

Research Space

Journal article

Editorial

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In the last issue of PRACTICE Alex Kendall ended the editorial with a message which spoke of the collective voice of IPDA members “of always being / feeling accountable to those our practice ought to serve rather than those we are obliged to please.” Over the past twelve or so months, the pandemic has shown how imperative it is for professionals to work together in order to save lives, to provide education and care in innovative and flexible ways in order to maintain our communities and wider society. Consequently, it has also further highlighted questions about how and who engages in service change, development and learning. Should clients, parents, students and patients all be full partners in designing services to ensure best and most appropriate provisions are available to all? Also, words like collaboration and co-production now have actual, practical, positive and purposeful meaning for all during this difficult time when finding solutions together provides comfort and hope. It is therefore very timely that this issue includes articles which critically explore and challenge current ways society views professional working and learning and hierarchical practice and decision making.

In the first article of the issue Chris Jones (2021) asks the question, ‘Does society get the education it deserves?’ and reflects on the arguments offered in recent literature. Discussing Bauman’s (2000) concept of liquid modernity, Jones explains that instead of using education to ‘re-connect and develop society,’ it is possible to identify how the current education systems in the UK can be seen to absorb the priority neoliberal values of society and the governing politicians. However, he also challenges the view that ‘power has been fully divorced from politics.’ Jones identifies the needs of education in our society to be flexible, to help individuals learn to be adaptable and to cope with life and highlights the compelling logic of Thomson (2017) and Jeffries (2011) that education’s issues are the same as those of wider society. Whilst reflecting on many of

the neoliberal features such as competition, the promotion of inequality of wealth and opportunity, Jones discusses how authors such as Bauman (2000), MacFarlane (2017) and Allen and Burgess (2010) view the impact of competition and consumerism on collaboration, co-operation and diversity. Performativity and subjectification are also considered in light of this discussion presenting for example how these two factors are influential in teachers' decision to leave the profession due to stress and demoralisation (2021,p.5). Perhaps not surprisingly Jones concludes that schooling and broader education today does "reflect the society that we choose to live in and perhaps do not actively do enough to change." For the editors this article raises the question that if society wishes to change from holding neoliberal values can a shared re-conceptualisation of what is good learning and good education be shared by developing co-production partnerships and systems?

Following on from this thought-provoking theoretical piece the authors of the next article "*It's a whole cultural shift: understanding learning in cultural commissioning from a qualitative process evaluation*" present findings from a study which aimed to embed co-production in the decision-making process of commissioning arts for health programmes. Crone et al (2019) sought to identify whether there had been any cultural shifts as a result of the twelve funded innovation projects which implemented NHS commissioning interventions which were co-produced and delivered by the arts and culture sector. Outcomes identified that there does not appear to be an 'off the shelf' method of co-production and that it is time consuming, requires flexibility, transparency and a high level of involvement from participants who all have a clear understanding of their carefully defined roles. The outcomes also suggest that if there is genuine commitment to co-production then it does have benefits for service design and the potential to shift power in the clinical commissioning process. Challenging Co-producers' to also identify and justify effective and inclusive methods of co-production should inform future study design.

Richard Holme's (2021) thought piece considers the rise of teachers taking ownership of their own development and learning in the light of even greater threat of national accountability in

education and performativity. He discusses the challenges of teacher-owned professional development, but also sees the less formal professional development events as providing opportunities to collaborate and to participate in co-learning without limiting hierarchy structures, high cost or forced interest in specific areas. Holmes states that grassroots professional development should be embraced because it can enhance motivation and teacher identity and enables learning to be part of a teacher's everyday working life with collaboration emboldening its influence and sustainability. Although not suggested explicitly such collaborative professionally owned, non-hierarchical learning approach appears to chime with the principles of co-production.

The next article by Hannah Fox (2020) supports key considerations raised in Holme's and Jones articles about performativity. It is written with a sense of urgency and conviction as a practitioner living the reality. She argues that following the Educational Reform Act (1988) the emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) has restricted the autonomy of teachers to a level which is impacting negatively on retention and teachers' professionalism. In response to this Fox supports an activist teaching identity (Sachs, 2001) which will motivate and foster teachers' individual identities and encourage through a commonality of experience collaborative identities which are creative and empowering. This again echoes the desire to hear all voices and to design and implement policy and practice in the public sector through co-production.

This issue's correspondent paper '*Conceptualising innovation and professional learning in the Hong Kong context*' by Jiafang Lu and Paul Campbell (2020) proposes that teacher innovation could be enabled and rejuvenate professional learning. The authors suggest that the two main inhibitors of teacher innovation in Hong Kong relate firstly to the impact of the cultural value of seniority and authority within their society and the expected acceptance of individuals that there is an unequal distribution of power. The second inhibitor in their minds relates to the system-wide expectation and competition for academic performance within teacher professional learning. These factors they suggest can limit the link between teacher professional learning and innovation, and they propose

there is a need to develop a 'reciprocal relationship between them.' Such factors they believe have significant implications for systemic culture and practice around the world.

Moving on, but undoubtedly linked is a timely self-reflection written by Jarintorn Wintachai and colleagues, (2020) entitled 'Covid -19 as a game changer in a Thai University' focused on what has occurred as a consequence of the pandemic and 'lockdowns.' During her self-reflection the main author focuses on three challenges that she has observed during these times, namely the transition to online learning, the appearance of reversed hierarchy and the impacts of these changes on students. The phrase that resonated most for us here was that the professors had to 'prioritise students' needs over their own pride' and perhaps, the 'power' of senior members as well as they have needed technical support from their junior colleagues. The question here is whether such change will be long lasting or just a fleeting change?

Continuing with a focus on Higher Education is a discussion piece about how creative methodologies such as poetry can provide a way of combining, of co-producing, individual people's professional, practitioner and personal values, opinions and feelings into a collective response which as Cahnmann (2003:35) suggests creates 'a more socially just and democratic society.' For Tom, Gayle and Sue (*Delahunt et al*, 2020) the poetic methodology utilised enabled members of the network group 'ACT' to voice their emotional responses safely, respectfully and without judgement through this co-productive approach. As a result, they were then able to identify the practical steps needed to facilitate the continuation of the network group, having managed the emotional responses to the situation collaboratively.

Collaboration and co-production have been important or key elements of many of the discussions of the articles in this issue. Authors have explored the importance of genuine and impactful professional learning born from individuals and groups that accept the equal place of all voices and experiences using different approaches and research methodologies. What is consistent across all the articles however is the need for change; for the recognition that professionals are people and not products which have to meet performability and marketisation targets.

As well as the grief and distress the global pandemic has caused it has also evidenced how people can achieve important societal requirements and change through co-production, working across and beyond disciplinary border, enabling hope and future innovation to flourish. The last piece in this issue Judy Durrant's (2021) 'In conversation with,' aptly captures and pulls together the many factors explored in all of the authors contributions. Judy so eloquently describes this that we feel it is fitting to end this editorial with her words:

“Disciplines need to be connected and complementary to enable human flourishing, so we need more holistic approaches to development, accountability and evaluation, with resourcing for local areas and communities to enable collaborative response and innovation.

During more than a year of pandemic disruption, practice has faced unprecedented challenges, revealing extraordinary collective commitment and care, knowledge, skill and experience, flexibility and resilience.”

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