

Editorial

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Biographical note: Georgia Stavradi is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the International Hellenic University, Greece. Her research interests lie in the areas of experiential consumption, arts marketing, visual research methods in consumer behaviour and consumers' identity projects. She has published in academic outlets including *Management Learning*, *European Journal of Marketing*, and *Qualitative Market Research*, among others. Her work has also appeared in books and international conferences. Ioanna Anninou is Associate Professor in Marketing at Surrey Business School, University of Surrey. Her research is concerned with understanding why consumers behave the way they do, taking into consideration decision-making aspects like confusion and the influence of consumers' affect. She has published in academic journals including *Management Learning* and the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, among others. Her research has been presented in international conferences, including the Association for Consumer Research, ANZMAC, and the Academy of Marketing.

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The teaching and learning environment is constantly evolving, driven by both new possibilities and ongoing difficulties, which together envision the direction of future changes. Elements such as technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI hereafter), increased student numbers, student well-being and career mobility, teaching innovation and student critical engagement to develop a holistic set of skills, create such challenges and opportunities (Gill-Simmen et al., 2025). Discourses on these challenges and opportunities often evolve around the role of support required in all levels of education and for distinctive education stakeholders; for example, this includes supporting students at all levels to decrease dropout rates and increase resilience; supporting the effective use of AI in learning and teaching practices; supporting innovative teaching practices and engaging learning experiences; supporting the academic staff as well as the (higher) education sector to navigate such elements under decreased budget and resources availability. This issue of the Journal of Contemporary Education Theory and Research (JCETR) delves into such challenges and opportunities. It contributes to existing discourses of support in light of cognitive (e.g., development of appropriate learning materials that bridge the gap between theory and practice) and emotional (e.g., emotionally supportive learning environments) elements aiming to equip students to respond to the challenges and opportunities of such an evolving environment (Raaper, Hardey & Aad, 2024). Specifically, these elements nurture the concepts of engagement, connection, and adaptability, which are all essential in "maintaining learning motivation and managing

emotions" in a fluid educational landscape (O'Flanagan & Jester, 2025, p. 2). Motivation is a key part in student learning and practices and can also be realised through extrinsic features, such as in design principles and active learning techniques that encourage student engagement and thus, motivation. Similarly, emotions have been identified as central to experiential learning and teaching practices (e.g., O'Flanagan & Jester, 2025) in order to foster connection between students and students and educators, as well as to overall student well-being (Hamdani, 2020). For instance, supporting students with managing emotions through projects that encourage them to develop self-insights and a positive perspective (ibid.), can play a critical role in empowering them to navigate the affective challenges that often arise during experiential and other forms of active and transformative learning experiences.

To this end, this JCETR issue hosts papers embracing the concepts of transformative learning, facilitated through gamified engagement practices, and exploring ways of tackling issues of employability, skills and competences through mobility programmes (e.g., Erasmus). Transformative learning in this issue is approached through the lenses of Mezirow's theory through which appropriate teaching and learning practices can construct a learning space that allows for breaking from and reconnecting anew with existing ways of thinking, feeling and being. Gamification, characterised by its transformative value dimensions, namely knowledge acquisition, distraction, and simulation (Mulcahy, Zainuddin, & Russell-Bennett, 2021), has been shown to facilitate learner engagement and transformative outcomes. Similarly, mobility programmes are widely recognised as prototypical transformational educational experiences due to

their potential to support personal development for example through network growth (Nada & Legutko, 2022).

The common ground of this issue's papers is the notion of support. Support to make sense and deal with both opportunities and challenges arising during the learning process in an attempt to create a space in which transformative learning occurs. Transformative learning practices envisage the support of technology and networks in an attempt to create opportunities for deep connections and foster growth opportunities respectively. As such, one paper in this issue discusses the role of gamification techniques in achieving deep connections between learners' identities and the taught material in the context of higher education. Another two papers are centred around the role of Erasmus mobility programs, unpacking encounters enhancing an educational community.

This discussion is then followed by a review of the book 'Roadmap to a successful PhD completion in business & management and the social sciences – the definitive guide for postgraduate researchers'. This book aims to support researchers at different levels (PGR, early career researchers) with its chapters to range from including a first-class PhD proposal to how to prepare for life after the PhD, topics too often ignored by other manuals. This book also discusses job opportunities within as well as outside academia, useful online resources, global recruitment boards, networking platforms and the practicalities of applying for jobs.

Reflecting upon the above, embracing (self-)reflexive practices and having access to supportive others and/or practices (Houldsworth, Tresidder & Rowson, 2025) do not only facilitate personal transformation but also can decrease feelings of uncertainty and create space for positive cues and experiences of belonging. This issue unpacks ideas of how we can design opportunities for supporting students, acknowledging at the same time the socially situated and complex nature of student support extending beyond student-faculty interactions.

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