This is a book for practitioners, university educators, workplace learning educators, researchers and the professions. It draws together two key elements of the lives of these people: professional practice – what people do, and practice discourse – what they write and say about what they do. And, it focuses these discussions around two spaces – the core and the margins, of practice and discourse.

Writing in the margins of texts has a very long history. People have always left part of themselves – their ideas, personality and reflections – in the margins of texts. In this book we have taken up the idea of such written marginalia and we have expanded it into writing into the texts of practice discourse as well as speaking and acting in the margins of professional practice. Such deliberate practice changes in marginal practice spaces and in written practice discourse provides ways of shaping and critically appraising current and future professional practice.

This book provides a dialogue between two fascinating phenomena: professional practice and discourse. In the 21st century these two are facing challenges as they negotiate their contested spaces in a rapidly changing global society. They draw on strong established traditions and expectations but they cannot be complacent in these illusory stabilities. Rather they must be awake to the imperatives of their own re-invention and re-claimed relevance to today’s society and today’s professional class in the workforce.

Across the chapters we explore the core spaces of professional practice discourse from the vantage point of the margins of this space, and the margin spaces as they interact with the core. Marginalia serves as an architect of destabilisation, challenge, revolution, reflection or sometimes affirmation of the central discourse space.

There are five sections in the book: Section One: Professional practice discourse, Section Two: Leading the practice discourse, Section Three: Writing from inside practice, Section Four: Writing onto and into practice and Section Five: Marking trails and stimulating insights.

Readers are invited to contribute to our exploration of the phenomenon and practice of professional practice discourse marginalia.
Professional Practice Discourse Marginalia
Other books in this series:
Professional Practice Discourse Marginalia

Edited by

Joy Higgs and Franziska Trede
The Education For Practice Institute, Charles Sturt University, Australia
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This series examines research, theory and practice in the context of university education, professional practice, work and society. The series explores spaces where two or more of these arenas come together. Themes that are explored in the series include: university education of professions, society expectations of professional practice, professional practice workplaces and strategies for investigating each of these areas. There are many challenges facing researchers, educators, practitioners and students in today’s practice worlds. The authors in this series bring a wealth of practice wisdom and experience to examine these issues, share their practice knowledge, report research into strategies that address these challenges, share approaches to working and learning and raise yet more questions. The conversations conducted in the series will contribute to expanding the discourse around the way people encounter and experience practice, education, work and society.

Joy Higgs
Charles Sturt University, Australia
In the pageant of practice,
in the diverse dissertations of discourse,
in the lived core and margin spaces of practice
in the magical musings of marginalia
lies practice experienced, imagined and inscribed.

Discourse without practice
is talk without purpose.
Practice without discourse
is walk without foundation.
Margins allow for things being the same
and for things becoming different.

In this book professional knowledge, practice and discourse take central stage as inseparable parts of the same whole: professional practice. This book presents six key arguments:

1. Professional practice is a complex human phenomenon that lends itself to multiple perspectives.

2. Professional practice and practice discourse are co-generative: meanings and meaning making lies in the space between them. Professional practice is the landscape and reality of its discourse. Discourse is the portrayal of and guide for practice in the professions.

3. Discourse (both verbal and textual) and its inherent practice has many lives (in the here and now, in the there and then), many forms (from ideas, to spoken word, to text, to images), many systems (disciplines, professions, occupations, organisations), many infrastructures (structural, virtual, human, technical), many frameworks (cultures, paradigms, disciplines) and many possibilities.

4. Margins are valuable means of containing the potential endlessness of life and work (see Swenson, 2003). They reflect the unrelenting expansion of practice and discourse, and yet, margins provide powerful and exciting spaces for creativity, reflection and appraisal beyond the practice and discourse core.

5. Marginalia literally refers to writing or adding images into the margins of texts such as books. We take this metaphor, apply it to professional practice discourse, and expand it to include developing new practices in the living margins of practice discourse-in-action as well as exploring the knowledge that lies in the core and margins of more formal discourse texts.
6. We need professional practice, professional practice discourse and marginalia to work in harmony but also to creatively disrupt each other to develop dynamic, transformative and complex future practice for liquid modern times.

