

Editorial

Last year's IPDA (International Professional Development Association) conference was highly anticipated, well supported, and received in favourable ways, as evidenced in social media fora and during the discussions at this journal's editorial board meeting in Birmingham in November 2019. Over the years, the IPDA conferences have introduced, nurtured, and refined themes in respect of professional development across education, health, and social care and these formal academic papers and the conversations around professional development in respect of practice are at the heart of the content of our journal. In May 2016, 'Practice' was publicised at Newcastle University, and one of the academic staff who was listening asked: 'what exactly do you mean by practitioners?'. This question has also been asked by a number of the inspirational speakers who have contributed to the IPDA conferences over the years, as they too have essentially considered the ambiguity that exists within practice and between practitioners. In 2009, Mathias Urban made an analogy between professional practice in education, health, and care, and the film 'The Wizard of Oz'. Urban observed that just as the main characters within this film appear to believe that they can find what they are looking for in their end destination, so it appears that those who are involved in education, health, and care in England are expected to focus on 'end products'. Our children and young people in schools, colleges and universities appear to focus with tunnel-like vision upon achieving results and therefore, reaching an end destination. Urban (2009), reflected on the problems that result from focusing on end products by arguing that in consequence, the fundamental processes that produce end products become at risk of being neglected. The irony with 'The Wizard of Oz' rests in the characters in the film discovering what they are seeking during the journey along the yellow brick road. Urban (2009) argues that much is uncertain in practice with practitioners in education, health, and care. Likewise, as Vermunt observed in his 2016 keynote speech at the IPDA conference in Stirling, it is, therefore important to listen to the voices of those who are situated within practice as practitioners. The uncertainty in respect of what should be happening in practice with practitioners in education, health, and care appears to produce what can be viewed as a liminal area of flux with meanings that are fluid. The joy of being a researcher in this area rests in the possibility of opening up what Vermunt (2016) refers to as black boxes of hidden conversations from those who are working in education, health, and care. The

uncertainty of practice and practitioners appears to be exacerbated by the variable professional development that is occurring. This theme was developed by Donaldson (2017) in his keynote speech at the IPDA conference in The Vale of Glamorgan. Donaldson reflected on his own 'sink or swim' experiences when he was teaching in Glasgow, as he was led to a classroom in a school, shown a cupboard with a few resources, and more or less told 'see you at Easter if you survive that long'. The problem with uncertainty and liminality in respect of practice and practitioners results in variable interpretations occurring in the nature of practice. Randall and Downie (1996) reflect on the emergence of Hippocratic understandings in education, health, and care in England. Hippocrates is associated with a particular train of thought, in other words, that problem 'a' can be resolved via cure 'b'. As Randall and Downie (1996) argue, the difficulty in respect of this rational view of education, health, and care is that this once again results in a focus on end products. As opposed to adopting a Hippocratic focus, perhaps we need to embrace the Asclepian notion of healing, where professional practice occurs by working with others through reflection as opposed to believing that a magic bullet can be fired and take us off into infinity and beyond? Perhaps healing can become our mantra in education, health, and care, and this will in turn transform what is lugubrious and sclerotic into a new golden yellow brick road? This appears to be the subtext within the keynote speeches of Urban (2009); Vermunt (2016); and Donaldson (2017). This clarity of focus may then in turn become a way of developing professional development in education, health, and care?

The themes that are present within this introduction to our editorial apply to the content of this next issue of the journal. We continue with our 'in conversation feature' with Anne Looney and Paul Campbell and their reflections on the nature of professional practice and its development in respect of the rich variables that are informing professionalism in education, health and care in 2020. In times where there appears to be increasingly wider divides between views on research supporting education and its limitations, Anna Mariguudi develops the theme of liminality in her research article by reflecting on the challenges that are present in establishing a research practice nexus. It is argued that the research in academia may become out of touch in respect of practice on PGCE programmes and that this research is not necessarily a means of nurturing the researcher-teacher working relationships. The theme of 'flux' is encapsulated in Lynda Kay's simile that research

with children and young people can be likened to a seesaw. The methodological decision-making processes in this aspect of practice are akin to balancing a seesaw because of the complex variables that are informing this research area. As with Mariguddi's article this suggests that there is not a magic bullet as some ways of working are more considerate than others. Alex Kendall and Mary-Rose Puttick's article includes the recommendation that we should 'read ourselves against the grain' when we are working with newly arrived families in this cultural context. It is argued that within teaching, the practice that is evident can be framed by 'whiteness' and 'post-colonialism' and in view of the presence of these complex aspects of agency we need to read our teacher-selves 'against the grain'. This is underpinned by the same needs as the previous article in respect of the importance of being sensitive and considerate to the needs of those who we are involved with during professional practice. Kerry Boyle's research article complements the theme of negotiating meanings by applying the theory of Bourdieu to reflect on the habitus, field, and capital that is present within music education. There is increased use of capital within the world of education and in alignment with the other articles in this issue it is important to realise that this is not something that is 'done to' yet rather more a delicate evolution. In consequence, although 'steering' is required, this is not a facet that is simply 'given', thus drawing attention to the importance of reflecting on our professional practice. The article reveals the complexity of professional lives and identities within music education. Chris Jones also reflects on the complexities that are present within education by focusing on the challenges that can occur for trainee teachers when they are communicating with the parents/carers of children. In reinforcing the ethos of partnership, attention is drawn to the importance of the 'family school partnership' within teacher training. It is argued that this broad sense of integrated working is vital if we are going to nurture initial teacher training programmes effectively. The journal is keen to open up reflections on areas of professional practice in education, health, and care, and this theme is developed in the work of Helen Holder in her fascinating account of the perceptions of personal tutors in respect of nursing courses. The research findings in Holder's work develop the theme that has been introduced in the introduction to our editorial, in other words, the conceptualisation of a personal tutor who focuses on 'healing' as opposed to 'curing', through providing support for the pastoral, academic and clinical development of the students. This article captures some of the reflections in health

care that are at the centre of the journal's ethos so it is pleasing to see that the content of this edition of 'Practice' continues to maintain an upward trajectory. Upon drawing this together, it is clear that although perhaps unintentional, the theme that runs through all of these articles is one of care and sensitivity. The perceived barriers to the research are created, in part, by a sense of 'done to' although much of the work that is presented here suggests that there is an abundance of 'done with' that is happening within a number of fields of practitioner research. This leads back to the analogy of 'The Wizard of Oz' in the initial part of our editorial. In professional life we may find ourselves in places that we neither wanted nor expected to find ourselves in. Along the journey there are frequently unanticipated challenges that we need to deal with, however conferences such as those that are facilitated by IPDA and other professional associations allow us to reflect on professional practice in ways that are helpful. In fact, improving what we do and how we do it is often as much about who we meet along the way (and whether they are straw men; tin men; lions; witches or wizards). Sometimes it just takes spirit, courage, some careful thought, and as highlighted in this issue of 'Practice', some compassion and consideration for others to take our steps along the road.

References

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