Editorial

Welcome the second issue of our eleventh volume. We are fortunate to have a selection of articles in this issue that address concerns in nursing (Black & colleagues), counselling, health and social care (Whitehead), occupational and physiotherapy (Warren & colleagues), and social work education (Tedam; Smith; Irwin & McGlade). Whilst these papers address specific disciplinary interests, they also share many commonalities that other disciplines can learn from and apply.

The first article, by Black, Baillie and Kane, relates to an issue that exercises the minds of pedagogues throughout health and social care professions, the support of students with specific learning differences (SpLD). The paper describes work undertaken to turn the experiences of nursing and midwifery students with SpLD into training films for use with mentors, and its subsequent evaluation.

Many students faced with SpLD find it hard to complete their programmes of study. In the second article, Whitehead examines the further difficulties experienced by part-time counselling students; those who are often working and training or undertaking study. It is good to see this issue being raised within the journal. Part-time student issues are often relegated behind those of full-time equivalents. This may, of course, change increasingly with the development of mass online open courses (moocs), and changes to fee structures in the UK and across the world.

In our third article, Warren, Taylor, Cahill and O'Donnell explore interprofessional education for occupational therapy and physiotherapy in Ireland, something that has not been common to date there and which is ripe for evaluation.

Tedam introduces an innovative model to engage black African students on social work courses and critiques the strengths and limitations of this model, and Smith addresses a sensitive aspect of social work

service user involvement in teaching, the engagement of people using child protection services.

Our final article in this issue is a practice reflection from Irwin and McGlade, focusing on the assessment of social work students in Northern Ireland via observation of practice and offering thoughts on a model to guide the use of observational assessment.

The current editorial has been co-written with another of the editorial board (Mark Doel) together with a member of the Whiting and Birch team (Jane McLaughlin). It includes the following section on writing tips for those authors who are not writing in a first language and for those who are but who need to consider how to pitch their writing for an international audience. This material was originally developed for another Whiting and Birch journal (*Social Policy and Social Work in Transition*). We hope the suggestions will be used widely and that any future reflections to assist in making such writing accessible will be passed on to us so we can, again, disseminate ideas more widely.

Writing English for an international audience

Many of the articles published within the journal have been written by people for whom English is not their first language, and the journal has had to make fine judgements about what we have come to term 'polishing' this English so that a broad international community can best understand it. However, our guiding principle has been to balance the need for global comprehension with the desire to maintain the author's own voice – that sense that the author is speaking to the reader, with a tone and an accent that is unique to them. It is a difficult balance to maintain. An example: this editorial was going to use expression 'passing a milestone'. Since most readers of the journal do not use miles, we asked if this expression should be altered at the polishing stage? In fact, it is the kind of phrase that we would leave alone, as it is not difficult to understand what is meant - even if you use kilometres and not miles - and it gives tone to the authors' meaning. It is part of the authors' individual linguistic repertoire.

The example above illustrates the fact that consideration of 'English for an international audience' is a two-way street: that is, the English that first-language English speakers use can be problematic for readers

for whom English is not a first language. So, whereas the latter are self-conscious about their need to consider their use of English, the former can be oblivious to the fact that they, too, need to pay particular attention to their use of English.

> Behind me on the board were written those expository phrases found in that fatigued genre, the 'topical essay' - in the final analysis, on the one hand/on the other, it might be objected that … - No-one wrote like that, except in international English, that committee-language sieved to a fine inexpressiveness through the strainer of compromise and neutrality. (*The Last Hundred Days* [of the Ceausescu regime], p.60)

This quote from a novel by Patrick McGuinness illustrates one of the most difficult aspects of writing English for an international audience – how to make certain compromises of style for broad understanding without losing the individual voice of the author. This challenge is compounded by the fact that academic language, especially that of sociologists, can be provocatively difficult to penetrate.

We sincerely wish to avoid a series of bullet-points of 'do's and don't's', but perhaps a discussion of some sound principles for writing English for an international audience is justified, even helpful.

A first principle is to understand that complicated language should not be mistaken for complex thought. Using 'utilise' instead of 'use' does not give your work more weight: there is almost no situation in which 'use' cannot be substituted for 'utilise', so why use the clumsier, three syllable 'utilise' rather than the single syllable, simple 'use'? Use/utilise is a good metaphor for your approach to language in general: not to confuse long, clumsy phrases and sentences with academic weight. Complex thoughts can and should be expressed in accessible language.

A second principle is to use idioms sparingly. Writing for an academic journal does not have to be stuffy (indeed, it is much better if it is not), but it is different from a conversation or a personal written communication. Idioms ('a dime a dozen', 'against the clock', etc.) are often too casual and too culturally specific for a broad international audience. This is not say that they should never be used, just with care.