This is a book addressed to professional practitioners, university educators, workplace learning educators, researchers and the professions. One of the challenges facing fields of discourse such as the human services professions and professional practice is that the key phenomena of any rich, human field of discourse (such as jargon, theories, practices) are complex (both multi-faceted and unpredictable). This is both an inherent reality as well as a precursor to the generation and inevitability of multiple perspectives arising around and through such phenomena.

In this book on professional practice discourse we take discourse to refer to written or spoken communications, conversations and dialogue concerning professional practice as a phenomenon that is at the same time conceptual, established, dynamic and enacted (see Chapter 1). Discourse, as presented in Chapter 3, can be understood as not just a matter of the public and written discourse owned by the profession; it is also the informal “talk” of communities of practice. We are interested in the discourse of professional practice in general and of particular professions, academic discourse and discourse as a living phenomena in professional practice.

This book is a dance, a dialogue between two fascinating phenomena: professional practice and discourse. In the 21st century these two are facing challenges as they negotiate their contested spaces in a rapidly changing global society. They draw on strong established traditions and expectations but they cannot be complacent in these illusory stabilities. Rather they must be awake to the imperatives of their own re-invention and re-claimed relevance to today’s society and workforce.

From another sphere of interest – the consumers of professional services – we face questions of authority and mastery of the previous mysteries of “the professions”. The potential educational differential between these consumers and professionals is a contested space. The power of professional jargon-language is facing international media demystification, and the marketplace has come to dominate and commodify the former elite world of professional services. Many interests beyond professional self-direction and self-regulation are working their way into the hegemonic space of the professions’ practice discourse, ranging from expanding technologies, the physical sciences, and the humanities, to human service and community groups. The very term profession is constantly being reviewed as society, knowledge and global non-differentiation evolve, and an increasing number of occupations join the ranks of emerging professions.
Across the chapters we explore the core spaces of professional practice discourse from the vantage point of the margins of this space, and the margin spaces as they interact with the core. Marginalia serve as an architect of destabilisation, challenge, revolution, reflection and sometimes affirmation of the central discourse space.

There are five sections in the book:

**Section One: Professional practice discourse** addresses the book context.

**Section Two: Leading the practice discourse** provides a series of dialogues across the core space of professional practice discourse highlighting people and ideas that lead practice discourse and marginalia.

**Section Three: Writing from inside practice** launches a number of dialogues from the contention that practice is the primary space where the reality of professional practice is known and appreciated through realising and contending lived practice. Through these experiences, received discourse can and must be challenged and new discourses will emerge.

**Section Four: Writing onto and into practice** gives voices to those whose words and authority lie in margins, those who prefer to remain in the margins, and those who are silenced in the margins of the primary discourse of professional practice. We examine ways in which these messages and voices can receive a forced audience of the “other world” core discourse guardians and instigators, or are welcomed to participate in an ongoing rejuvenation or re-invention of the emerging core of future practice.

**Section Five: Marking trails and stimulating insights** offers reflections, both stimulating and disconcerting, of how our marginalia discussions have or could weave trails into and leave legacies for professional practice discourse.

**REFERENCES**


Joy Higgs
This book was inspired by images and ideas of *marginalia*, which briefly, refers to writing in the margins. Marginalia is a term that was coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1832 (Jackson, 2001), although the practice predates the printed book, extending back to include commentary by bored monks in the scriptorium. Marginalia literally refers to notations in the margins of written work but can also figuratively refer to the way people influence the discourse (writings or ideas about a field) by writing in or from the margins into the discourse. In both cases marginalia contribute to and change the way people think about the field – in our case this field is professional practice.

The term most generally encompasses all reader modifications, including marginal notes, highlighting, underlining, and dog-earring (Basbanes, 2005; Jackson, 2001). “Marginalia provide a uniquely intimate glimpse into the reader’s mind in the process of reacting to a text. There is something very personal about seeing someone else’s words in their own handwriting” (Wagstaff, 2012, p. 2).

