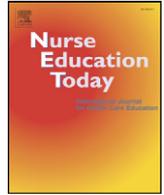


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Editorial



Welcome to this special edition of *Nurse Education Today* which showcases a selection of the papers presented at the *International Networking for Healthcare Education Conference* held at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge in September 2013. It contains ten papers which capture the breadth and diversity of the conference. Work from five countries is represented, with a mixture of accomplished writers and first-time authors. Studies in this collection draw on qualitative and quantitative data from educationalists, healthcare practitioners, students and service users, and a diversity of methods and methodologies are deployed, including case study, depth interviews, group interviews, survey, narrative inquiry, literature review, theoretical discussion and polemic. The range and scope of topics are diverse, taking in student selection, student experience, clinical placements, service user involvement, person-centred care, simulation, and the effects of technology on pedagogy, reflective education and the use of theatre in education. And all of this in the space of ten papers.

However, this selection includes one paper which, in a perfect world, would not be here, and omits a paper which, in a perfect world, most certainly would have been. Sadly, we do not live in a perfect world.

One of the planned keynote speakers was my friend and colleague Melanie Jasper, and it was my job as a member of the organising committee to ensure that her paper was written in good time for the conference. But timely completion of presentations was not Melanie's style, and with a month to go, she still had not produced a single word. However, I had no doubt that a paper would be forthcoming, even if it did not materialise until the day of her presentation.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. In August 2013, with less than a month to go until the conference, Melanie was diagnosed with cancer. Clearly, she now had far more important things to think about and do than to speak at a conference, and so I stepped in at the last moment and gave a paper in her place.

It is my paper, then, that in a perfect world would not be included in this collection because it would never have been needed to be written. And it is the paper which Melanie never got around to writing which is missing. That, in part, is my fault. If I had been a little more insistent that she kept to her writing schedule and a little less confident in her ability to deliver at the last moment, this special edition would have included her paper, and would no doubt have been all the better for it.

Melanie died in May 2014, and in the absence of her paper, I would like to offer a few words about Melanie as a person and, in particular, as an educationalist.

Since her death I have read a number of obituaries, including several in the nursing and academic press, and all of them have omitted three very important aspects of Melanie's life. Firstly, she was an accomplished cook. Secondly, she was an enthusiastic gardener who transformed a piece of scrubby Welsh hillside into a productive vegetable garden. And thirdly, she had a passion and a gift for education. Now, it is no coincidence that all three of these activities are related, that all three are concerned with nurturing and cultivating, with enabling growth and conjuring up

remarkable results from what were sometimes the most unpromising raw ingredients. The food was delicious and the gardens were lovely, but it is her achievements as an educationalist and a teacher on which I wish to focus.

I began working with Melanie at Portsmouth University in the early 1990s as a result of a shared interest in curriculum development and innovative teaching methods. Our first joint project was to write and teach a problem-based graduate entry programme for the Project 2000 curriculum (which won a 3Ms/Nursing Times award), followed by a process-led masters degree in Advanced Professional Practice and a post-qualifying nursing research course.

Melanie was always willing to take chances with new ideas and was never slow in trying out interesting but untested educational theories. But she was also steeped in common sense and inevitably stopped me from taking obscure ideas and theories one step too far. She was also a far better teacher than me. She built a remarkable rapport with her students and is still remembered by people she taught a quarter of a century ago. What's more, she still remembered them.

We both developed an interest in reflection and reflective education, which formed the core of all our courses and eventually resulted in a number of books and papers. Melanie had a knack of being able to speak directly to students through her writing, and it is unsurprising that several of her reflective practice books went on to be best-sellers. And whenever readers compliment me on our joint publications, it is inevitably Melanie's contributions which they single out for special mention.

As well as being my friend and colleague, Melanie latterly became my boss at Swansea University, and her new commitments restricted the amount of time she had for writing, yet she maintained a strong publication record and never lost her passion for teaching and supervising students.

Of course, when your life is suddenly threatened by serious illness, attention is quite rightly focussed elsewhere and work becomes largely inconsequential. But on the other hand, major life events can also help us to realise that, in fact, nothing is inconsequential, that everything we do, whether cooking, tending gardens or educating nurses — especially educating nurses — has far-reaching consequences for ourselves and others. Attending conferences, presenting papers and writing them up for publication are hardly matters of life and death, but they are nevertheless important, and this special edition of *Nurse Education Today* is a celebration of the attempts of healthcare practitioners, educators and researchers to make a positive difference to the lives of others.

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