Unlike idioms, concrete illustrations that are culturally specific are often a very helpful way in which readers can enter your particular world. One of the temptations of writing for a very broad audience is using language that is so bland and neutral that it really doesn't say

anything of interest: specific illustrations can give texture to the writing and highlight your meaning. It is mistaken to think that the focus of an article for an international audience should not be culturally specific – often it is this specificity that is of most interest to the reader. However, clearly expressed illustrations are needed in order for 'visitors' to your world, as expressed through your writing, to make sense of it in their own terms.

So, we start from a belief that the essentially international nature of this journal means that the diversity of the authors, editors and readers is an enormous strength. However, it also represents a challenge: how can that diversity best be represented in the medium of English?

Experts in English language describe the following: English is now more widely used across the world than ever; most people who use the English language do not have it as a first language; 'world Englishes' are developing – varieties of English with their own status and currency in different parts of the world, used in everyday transactions and business.

In the sphere of academic writing, 'standard English', that is, the version of the language regarded as correct in, say, the UK and the US, is still the norm. Whether this will continue to be so, we do not know. It poses some interesting questions for a journal such as this one.

A journal publishing in English in a multilingual context has a responsibility to work towards a clear 'contract on language' with its authors and readers and that is what we aim to do. Context is paramount: what is appropriate for these particular authors and readers? This is not a question that can be answered quickly or easily but trying to answer it will be valuable and interesting, and contributions and suggestions from all concerned with the Journal will be much appreciated.

At present in the field of English language there is much discussion of what ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) actually is. Some believe that the dominance of English in the academic world, as now in many others, is a hegemony. There is anecdotal evidence that many academics whose first language is not English resent the fact that their work must be published in English if it is to have any currency or status, and know that much high quality work remains largely unregarded because it is not in English.

In the context of 'world Englishes' what is 'correct'? Some now regard it as arrogant and unreasonable, as well as unrealistic, for 'native speakers' of English to require others to use their version. On the other hand, it is likely that many academic writers will believe that writing English

that is not ‘standard’ will not enhance their professional reputation or indeed their chances of getting published in reputable English language journals. Moreover, the various Englishes need to be close enough to be understood by one another.

What, therefore, is the role of this journal in promoting equality and accessibility in the use of English? Should we aim to publish bilingually wherever possible? Should editors insist on some ‘standard form’ as they determine it? What discussions should take place with authors about standardising their language? In the context described above it is both a challenge and an opportunity to publish in English in a multilingual context.

This concerns not only the writing, but the readership. While many academic writers are very proficient in English, the aim of the journal is to reach students and practitioners as well, and some of them may not have such an advanced level of English. We need to look at how authors, both those who do not have English as a first language and those who do, can make their writing more accessible to a multilingual audience.

It is not our aim at this stage, as we said earlier, to arrive at a prescriptive set of guidelines for writing in an international context. The conventions of academic discourse vary from culture to culture, and within cultures. There is not enough evidence to show what would be useful in the field of social work. However, we do intend to provide suggestions as to what may improve intelligibility, and we hope that all involved – authors, editors and readers will contribute to this.

Here are some to begin with. Some of these are principles of good writing in any context: to write abstracts that are as clear and straightforward as possible, while giving the reader a true and accurate summary of the content. Within the text, to indicate clearly what is more important and what is less important (both in argument and material).To avoid ambiguity, or to point clearly to ambiguity where it exists. Where opinions are expressed, to make it clear that is what they are. Where visual features such as charts and diagrams are used (usually very helpful in this context) to indicate precisely which parts of the text relate to them and exactly how they add to the evidence or support the argument.

It is also likely that a multilingual readership will find it helpful if the author provides very clear ‘signalling’ of the structure of the text (introductory and summarising sentences, headings and subheadings, sometimes numbered sections and bullet points where appropriate).

Also, that they indicate very clearly the stages in an argument by using linking and 'signposting' words, and that transitions in thought, argument and material are expressed in appropriate language. Where there is reference backwards and forwards in the text, the author should ensure that it is absolutely clear what is referred to. Keeping to chronological order where possible so that readers do not have to 'construct' a sequence of events for themselves probably helps readers and authors alike. Handbooks are now published giving examples of what grammar and syntax at sentence level are best suited to international publishing. Details of useful works will be placed upon the Whiting & Birch website in due course.

The aim is not to simplify unnecessarily, or to stifle the personal voices of different authors, but to make articles as accessible as possible while preserving their rigour and individuality.

We hope the suggestions above will result in further discussion, which will be both interesting and welcome.

Jonathan Parker, Mark Doel and Jane McLaughlin