Margin notes are not intended to be part of the text but rather a re-mark or a re-sponse to another’s thoughts. They may be made consciously by a deliberate annotator and critic, or they may be made spontaneously by a reader who is acting on impulse, stimulated to affirmation, disappointment, anger, illumination, or disgust etc. Marginalia have value to the annotator (in prompting responses or a way of remembering thoughts for later reflection), to future readers who may gain insights from both the text and the margin notes, to researchers (such as critics and cultural historians who produce meta commentaries or scholarly interpretations of the text or notes) and at times, to the original author who can learn about the impact of his or her writing on others.

In this book marginalia (in relation to professional practice discourse) is what we have written about; it manifests in the book product as you can see, and it was our lived process in writing collaboratively. The writing retreat, where most of the authors came together, was an intense, demanding and wonder-ful time of writing together and alone. This involved pairs or teams of authors writing in the core and margins of each other’s work. After the retreat we continued our inquiries, exploring the work of other authors in the broad field of professional practice and practice discourse, often dialoguing with other authors to produce reflective and conversational chapters. Both during and after writing our chapters and continuing
through the phases of refereeing and final editorial review, the authors and editors added marginalia in the form of text and images. The purpose of these marginalia was to add comments to the authors’ text, to incorporate marginalia as part of our multi-voice discussions on professional practice discourse and to be true to the book’s purpose of illustrating and illuminating marginalia. As a celebration of our marginalia journey we produced a quilt (wall hanging) from the retreat; the quilt incorporated photographs taken during the retreat and margin notes that participants wrote around their photographs (see Chapter 29). This process served to promote discussions at the retreat and to celebrate the retreat experience.

We added the margin notes, mainly after the chapters were finished, to give the appearance of them being added after publication. The notes were provided by the authors as well as added by the book editors. We received permission from the publishers to add these notes during the finalisation of the book before the manuscript was submitted to create a visual image of margin writings and images.

Readers are invited and encouraged to contribute to our exploration of the phenomenon and practice of professional practice discourse marginalia. The book awaits your notations.

REFERENCES


Joy Higgs

*A margin is an edge, a border, and a blank space that denotes the end of a space otherwise filled. A margin is an allowance, a measure, and a safety deposit. A margin is a place on the edge, a border between two realities. A margin is a place on the verge, a place full of possibility (Hickman, 2013, p. 41).*
Section One of this book sets the scene and context for the book and examines its core components and key arguments. Chapter 1 addresses the question of what is professional practice and discourse and how they serve society. It explores their mutual, inseparable existence and contends that both are reflective images of the other, two sides of the one coin, acting in symbiosis. Chapter 2 considers practice and theory and how their conceptual and actual co-writing (in text/discourse and in professional practices) is both essential and inevitable. This chapter presents a model of practice-theory harmonisation. Chapter 3 introduces the notion of marginalia or the writing of margin notes into professional practice discourse. It presents the argument that both core discourse and margin discourse are essential for the critical wellbeing and evolution of discourse, which in turn contributes to shaping positive and dynamic professional practice. For a promising future practice we need: professional practice, professional practice discourse and marginalia. And, we need these to harmonise but also disrupt each other to develop dynamic, transformative and complex future practice for liquid modern times.

Joy Higgs
Subsequent sections of this book will examine the literature, theories, practices, and experiences of professional practice and its discourse marginalia. This chapter focuses on the phenomena of professional practice and discourse. These phenomena exist inextricably through the fact and reality of each other and shape each other’s frame and being. Practice has primacy and discourse is written about practice, through it and from it. Practice is documented, challenged, extended, recorded, rejected, justified and re-written through practice discourse. In the enactment and lived experience of practice creators/implementers (especially practitioners) and discourse producers/refiners (including practitioners, theorists, researchers, commentators) there is a mutual belonging and common purposes: to challenge, document and enhance the knowings, doings, beings and becomings of and through practice.

Professional practice is a complex human phenomenon that lends itself to multiple perspectives and interpretations both from within practice and through its dialogues and written discourses, formal and informal. The first section of the chapter examines practice perspectives. The second section explores the nature of discourse. The chapter concludes with a practice-discourse symbiosis model.

