H. (2018) *Too much academic research is being published*. Available at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180905095203579> (Accessed: 30 January 2020).

Felten, P. (2013) 'Principles of Good Practice in SoTL', *Teaching & Learning Inquiry: The ISSOTL Journal*, 1(1), pp. 121-125. Doi: 10.2979/teachlearninqu.1.1.121

Fire, M. and Guestrin, C. (2019) 'Over-optimization of academic publishing metrics: observing Goodhart's Law in action', *GigaScience*, 8(6), pp. 1 – 20. doi: 10.1093/gigascience/giz053.

Jenlink, P. (2009) *Dewey's Democracy and Education Revisited: Contemporary Discourses for Democratic Education and Leadership*. Lanham, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Noddings, N. (2015) *Philosophy of Education*. New York and London: Routledge.

Scopus (2020) *Scopus Results*. Available at: <https://www.scopus.com/> (Accessed 26 February 2020).

Department for Education (2019) *Evaluation of Provider-level TEF 2016-17 (Year 2) Measuring the initial impact of the TEF on the Higher Education landscape*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771385/TEF_Year_2_Evaluation_Report__6_.pdf (Accessed 21 February 2020).



© 2020 *Journal of Impact Cultures*. This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>, which permits use, distribution, and reproduction of the material in any medium provided the author and source are attributed and the article is not used for commercial purposes.