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## EDITORIAL

# Editorial

**Lynn Clouder**

Email: [hsx059@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:hsx059@coventry.ac.uk)

In writing this inaugural editorial for the journal I feel incredibly privileged. Practice-based learning has been a particular passion of mine for at least the past two decades during which time I have experienced it as a practising physiotherapist, as a placement coordinator and a researcher. Research into practice-based learning, as I have learned personally, can be difficult to place in a suitable target journal: the multitude of general educational journals provide potential outlets but the risk is that the target audience is not reached; nursing, medicine and social work have educational research focused journals that accept submissions across the professions but again the potential to expose research to a wider readership can be limited; finally, allied health professional journals tend to be largely clinically focused. With the exception of the *Journal of Interprofessional Care* opportunities to reach an interprofessional audience have until now been scarce.

By focusing on practice-based learning this journal provides a dissemination opportunity for a range of topics as wide as the notion of practice itself; in fact, what we mean by 'practice' was part of the early discussions about the journal and its scope, something that has filtered into articles in this first edition, especially that by Jill Thistlethwaite who sets the scene with the lead article articulating the notion of practice. Robert Nettleton explores the concept of 'advanced practice' and Lynne Caladine considers the place of patient education in practice and its implications for practitioners. They highlight the diverse and nuanced nature of 'practice' as a concept which can be approached from many different perspectives.

Despite much emphasis having been placed on preparation for practice, as well as much blame being apportioned for students being ill-prepared, it is widely acknowledged that it is only when students begin to interface with its realities that they really start to recognise what practice in their chosen profession might hold for them. The professionals whom they begin to emulate (and those whom they decide they would rather not), the patients and clients whom they meet and the situations in which they find themselves all contribute to identification and assimilation processes. Even so, the transition to practitioner is still difficult and newly qualified professionals still feel underprepared for the workplace. In her recent keynote address at the National Association of Educators in Practice (NAEP) Annual Conference, Professor Trudie Roberts, Director of the Leeds Institute of Medical Education, emphasised the importance of 'expansive learning environments'. Such settings operate on the principles of inclusivity, provide scope for seizing the moment when unforeseen opportunities for learning occur and ignore false boundaries and rules constructed around 'tick box' exercises and formalised expectations of what practice education is about. Of course, Professor Roberts added that this exposes practice as not neutral. This important observation is aptly illustrated by Margaret Volante's article on the structural influences of the practice learning milieu on the reflective practice capability of learners.

Reflecting all other aspects of life, practice is also ever changing. At the time of writing the entire health and social care system in the United Kingdom is again undergoing fundamental change, the consequences of which are likely to be far reaching for service-users and all professional practitioners. However, conversations about health care costs and

needing to change health service delivery and education are occurring globally. Many practice-based learning opportunities are fragile, compromised by inadequate numbers of temporary staff under pressure to fulfil a plethora of roles. One consequence of this situation, the involvement of multiple practice educators in providing students with feedback, is explored in this edition by Jane Morris and Graham Stew. In this complex context newly qualified professionals are increasingly expected to hit the ground running. Availability of mentorship once professionals are in post is variable and resources for any training, beyond what is mandatory, severely constrained, highlighting the importance of learning in and for practice for qualified professionals. How we respond to these challenges has fundamental implications for the quality of practice and, as a corollary, for the quality of practice-based learning. The article by Vinette Cross revisits a question that she posed almost two decades ago about whether it was 'too much to ask' of practitioners that they move from a supervisory to an educational role. She comes to the conclusion that although fraught with dilemmas and contradictions the practice educator role is even more pivotal for the future of high-quality health and social care.

Against this backdrop the partnership between the National Association of Educators in Practice and the Higher Education Academy to produce a cross professional publication on practice based learning is opportune. As editors it is important to articulate our priorities in selecting material for publication in the journal. Our aspiration is for the focus on practice-based learning to be *incisive, interprofessional, international and inspirational*. Insightful, penetrating and perceptive articles moving beyond description to address the 'so what?' and 'now what?' questions are what the practice-based literature currently lacks. We expect that authors will embrace relevant empirical, ideological, methodological and theoretical critique and in so doing illuminate, problematise, celebrate and inspire changes in how we understand and experience learning in practice.

In approaching colleagues around the world to discuss the challenge of getting a new journal off the ground, when so many journals already exist, I have been met with overwhelming support and enthusiasm. Although it seems that finding peer reviewers for journals can be problematic we have assembled an enthusiastic and eclectic cross professional editorial/advisory board that has 'hit the ground running'. Perhaps this commitment reflects the altruism with which health and social care professionals are identified; maybe it simply taps into an intrinsic identification with the issues and a willingness to seize the opportunity to give practice-based learning the attention it deserves.

Certainly, there is recognition of the need for high-quality research, rigorously conducted and critically appraised. Each issue will include a selection of original research articles, review articles and professional issue discussion articles. In addition, the inclusion of Masterclass articles is one way in which it seems feasible to support practice-based learning research. Katherine Wimpenny's article on participatory action research is the first in the series, which we hope will inspire the practice-based learning community to engage increasingly with the research agenda. The reflective pieces are designed to attract a greater sense of debate from the wider community, including students. Interestingly, the first two reflections, one by Angela Rowlands, Annie Cushing and Vivien Cook, which focuses on medical students' learning communication skills in practice, and another by Ann Jackson, Pat Bluteau and Jan Furlong, which focuses on interprofessional working in practice, both highlight issues of the theory–practice gap. Perhaps a measure of the journal's success will not be how quickly it can make an impact, albeit this will be critical for its contributors, but whether it provides a vehicle to begin to bridge at least some of the gaps.

Finally, I thank the authors, associate editors, the newly formed editorial and advisory board and the Higher Education Academy for all their hard work over the past few months to bring this first edition to life. We hope that you enjoy reading it and welcome future contributions.