INTERPRETING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Practice can be thought of as the enactment of the role of professions or occupational groups in serving or contributing to society. Professional practice is a social phenomenon and as such, it is inherently situated and temporally located in local settings, lifeworlds and systems. However, it is not only a socially-historically constructed phenomenon and artefact of human society it is also an intense experience of professional practitioners as an embodied, agential and self-realised way of being in the world and a part of the fabric of society’s social practices. The complex abstract and social phenomena of professional practice are manifest through the practices or customary activities of professions (such as ethical conduct, professional decision making, client-practitioner communication, consultation and referral, and interdisciplinary team work) and through the chosen ways individual practitioners implement their professional practices.

A second interpretation of professional practice is to recognise that particular professions have a range, scope and particularity of practice that define and is defined by those professions. When we speak of the practice of law (for example), taking a society perspective, this evokes ideas of what lawyers do, why people seek out the
services of lawyers, what sort of standards should be expected of members of the profession, what different roles are played by lawyers and how the law profession is unique and different to other professions. From within the law profession, professional practice is what members of the profession are expected to do (their practices and behaviours), what standards they are expected to uphold, how they support (e.g. mentor, role model) other members of the profession and how collectively they challenge, set and monitor the profession’s roles, standards and performance. Each profession has a unique body of knowledge (i.e. a unique composite whole including overlapping fields of knowledge like justice that can be shared across professions), a particular language (including terms, nomenclatures, jargon, symbols), behavioural interactions (such as terms of address and professional etiquette), communication conventions (such as modes of referral) and decision-making practices (such as the place of precedent, logic, imagination and hypothetico-deductive reasoning in decision making). Professions are self-regulated, accountable, and under continual scrutiny and development.

Third, professions as a group of occupations face society expectations to demonstrate particular characteristics and behaviours that set them to higher standards of conduct and achievements in their service to society, in recognition of, and “repayment” for, the elite and privileged position that society accords professions. Professional behaviour (or professionalism) comprises those actions, standards and considerations of ethical and humanistic conduct expected by society and by professional associations and members of professions. Ethical conduct is clearly part of professional practice expectations and standards. Practice that is ethically informed, committed, and guided by critical reflection on one’s own practice and practice traditions has been referred to as praxis. Another important consideration in this discussion about practice perspectives is that professions, historically have “stood for something” in society, acting in support of those who are underprivileged and in need, treating all people without discrimination, giving voice to important social issues and speaking for the voiceless. As members of the well-educated, privileged groups in society, there is a tradition of taking responsibility and actions in social justice matters.

Towards the end of the 20th century Ivan Illich (1977, p. 9) wrote these words below to challenge the place and power of the professions as well as the passive complicity of clients and community in this professional domination.

The professionals, that is the skilled and learned experts who apply their knowledge to the affairs and in the service of others, are traditionally held in high esteem. For generations, divinity, the law, medicine … and now the newer professions in the fields of education, welfare, … etc. have been acknowledged as being selflessly devoted to the good of the weaker and less knowledgeable members of society … However, the question must now be asked whether the professions in fact provide their services so altruistically, and whether we are really enriched and not just subordinated by their activities. There is a growing awareness that … professions have gained a supreme ascendance over our social aspirations and behaviour by tightly organizing and institutionalizing themselves. At the same time we have become a virtually passive clientèle: dependent, cajoled and harassed, economically deprived and physically and mentally damaged by the very agents whose raison d’être it is to help.
How has the 21st century changed this position? Have professionals become more driven by pursuits of wealth and status without the encumbrance of responsibility, in the face of higher costs of education etc.? Has the Internet, and more widespread public education improved client knowledge and assertiveness?

Abbott (1988) similarly questioned the role of professions in society. He presents the professions as growing, joining, splitting, adapting and dying. In his systems interpretation of the professions he examines the question of the division of expert labour and focuses on “jurisdiction”, meaning the link between an occupation and its work and the boundaries between them. “Professions both create their work and are created by it” (ibid, p. 316). The professions are described as an evolving, interdependent system, with each profession having its own activities, roles and jurisdictions and with different professions having different (and changing) levels of control over these jurisdictional boundaries. Working within and across these boundaries occurs in both workplace and public environments.

