Editorial

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Practitioner Research in Higher Education was established seven years ago with a view to publishing articles that contribute to the understanding of theory, policy and practice in teaching and supporting learning. The journal explicitly encourages practitioner research approaches where the implication is that the researcher learns from their research in a way that is often not the case in other forms of research. As Campbell (2007) argues, it is an approach to research which aims at improving rather than proving. This issue of the journal strongly reflects that intention to use practitioner and reflexive research to develop practice in a wide range of contexts. The writers are reporting on investigations into their own and colleagues practice with a clear objective of better understanding and enhancing practice, personally, and more widely in their field.

In particular, several articles in this edition draw on a form of auto-ethnographic exploration of writers' own practice, even if this is not explicitly discussed. Personal narrative and reflexive analysis are employed to determine learning for the individual author and more widely for practitioners in the sector through examination of successful strategies for negotiating new or challenging situations including undertaking research itself. As Prince notes, such an approach to research reporting uses a juxtaposition of academic writing and first person writing style and this combination is used well in four of the papers: Prince, Appleby, Peelo and Duke. A more traditional academic style is used in the other articles by Walker and Davis and by Jackson but the relevance to their own pedagogical practice and research is very evident.

Prince reflects on the learning process inherent in her recent submission to be accredited in the UK Professional Standards Framework for Higher Education. She debates whether engagement in the reflexive process of personal portfolio building reveals the knowledge underpinning her practice or helps her to actually build that knowledge. In this way, Prince's work acts as an advocate for scholarly portfolio-building for both defining and justifying personal practices as it uncovers relevant theoretical and empirical justifications. The deeper exploration of literature required in the analysis of practice served not only to validate her existing approaches to teaching but also helped her build a more coherent

structure for her pedagogy. Autobiographical narrative and analysis of her learning process is presented as a guide and support for colleagues setting out on a similar portfolio building journey.

Appleby, likewise, notes that practitioner research is not only about applying the results of scholarship in professional contexts but can also begin to identify the kinds of knowledge which are embedded in practice. She provides a reflexive discussion emerging out of her experience as a practitioner researcher on a Doctorate of Education programme. In particular, Appleby addresses the conflict between practitioner knowledge (or practical wisdom) and the knowledge of her doctoral programme (public knowledge). She draws on the concepts of critical distance, relationships, power and trust, and ethical considerations to debate resolutions to potential quandaries for practitioner researchers, identifying both the benefits and limitations of this approach to enquiry.

Peelo debates her personal approach to providing educational development for research degree supervisors at the same time as providing learning development for PhD students which does not abandon her educational vision and values for the latter. Whilst this article also adopts a strong autobiographical account, it builds a clear context for the work in the developing managerialism and accountability surrounding the 'risky' business of PhD students as well as the diversified nature of doctoral degrees and those studying for them. Part of this context is the conflict between an emphasis on completion rates and a view that research students, as generally very 'able', do not need learning development support. She debates an approach which involves the same staff in both learning development and educational development, often separated in university provision, in an effort to close the 'loop of interdependence' between the two element of support for PhD study.

Duke continues this methodological theme of reflexive enquiry into personal aims and practices by analysing his own work as a master's degree project supervisor against Brew and Peseta's (2004) criteria for good supervisory practice of postgraduate researchers. The text explores and evaluates approaches to meeting the criteria with an additional strength in this reflexive piece created by drawing on his own experience to challenge the applicability of the model in the case of supervision of projects on taught master's degrees. Duke's article illustrates an approach to validating autobiographical narrative through reported dialogue with a student including an exploration of the implications of such an approach for both ethics and reliability.

Jackson's article also addresses the challenges faced by students and teachers completing master's level research but whilst Duke interrogated supervision practices, Jackson focuses on a specific issue that students often struggle with: methodology and methods. Nevertheless, both approaches draw on analysis of personal experience to identify learning for others. Jackson adopts a style of exploring methodological questions such as conceptual frameworks, positionality, ontology, and epistemology illustrated by practical applications

and resolutions from her own doctoral research on student teachers perceptions of mathematics. In particular, the article provides a very helpful description of the methodological journey involved in developing a phenomenograpic practitioner study and I imagine many MA tutors working in education will want to refer their students to it as a helpful exposition of some demanding concepts grounded in a real example of practitioner research.

Finally, Walker and Davis have reported on a more traditional pedagogical research study evaluating the preparation of midwives for their role in contraception and sexual health information and advice. Nonetheless, the close understanding of context is very apparent and contributes additional insight into the data analysis. Central to their article is the question of enabling practitioners to incorporate theoretical learning into their professional practice, a much debated topic. In particular, their research indicates the importance of practitioners being confident in their knowledge as a pre-requisite to undertaking more challenging professional practices. Although a one-institution study, the findings are relevant for professional training in general, for example the power of mentors' work practices in reinforcing (or not) the curriculum and influencing trainees, and the contribution that trainees with up to date knowledge can make in challenging established practices in the field. They conclude by stressing the need for theoretical knowledge and practical skills to be learnt together, iteratively, where practice reinforces theory and also generates further interest in theoretical learning.

Practitioner Research in Higher Education, as an open source journal, continues through articles such as these to disseminate evaluations and research of professional practice which give voice to all of the participants in higher education. In this edition, the autobiographical voice of the higher education teacher and educational developer is particularly visible as well as that of the students with whom they have engaged. In all cases, the work presented here continues to reveal the power (and challenges) of practitioner research to extend our understanding of higher education.

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Campbell, A. (2007) Practitioner Research. London: TLRP. Online at http://www.tlrp.org/capacity/rm/wt/campbell (accessed 4 Oct 2013)