

Thresholds of social care practice

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This presentation will outline the four thresholds, provide support for their identification and will consider if these thresholds are relevant to social care education. In essence this presentation aims to make a theoretical contribution to the knowledge social care has about its discipline thresholds (Mayer and Land, 2008; Taylor and Share 2012).

Mayer and Land (2008) contend that each discipline has its own thresholds, they liken these to 'passing through a portal' which provides 'previously inaccessible ways of thinking about something' (Mayer and Land, 2003, p.). Threshold concepts are transformative as they change the learner's perspective of the discipline and once achieved the learning is irreversible. Even though the thresholds are troublesome to learn, they allow the learner understand the interrelatedness of different aspects of the disciplines knowledge. For this reason, threshold concepts can be highly integrative. Perkins, (2006) suggests that disciplines need to be explored so that discipline specific thresholds and liminal spaces can be identified.

A community of practice is a way of considering the learning required by those who share a universal concern for a particular area of interest (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Inducting new members into the community through situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation is a core activity of a community of practice. Professional Practice Placement creates situated learning and experience gained under the guidance of a student supervisor (IASCE, 2013) provides legitimate peripheral participation.

Withstanding its employment diversity (Share and Lalor, 2009; Lalor and Share, 2013) thresholds of social care practice has been identified (Byrne-Lancaster, 2013). Using discourse analysis as an analytic tool, the three accepted definitions of social care (JCSCP, 2000; IASCE 2004; CORU, 2012) infer outcomes for all social care service users: empowerment, quality of life space and individuation.

In forty year history of social care education (Courtney, 2012) learning experiences associated with social care placement has received limited research attention (Byrne, 2000) and little is empirically known about what learning occurs on placement and what mechanisms support or hinder this learning. Taylor and Share (2012) have introduced threshold concepts as a framework to explore placement learning. Drawing on the work of Clouder (2005), Taylor and Share (2012) explore how Early Childhood Education and Care learners can be supported to learn about 'caring' on practice placement.

In an attempt to understand pre-graduation social care learning, three models of professional social work development (Reynolds, 1942; Saari, 1981; 1989; 2012; Holman and Freed, 1989) have been thematic analysed. Social work is a field of practice related to social care (Trevithick, 2008) and draws on the same theory base and use placement as a professional learning pedagogical tool (Share, 2009). The analysis identified four thresholds of pre-graduation learning for social workers: suitability to the profession, role identification & performance, mobilising theory and impact of practice on service users.

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