INTERPRETING PRACTICE IN ACTION

Practice is a lived phenomenon that emerges from the enactment of life and career choices, and the socialisation and interests of individuals and groups of professional practitioners. It encompasses the doing, knowing, being and becoming of professional practitioners’ roles and activities (Higgs & Titchen, 2001). These aspirations, activities and pursuits occur within the social relationships of the practice context, the discourse of the practice, and within the practice paradigms, systems, languages and settings (local and global) that comprise the practice world. These practice worlds and dimensions may be shared and they may be uniquely owned and manifest in a particular practitioner’s practice.

I bring my being to my practice
And in my practising
I am being me
and I am becoming
who I will be

My knowing is understanding me
and my practice through critical lenses
and against the backdrop of the knowledge
and ways of knowing that characterise my profession,
my various cultures and communities.
My doing,
my agency
and my actions
arise from
and in turn create
my knowing, being
and becoming.

And through these four
I practise
with others
and for them
under their scrutiny
and my own judgement.

In action, practice, can be collective (e.g. a profession’s practice) and individual (i.e. an individual practitioner’s practice). A (collective) practice comprises ritual, social interactions, language, discourse, thinking and decision making, technical skills, identity, knowledge, and practice wisdom; it is framed and contested by interests, practice philosophy, regulations, practice cultures, ethical standards, codes of conduct and societal expectations. The practice identity of individual practitioners, their chosen or received practice model and their enacted practice are framed by the views of the practice community as well as the practitioner’s interests, preferences, experiences, meaning making and practice philosophy.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) recognise the value of narrative life histories and storied life compositions in developing the professional identities of individual practitioners. Through their research into teaching they reflect on the changing and sustaining stories of teachers (practitioners) and the stories of schools (context) that together comprise the landscape of schooling. These stories shape the teachers’ working lives and “these stories to live by compose teacher identity” (ibid, p. 94).

Communities or cultures of professional practice can be interpreted as professional groups that work in paradigmatic frameworks comprising common practices, cultural norms, interests and philosophies. These practice cultures arise from professional acculturation of members of professional communities and from critical choices, support for and interests in particular issues, values, fields of practice and practice actions. The philosophical stance of a practice community or professional paradigm includes the primary worldview and view of reality that underpins the profession’s practice approach (its collective practice ontology) and the understanding of what constitutes practice knowledge and the ways such knowledge is created (its collective practice epistemology).

In general terms, practice cultures can be divided into three paradigm categories (Higgs, Trede, & Rothwell, 2007). In the empirico-analytical (natural sciences) practice paradigm, practice is characterised as objective and accountable and is underpinned by an objective, positivist view of reality, an empirical approach to knowledge, technical cognitive interests, and the search for prediction and objective evidence for practice. In the historical hermeneutic (social sciences) practice paradigm, practice is typically
subjective, contextual, emotional and risky; it is underpinned by social reality, embodied and constructed knowledge, practical, cognitive interests, and the search for agreement to support practice decisions. In the critical (critical sciences) practice paradigm, practice is collaborative, respectful, self- and system-challenging and transformative and is underpinned by the socio-cultural, historical construction of reality, negotiated understandings, emancipatory interests, and the search for transformation and emancipation as the purpose for practice.

The notion of practice models is useful here to reflect upon the idea that a practice culture and a community of practitioners working within a practice paradigm share a practice model. This might occur across a widespread, even international community who uphold particular theories or strategies such as Montessori educational approaches, to practices sharing technological goals and foci such as bionic surgical practices, to an international business-run practice such as international marketing consultants, to practices (such as policing and law) that operate within national or international boundaries, and so on. A practice model can also be locally operated such as by a hospital ward where patient management protocols are grounded in scientific research and humanistic principles. Practice models can also be personally constructed and chosen approaches for practice by individual practitioners. At times practitioners reject the hegemonic practice approach that was the primary or sole message of their education to take a more radical or novel approach. Other practitioners may leave the orthodoxy of institutional practice where conformity to the norm becomes an unsustainable pursuit. Still others might evolve their practice over time as they learn to appreciate different ways of being themselves in complex and changing worlds. Eclectic practitioners might draw on Eastern and Western practices to craft a unique hybrid approach that suits their own and their clients’ needs. In each of these cases the point of the argument is that these practitioners have chosen their practice approaches informedly, consciously and in consideration of their own identity, motivations and commitments.

