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Action Research and Reflective Practice: Creative and visual methods to facilitate reflection and learning. Paul McIntosh

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BOOK REVIEW

Action Research and Reflective Practice: Creative and visual methods to facilitate reflection and learning

Paul McIntosh,

Routledge, London, 2010.

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Reviewed by

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This text offers an interesting exploration of the relationship between the use of evidence-based practice and reflection-on-action to conclude that reflective practices are in essence research of an informal nature.

A 195 page text in two parts, the first section deals with the need to evolve evidence-based practice to incorporate reflective research (or reflection on action), while the second part deals with philosophical and practical aspects of this evolution.

The author, Paul McIntosh, has worked as a health and social care practitioner within the learning disabilities field, and has extensive experience in higher education for health and social care professionals, although his credentials are not clarified until further within the text.

The text begins with a historical overview of the development of evidence-based medicine through the evolution of medical practice from the Babylonian era to the present, and links this to a formula-based approach to patient management (evidence-based practice) where protocols are rarely deviated from, as a consequence of their basis in evidence. The author describes well the stifling effect this has on learning within the health disciplines, and follows this in the ensuing chapters with support for a philosophical approach to engendering practice-based research through the auspices of self reflection, creativity, symbolism and metaphor.

The author's writing style is very much aligned to the reader as he steps through his and others' philosophy, while encouraging us to contemplate our practice through this construct, supported by the works of theorists and, occasionally, television shows. This text is not an easy read for those of us brought up on a scientific algorithm of problem-solution patient management and practice. It does, however, offer a refreshing insight into the possibilities for learning that exist when clinical practice ventures out into the world of philosophical contemplation.

This work attempts to bridge the divide between quantitative and qualitative research through the application and integration of pedagogic theory and philosophical conceptualization. In some sense, the author succeeds in demonstrating the potential to improve the understanding

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of an individual's practice by engaging in significant self-realisation exercises. On the other hand, I felt that the author failed to provide a significant alternative to the practicalities of working within the systems and constraints that presently exist in the global health care system. Having said this, the text offers an alternative to rigid scientific learning for those who seek greater introspective understanding of how and why they function in practice.

I would recommend this text for those who are absolutely comfortable with their current clinical practice and seek to influence their craft through understanding more about their own actions and the potential that exists outside of a protocol. Having said this, I am not convinced that any of the major health bodies will embrace the concept of staff rushing off to engage in an esoteric examination of their practice outside of the confines of what has become an economic and process grounded practice, which is easily quantified and measured for the purposes of efficiency.

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