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Welcome to the **third edition of CAIRN.** Consistent with our mission of building the field of scholarship and research within Scottish Colleges, CAIRN specifically invites submission from previous unpublished authors as well as established researchers. We are delighted to highlight that this edition has a range of stimulating articles.

Against a backdrop of rising rates of mental health issues among college and university students, the article on **student wellbeing and the impact of mindfulness exercises** by **Mel Stuart and James Short (Dundee and Angus College)** is highly relevant and a welcome contribution. Their small-scale action research provides robust evidence suggesting that mindfulness exercises can reduce anxiety and improve student transitions into a FE learning environment. As the article points to, the benefits of mindfulness within FE is an under-researched area and this well-structured study offers an important action research blueprint for others to consider. The study has the potential for stimulating new avenues for wider large-scale collaborative studies between colleges.

Similarly, the article by **Kirsteen Wright (Forth Valley College)** on **supporting practice for HND-level art and design students with Autism** is highly relevant, providing new insights into yet another under-researched area within FE. This study adopts a mixed method approach through interviewing lecturers and surveying the views of student participants and is informed by two questions: 'What constitutes 'good' inclusive practices for autistic students in learning, teaching and assessment on an HND level art and design course?' And 'What factors contribute to supportive practices that enhance the college experience of all students including those with an Autism Spectrum Condition?' The study emphasises the importance of tutor of feedback and peer interaction in creating conditions for supportive learning.

The article **Tinkering with Professionalism: Playfulness in Further Education**, by **James Short, (Dundee and Angus College)** considers the concept of playfulness as a pedagogical intervention. Playfulness, as a concept, is utilised in numerous fields and therefore, marked by a degree of ambiguity. However, this article usefully traces and engages with the sorts of complexities surrounding the concept of playfulness. It is argued that playfulness as an approach to teaching and learning embraces humanistic values of creativity and growth. The key aim of this article is to introduce the reader to discursive benefits of playful pedagogy. The article raises important questions for FE professionalism and the need to push the boundaries, creating student-centred learning spaces founded on playfulness.

The article by **Matt Woodthorpe (Scotland Director at EAUC)**, **Widening the frame: 'Digital First' education and environmental sustainability**, offers helpful insights into the environmental impact of digital v in person education. This article complements Kenny Allan's (West College Scotland) **article** in CAIRN Journal Issue 2 and Matt's inclusion of the planetary boundaries framework and Sustainable Development Goal Wedding Cake bring into sharp focus our collective responsibilities towards the environment.

Jamie Campbell (Forth Valley College), in his **article on reflective practice and peer assessment** offers new insights on peer assessment in a vocational workshop context. The study, informed by constructivist theory and Vygotsky's zone

of proximal development, compares peer assessment with more traditional assessment methods. The study examines an under researched area and reveals that interventions such as peer assessment help enhanced student reflection, confidence, and engagement.

The study **Reflections on the Role of Edinburgh College's English for Work Programmes** by **Neale Gardiner and Sarah Donno, (Edinburgh College)** underscores the critical social and economic role of FE colleges. Their study - assessing the impact of Edinburgh College's English for Work programmes – addresses the key questions surrounding who is undertaking English for work and what are the impact for the individual and wider local labour market? The study also reveals important contextual information that will help inform discussion on curriculum enhancement. This paper should certainly provide a useful template and stimulus for others to conduct similar studies within their own institutional setting.

The article **Impact Of Counselling Services On Student Retention** by **Craig Moore, and Tom Thomson (West Lothian College)** examines how one college engages with Scottish policy initiatives - Student Mental Health Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2024). The study maps recent policy and reveals demographic trends in those accessing counselling services and evaluates the impact of counsellors on student retention. The study offers several insights into the value of mental health interventions and offers a helpful entry point and focus for any future larger multi-case study research into how colleges are interpretating and enacting government policy initiatives/recommendations surrounding mental health and counselling services.

Read CAIRN Issue 3 here