A DISCOURSE ON DISCOURSE

In this book on professional practice discourse marginalia, discourse refers to written or spoken communications, conversations and dialogue concerning professional practice. Discourse is a phenomenon that is at the same time conceptual, established, dynamic, virtual/online and enacted. As a verb the word (to) discourse emphasises the practices inherent in this phenomenon and can encompass formal processes (e.g. debate, dissertation, conference, consultation, colloquium) and informal processes (e.g. parley, chat), collective processes (e.g. conferences) and individual processes (e.g. soliloquy, diarising), and a range of interactions (e.g. verbal, face-to-face, virtual, written) using a range of media (e.g. electronic, telephonic, hard copy, images, symbols), a variety of word and wordless representations (e.g. gestures, images, texts) and a range of languages (living, dead, constructed, symbolic, hieroglyphic). As a noun, discourse encompasses the content and products of discoursing activities, as in: “the discourse of a discipline”, “the current discourse on ethical conduct” and “the body of knowledge of this field”. In keeping with the title of this book: Professional Practice Discourse
Marginalia, Figure 1.1 represents ways of framing the discourse on discourse with added marginalia notes.

**Figure 1.1. Marginalia in discourse extracts**

**PRACTICE-DISCOURSE SYMBIOSIS**

In Table 1.1 a model of practice-discourse symbiosis is presented. The four quadrants represent mutually influential relationships across practice and discourse through research/propositions, theory, practice and case studies/narratives.
**Table 1.1. A model of practice-discourse symbiosis**

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<th>RESEARCH + PROPOSITIONS</th>
<th>THEORY</th>
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<td><strong>Dissertations/presentations, meta-theories about practice grounded in research, wisdom, theories, theorisations, reflections on practice, practice reports/case studies</strong></td>
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<td>- to critically appraise and question discourse and practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- to propose new views on practice</td>
<td>- to provide rationales for practices and the basis for further practice knowledge generation and theorisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to build on existing research and practice reports to critically propose new practices</td>
<td>- to create a meta (state of the art) view of practice and practice discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to expound theoretical and research knowledge to practice populations</td>
<td>- to provide the basis for practice innovations and evolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to inspire new ways of doing, knowing, being and becoming in practice</td>
<td>- to critique practice discourse against wider perspectives (e.g. history, culture, society evolutions, changes in language, technological advances, multidisciplinary perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to critically appraise practice discourses in progress and in context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to transform informal practice reports into state of the art discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRACTICE</th>
<th>CASE STUDIES + NARRATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doing, knowing, being, becoming in practice, dialogues in practice as part of practice experiences and actions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reporting about practice, narratives, case studies, reflections, debates, presentations, and theorisations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to enact and facilitate practice (including formal and informal conversations)</td>
<td>- to illuminate practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to report on/record practice to support team practices</td>
<td>- to propose/justify/critique current and new practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>- to demonstrate accountability in practice</td>
<td>- to explain and justify practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to critique and extend practice through critique and debate</td>
<td>- to articulate new practice knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to deal with personal and professional experiences of practice</td>
<td>- to expand practice discourse through experiential knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to role model and explain good practices</td>
<td>- to share case experiences with the practice community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to reflect on one’s becomings in practice</td>
<td>- to articulate and justify practice decision making</td>
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Symbiosis refers to a mutually beneficial relationship, in this case between two living phenomena: professional practice and professional practice discourse. The four quadrants were generated by considering these phenomena as occurring or being constructed across two continua. The first concerns professional practice and ranges from practice-discourse situations that are experienced and enacted to those
that are theorised or reported in the public domain. The second continuum concerns practice discourse and ranges from practice dialogues that occur within practice to dialogues about practice from the outside. The four quadrants provide four ways of reaching into this symbiotic practice-discourse space and matching various goals for using and pursuing good practice and/or discourse through a deep understanding of how practice and discourse co-exist and are co-created.

