

Threshold Concepts in Practice Education – Reflections for the Future.

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Humanities education, particularly in the areas of early childhood education and applied social studies must engage with professional practice education. There is urgency for the need for practitioners and educationalists to communicate, and for practitioners to be aware of developments in educational theory. The idea of 'threshold concepts' is currently widely discussed by educationalists. Threshold concepts are described as areas of knowledge without which the learner cannot progress, and which, when grasped, lead to a transformation in the learner's perspective and understanding. Threshold concepts have been criticised on conceptual grounds, and there is a lack of clarity as to how to identify them empirically. While they may represent a fruitful approach to the task of engaging humanities students in teaching, it is suggested that further development of the idea is required before it could be usefully applied. However empirical studies in other disciplines suggest that there may be associated benefits to the teaching of the discipline from trying to identify threshold knowledge.

For placement educators, they must continue to ensure that practice placement education is relevant to constantly changing and diverse work practices (Lloyd et al 2002). Although there is an extensive body of literature on clinical education and the traditional practice placement models, there has been limited research on alternative practice placement education such as inter-professional learning and supervision.

Much is known about the purpose of placement educators, but how their role is implemented is subject to conflicting expectations, partly created by the structure in which they work. Collaboration between practice education settings between universities, institutes of technology and practice provide an opportunity for academia and practice settings to collaborate in a partnership to enhance practice learning and fulfil one of the main aims of the practice educator role in any contemporary setting : to narrow the theory-practice gap. However tensions and conflict will exist.

Professional standards and guidelines are of special value in the area of academic preparation, for it is this area that the seeds of professional practice are initially planted. It is essential that those who aspire to become professional student educators and supervisors receive the best preparation possible. Preparation standards are the essential foundation for quality education.

How the role of a practice educator in relation to those they work with is defined have implications for the purpose and process of supervision of students undertaking professional education for that role. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the lack of robust and generally agreed articulation of what constitutes professional practice in the first place has resulted in the absence of a body of literature and the development of appropriate models / frameworks of supervision for that practice.

This presentation will contribute to the identification and development of such models or frameworks. It aims to clarify the appropriate models of supervision in practice education and address elements of threshold concepts in the practice setting.