

## Editorial

# 'It's All Very Well in Theory, But Does It Work in Practice?'

Despite their diversity, the health and social care professions have at least one very important characteristic in common, that is, 'praxis', or the coming together of theory and practice (Bernstein 2011). Day-to-day challenges demand solutions that involve translating ideas into action. Praxis is at the very heart of striving to be professional, and this is why what happens in practice-based learning settings is so crucial to developing professional practice. Understanding and engaging in praxis is crucial for the preparation of new recruits but also for existing practitioners responsible for their professional socialisation, as well as their own development. As the demands of the working context potentially squeeze out space to think, praxis is essential to everything that the professions stand for.

Students experiencing the reality of practice need to be encouraged to draw on their theoretical knowledge base, to be able to go back to first principles, and to work with the basic facts and build on them. However, students also need to be able to 'reverse engineer' their reflections on events to fully appreciate why things are as they are, and to understand practice at a fundamental level. It is the placement context which allows students, with clinicians, to draw on experience, engaging with meaning, self and other in context, to develop their critical thinking with theory which does not separate itself from action. It is in this space that the theory-practice gap can be narrowed for both students and clinicians where they critically engage with praxis.

The articles in this issue illustrate the richness of existing praxis across a range of professions engaged with the many and varied issues raised by practice-based learning. A concern for how students experience the practical aspects of their programmes, and the quest to critically engage with the pros and cons of alternative placement models, in the face of the demands of practice, are never far from the forefront of contemporary debate. For example, Sarah Barradell, Felicity Blackstock, Clarice Tang, and Joan Leo explore the concept of situated learning through the experiences of physiotherapy students in a practice-oriented practice environment where learning was facilitated by clinicians. They report on the value of immersion in practice-oriented classroom environments, co-located in health care sites, and facilitated by practising clinicians; but they also acknowledge the challenges.

Nicola Wardrop, Lindy McAllister, Daniel de Stefanis, and Felicity Martin share the findings of research exploring the reactions of speech and language therapy students to a 'continuum of care' placement that brought to life the idea of patient-centred care, by providing insight into a

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Journal URL: <http://e-learning.coventry.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/pblh>

Clouder, L. (2017) 'Editorial: "It's All Very Well in Theory, But Does It Work in Practice?"'. *International Journal of Practice-based Learning in Health and Social Care*, 5 (1), ii-iii



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whole journey rather than a single stage of that journey, resulting in role clarification and enhanced competence. Similarly, Myra Mackenzie and Evelyn Newman's article focusing on a contemporary, or role-emerging, placement model, provides insight into the experiences of dietetic students on placement in social care settings as opposed to the more usual clinical health care context. They also identify shifts in students' role perceptions and professional identity development, as well as an affinity with the holistic person-centred approach demanding 'soft skills' and predicated on care and compassion capabilities, as opposed to a medical model. Adding to understanding of competence in the context of collaborative fieldwork models, Marisa Short, Candace Letham, Leanne Currie, and Donna Patricia Drynan examine the difference between students' competency scores in the traditional 1:1 and 2:1 fieldwork models, and conclude that perceptions that collaborative models might compromise the development of student competencies are unfounded.

The remaining articles in this issue relate the findings of interventions aimed at developing essential qualities in the health and social care workforce: compassion, leadership, and interprofessional collaboration. Their analyses are applied, conceptual, and theoretical. The first, by Charlotte Ramage and colleagues, focuses on the concept of compassion and its differing faces. The findings of an appreciative inquiry into the development of a toolkit for developing compassion in healthcare, emphasises the importance of cultivating self-compassion and compassion in others, and stresses the importance of leadership-support to embed practices and invoke behaviour change. The article by Jacqueline Leigh, June Rutherford and Tracey Williamson picks up on the concept of leadership by considering the impact on leadership development of the use of a multidimensional leadership conceptual model. Evaluated in the context of two post-graduate healthcare leadership programmes, the model appears to offer opportunities to optimise leadership development, and challenge assumptions and expectation of a healthcare leader. A key finding of this work, is the importance of the acquisition of leadership knowledge skills and attitudes, and the need to move beyond the theoretical to practical 'real world' application. Finally, Carole Orchard, Linda Pederson, Dianne Allen, and Halina Lam focus on clinical teachers' skills, specifically the effectiveness of interprofessional education workshops (underpinned by social learning theories), in preparing clinical teachers to promote interprofessional collaborative teamwork in their students on placement. Their findings identify positive outcomes in terms of promoting client-centred care, and again role clarification.

The articles in this current issue of the journal engage with a wide range of concepts and working theories that are recurrent, which seems to confirm their relevance to practice, and adds weight to the practice-based learning literature, much of which is transferrable across the professions. Of course, different theoretical lenses can reveal different ideas; theory plays a different role in different types of research, practical knowledge can be viewed from different theoretical perspectives, and concepts can mean different things in the different contexts and in different professions. The praxis debate, therefore, will run and run.

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## **Reference**

Bernstein, R. J. (2011) *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press