



Reviewing the past and considering the present to inform the future of professional learning

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EDITORIAL



Reviewing the past and considering the present to inform the future of professional learning

In this year of the journal's 50th anniversary we are, Janus-like, looking both backwards and forwards. In doing so, we are in some ways mirroring professional learning – eliciting and reminding ourselves what we already know, considering the current situation and thinking about the future.

Ken Jones' and Jim O'Brien's (Jones and O'Brien 2024) extended editorial in the first issue (50.1) of this anniversary year took a long view back over the journal's first half a century, a formidable task aided by two previous retrospectives (Lee 1997, Jones and O'Brien 2014).

Through reference to key articles, they charted the changing perspectives and policies that accompanied the shifting terminology from 'INSET' (in-service education for teachers) through 'professional development' to 'professional learning'. They referred to the range of categories (for example, policy, research, strategies, evaluation) that have been used to summarise the field of professional learning, and identified emerging themes including: leadership; practitioner enquiry; accreditation; collaboration and networking; induction and early professional development; mentoring and coaching; policy; the internet and social media; conceptual changes (Jones and O'Brien 2024, pp. 4–5).

The wide range of topics listed continues to have contemporary and likely future, relevance, certainly in the context of researching and practising professional learning in developed countries. Nevertheless, they do not comprehensively represent the breadth of the journal's publications to date, as made clear by Jones' and O'Brien's reference to recent and forthcoming special issues that point to trends and emerging cutting-edge themes. Perhaps particularly notable among these – especially for their more critical perspectives – are publications that consider complexity (as a theoretical lens, as a challenge to linear views of professional learning, and as recognition of context), and social justice. As befits an anniversary issue of a journal that aims to push thinking in the field by, among other things, asking challenging questions, Jones and O'Brien purposefully selected articles that question assumptions about professional learning. The articles challenge notions of 'effective' professional learning, consider the transferability of professional learning approaches both across cultures and into practice, and look at professional learning in association with digital technologies. Important and relevant as these matters are, they do not directly engage with some of the most pressing global problems of our time – all of which have implications for professional learning in education, as demonstrated in other editorials from recent years.

Editors of 'general' issues of the Professional Development in Education (PDiE) have raised questions about, for example, *collaborative professional learning and development in times of crisis and calm* (Alexandrou 2020); *climate justice and teacher professional learning* (Kennedy 2022); whether professional learning and development are *fit for purpose in an age of crises* (Stevenson 2023); *sustainability in education* (van der Klink 2023); and *the fragility, complexity and interdependence of the global ecosystem of teacher professional learning* (Kennedy 2024). Sadly, this list is easy to add to: ecological collapse, famine, conflict, wars, the increasing frequency and scale of natural disasters, extremism, mass movements of refugees, many millions of children lacking formal education, social injustices and social unrest, attacks on democracy, . . . ; all have implications for learning and teaching, and thus for professional development in education.

This brief review of the journal's publications and consideration of the present context reveals the great breadth and diversity of the field of *professional learning and development in education: a cornucopia of theory, research and practice* (Clarke 2024). Throughout, as Desimone (2023) reminds us, we should be *rethinking teacher professional development [to keep] a focus on how to improve student learning*. All this requires *leadership for professional learning* (Swaffield and Poekert 2000, 2023) including through *supporting teachers to lead by learning and learn by leading* (King 2022).

As I look back and consider the articles to be published in this current issue I am struck by the richness of the journal's content, and wonder about the potential contribution of research on professional learning and development in education to help address some of the huge global challenges. A necessary step must be reminding ourselves of, and making connections among, what we collectively already know. Researchers, from novice to expert, appreciate the importance of reviewing literature to shape their own research, and extant reviews are often one of the most valuable literature resources for any study. Savvy practitioners and policy-makers alike also understand the value of reviews that summarise and make sense of large bodies of research. Articles dedicated to reviewing existing literature have appeared regularly in PDiE volumes from 2010 onwards, and although there has been an upward trend the actual numbers remain very low (on average less than three a year). I have therefore chosen to highlight a group of five review articles.

This issue opens with a review of a niche topic within the field of professional learning and development – health education for primary school teachers – selected for the methodological approach taken by Otten *et al.* (2024). The article exemplifies the use of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement (Moher *et al.* 2009) for conducting and reporting systematic reviews. The PRISMA statement consists of a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram setting out how to: identify, select, and critically appraise relevant literature; collect and analyse data; and present information (paraphrased from Poekert *et al.* 2020, p. 542). PRISMA is recognised as a hallmark of academic rigour (Sohrabi *et al.* 2021) and is regularly updated, most recently to the PRISMA 2020 statement (<https://www.prisma-statement.org/>). Revisions include rewording for clarity, recommendations of greater methodological detail to be disclosed (for example, how many reviewers screened each study), and new technological tools to aid authors in following the guidance.

The second article (Lopes *et al.* 2024) has a much broader focus, reviewing a decade of debate about teacher professionalism and its relation to a transformative teacher attitude. It makes a significant contribution to the study of teacher professionalism and transformative education. Methodologically, the article also follows a step-by-step systematic approach (specifically, Boland *et al.* 2014), and one that is probably more familiar in that it is one of the many similar guides to conducting a literature review to be found in books and articles.

The remaining three review articles (by Tualaulelei and Haise, Herbert and van der Laan, and Blundell) are all-scoping reviews, which like systematic reviews follow a staged process to identify and summarise literature with a particular focus. Scoping reviews are used to gain a broad overview of research available on an area of interest, particularly to inform future research. In their article, Tualaulelei and Haise (2024) discuss the scoping review method and its application; they follow Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage framework to guide and present their work with detail and clarity. These five steps appear in other later guides to scoping reviews and are also used by Herbert and van der Laan (2024) and Blundell (2024). Together, these three articles provide reviews of 'in-service teacher professional development for inter/multicultural education and teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students', 'learning and teaching professional development practice uptake by university academics', and 'design thinking in school-based teacher professional learning and development'. Interestingly, the three scoping reviews as well as the PRISMA-guided systematic review were all conducted by researchers at universities in Australia; Lopes and her colleagues are from Portugal.

The remaining articles report empirical research, and in various ways consider educators' mental models – their beliefs, values, conceptions, and understandings – that relate to their professional learning and teaching. They complement the review articles by taking us from overviews of large bodies of work to the individuals who learn professionally and who directly influence students' learning. To emphasise the shift, the first article in this group is a case study of a single teacher's engagement with professional development. All these empirical articles remind us of the connections between individual educators' mindsets and professional learning.

Our own professional learning and understanding is enhanced by considering existing relatable research. Collectively we must become aware of, critique, and build on earlier work; the pressing problems are so great and so urgent that we cannot afford not to. Rigorous reviews that include full details of their methodology and methods are immensely valuable, but there is a dearth of them in professional learning and development. I hope that we see both greater use of extant reviews, and increasing numbers of high-quality reviews, in future issues of the journal.

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