Preface

It is now the case that research actively informs the standing and desirability of some educational practices. There are also emerging and sometimes inconsistent expectations among policymakers, politicians, researchers, and practitioners about the quality of educational research that serves as investigative practice. This proceeding examines actual and desired practice across several areas of educational research including language and culture, cognition and instruction, and inclusion, in relation to informing research in those areas. This meeting will consider aspects of how to better inform practice and how to better improve research on that practice as part of an ongoing scholarly conversation among members of the School of Cognition, Language, and Special Education at Griffith University and in company with other educational researchers and practitioners who join this community of conversations as part of their own pursuits.

Practice, as a construct in education, has been described and evaluated in various ways. In educational terms, a practice may involve any strategy, curriculum, program, or, more broadly, any planned or unplanned intervention. The description of practice is, to some extent, dependent on the purpose and place of its occurrence. Everyday practice can be described as repeated, fluent, habitual part of life that has come to be seen as part of a natural or moral order. A culture of practice can be discussed as implicit or explicit ways of thinking and functioning that are shared by members of a social group and maintained by intergenerational transmission. Professional practice can be described as core, privileged domains of service activity that enables practitioners of some craft to construct sets of unifying standards that justify and legitimate membership of a guild. Practice can also be described in contrast to, for example, theory, policy, and advocacy.

Practice can also be described in relation to informing research. Research and evidence help to clarify the professional boundaries of competence to educational practice (i.e., ethical standards). The language of the science of educational practice can be described in several prototypical phrases. For example, practice can be viewed as evidence-based and empirically grounded (or not), and the science of practice can be characterised as applied and rigorous (or not). When practice and research are brought together, the language of practice evaluation can be used to characterise some practice as either best, recommended, quality, and promising practice (e.g., Landrum & Tankersley, 2003; Thomas & Grimes, 2002) or controversial and poorly informed practice (e.g., McWilliam, 1999; Strain & Joseph, 2004). For example, some inclusive educational practices can be described as evidence-based; others cannot, either because the research has not been done or because the available research does not support the practice.

This proceeding and the scholarly discussions held at this meeting will consider a range of issues about the language and culture of educational practice, the ideas we hold about practice and the way we think about practice, and the value and worth of practice in advancing the education of all students. This meeting is somewhat out of season for its Australian participants, as it falls in the middle of the Australian university year. For
the US academics from Vanderbilt and other universities, who often travel at this year of year, participation continues and extends some existing connections and perhaps begins others. Although the numbers of registrants and presenters participating in this US-based meeting are not as large as in the Australian-based end-of-year meetings, we anticipate rich, productive, and ongoing conversations around this conference theme.

References

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