

## **The triangle of education—learning, teaching and assessment: Insights from the Psychology of Education Section Annual Conference**

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The Psychology of Education Section 2017 Annual Conference was held in Edinburgh between 27–28 October. It offered an impressive programme including two keynotes given by Professor Christine Merrell from Durham University and Professor Lisa Woolfson from University of Strathclyde and the Vernon-Wall lecture was presented by Professor Jo-Anne Baird from Oxford University. With the two postgraduate workshops that took place on 26 October, this three-day conference comprised of one symposium, two workshops, 30 oral paper sessions and 10 posters. Overall, the conference offered something to everyone interested in learning, teaching and assessment in education which was the theme of the conference.

The main conference was preceded by two informative workshops aimed at postgraduate students. In the first workshop, Dr Emma Vardy spoke about the challenges associated with recruiting children and young people for research studies. She provided practical tips for participant recruitment, drawing on her extensive experience working with schools. The topic was relevant to all who intend to collect primary data from children in their research. The second workshop on research impact was given by Professor Dave Putwain. He discussed methods of designing and implementing pathways to impact in research projects. Given the increasing emphasis on knowledge transfer within UK higher education, this workshop was timely and useful for early career researchers to think about how to achieve impact in their own research.

Professor Christine Merrell kicked off the main conference with a keynote address on assessments in the early years and the development of Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS). She outlined best practices for screening and

assessing the development of children aged 4 to 7. Extensive evidence was presented showing that PIPS provides reliable and valid data about children's development, and serves as a useful indicator of a child's later success or difficulties in school. Such an instrument can help identify children with learning difficulties at a critical early stage, so that timely and appropriate support can be put in place to address their needs. This work has also been translated into a practical guide for teachers, called '*Working with difficult children in primary schools*', which is free to download.

The keynote was followed by some engaging parallel sessions. Among these came the session led by Laura Nicholson. She presented her research on the beliefs of teacher educators regarding their research engagement. As is known, for the purposes of the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021, teacher educators who have long been engaged in teaching rather than research are required to actively conduct research as well. The study found that although some teacher educators had not formally engaged in any research, their attitudes were generally positive. Several barriers to their research engagement were highlighted though such as lack of time and not having enough knowledge and experience in research.

As part of the triangle of education, assessment was discussed by the presenters as well. In their workshop, Sarah MacQuarrie, Catherine Kelly and Dermot Bergin addressed the challenges concerning language assessment in diverse classrooms. They aimed to further the practice and research agendas in maximizing opportunities and reducing barriers to development for children schooled in a minority language or learning English as an additional language. This workshop on assessment was timely as it was followed by the 37th Vernon-Wall lecture given by Professor Jo-Anne Baird. The talk entitled '*On different paradigms of educational assessment: Implications for the relationships with learning and teaching*' provided much food for thought. First of all,

it was stated that there are three paradigms in educational assessment which are rooted in occupational, educational and psychological research. Professor Jo-Anne Baird suggested that as practitioners and researchers are usually unclear about which paradigms they are operating within and what the assumptions and implications are, there is a long overdue need of synthesising and integrating these frameworks. Also, she emphasised the need for assessment models having a closer relationship with learning. She further pointed out that educational assessment is a social construct, so the current model in assessment, cognitive theory of learning, bears significant challenges in providing theory that helps learners and educators.

The last day of the conference featured a number of talks related to teachers' and students' beliefs about ability. Madeline Crosswaite found that teachers perceived genes and environment as equally important influences on student attainment. Dr Becky Taylor reported a discrepancy between teachers' self-reported mindsets and classroom practices. Although teachers tended to report a growth mindset, they differentiated their instructional practices based on perceptions of student attainment. Similarly, Junlin Yu showed that the vast majority of students reported a high level of agreement with growth mindset statements, rendering them ineffective in differentiating students with a growth mindset from those with a fixed mindset. Instead, he suggested that people with a true growth mindset are those who are willing to strongly refute fixed mindset statements.

In the closing keynote, Professor Lisa Woolfson shared her insights about the complex relationship between assessment and practice. She emphasised that the relationship between assessment, educational policy and teacher classroom practices is not linear or logical. Not only did she share the findings of her intervention studies in early childhood education with a view to influencing educational policy, but she also

discussed how teacher beliefs can influence teacher assessment of learning in children with special educational needs and disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Overall, the conference was thought-provoking and full of take-home messages concerning learning, teaching and assessment in education. The next Psychology of Education Section Annual Conference will be held at Wolfson College, University of Oxford on Friday 14 to Saturday 15 September 2018. The conference theme is 'Enhancing Wellbeing in Education'. We are sure that it will be interesting to anyone who is interested in the psychology of education in general or wellbeing in particular. For more information about the programme and the bursaries available, please visit <https://www.kc-jones.co.uk/pes2018>.