CONCLUSION

Professions serve as well as influence society. They form a privileged segment of society’s workforce and provide a range of services to clients and communities. The discourse of professional practice plays a number of key roles in reflecting, documenting, monitoring, critiquing, shaping and extending practice. Neither practice nor its discourse can exist in isolation of each other. Symbiotically they feed off each other, growing in conjunction. As we proceed through this book, professional practice becomes the context of our reports and contemplations and discourse its focus. Marginalia, the third player, is explored in detail in Chapter 3. It will be the catalyst that enters through the borders of practice and discourse to stimulate change in current practices and create future possibilities.

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In this chapter we write from a stance that acknowledges the primacy of practice and at the same time we seek harmony between practice and theory so that each can inform and enhance the other in the pursuit of exemplary practice and rich, informed practice discourse. The primacy of practice is a concept that contends that practice comes first in the development of knowledge and that theory is developed from practice (Eisner, 1988). Theory without practice has limited purpose. This understanding of practice-based knowledge, as primarily developed through practice, privileges practice in the process of knowledge development.

Through theory and theorisation, practitioners and scholars alike can explore practice as a general concept to more deeply understand what practice is like. From this deeper understanding we present, in this chapter, a dialogue between theoretical knowledge generated by scholarship and knowledge generated within practice. Such dialogues serve to identify challenge points where practice and theory can enhance and inform each other. Realisations in practice can thus become catalysts for the generation of the next practice theory and for that theory to inform, underpin and enhance the next realisations in practice. Illuminating the connections between theory and practice makes practice theory relevant to everyday practitioners with the ultimate aim of achieving improved outcomes for practitioners and service users.

Professional practice is a lived phenomenon and that professional practitioners may be required to challenge current practices, to act ethically in uncertain and dynamic contexts and to have the courage to change both themselves and their practice worlds for the better. We argue that a coalescence of practice knowledge developed in practice and theoretical knowledge developed by research and scholarship is needed to bring this inspirational professional practice to life. We propose a model of practice-theory harmonisation. We place practice at the core of this model and contend that it is through authentic and respectful relationships between forms of knowledge and knowledge generators (scholars, researchers and practitioners) that theory and practice harmony can be established and sustained.

Practice theories are important for the support and enrichment of practice because they provide a lens through which to illuminate important aspects of practice and human life that would otherwise remain hidden. Importantly, practice theories provide a vehicle to develop thinking about what might be involved in the notion of practice (Green, 2009) and therefore to understand more deeply what practice is like.

J. Higgs and F. Trede (Eds.), Professional Practice Discourse Marginalia, 11-16.
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Practice as a concept and a lived experience has been the subject of a considerable range of literature and theorisation. Within this body of literature, practice has been described in general terms as a broad range of doings or patterns of activities (Rouse, 2007). These patterns of activities include the use of relevant equipment and material culture, as well as vocabulary and other linguistic forms of performances (ibid). In an exploration of contemporary theories of practice, Rouse interpreted three core domains of practice: embedded, quality embodied and transformative domains. In combination, these three domains of practice, or ways of understanding practice, provide a useful framework for the development of broad and deep understandings of practice and of the practices of specific professions.

Contemporary practices are embedded in traditions or practice contexts, which exert a powerful influence over the enactment of current practices and the formation of future practices. All practices are products of prior practices, shaped by contemporary circumstances and past histories (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Although it may be argued that practices comprise individual performances, these performances only become intelligible when viewed as belonging to, or embedded within, a practice tradition (Rouse, 2007). Practices may therefore be viewed as purposeful, situated and flexible engagements with the world, embedded in traditions and interactions with other individuals (Schwandt, 2005). Social practices exist and evolve in a context - a nexus characterised by an intimate weave of activity and objects, with a person’s position in the nexus determined by the relationships among things in that nexus (Schatzki, 2002). Practices are also intrinsically connected to and interwoven with objects. Physical contexts shape practices through their ability to enable and constrain particular practice actions (ibid). Distinctive artefacts (such as the doctor’s stethoscope) also play an important part in the implementation of any profession’s practice and often hold a significant symbolic meaning (of role, place and power) in the practice.

Practices are dynamic and transformative, as a result of changing patterns of collective performances of practice within and across cultures and individual practice performances enacted in response to particular social contexts. Human practices, by occurring under different conditions and in different places, generally occur with adaptive variations (Kemmis & Trede, 2010). The particularity of practice performances and individual responses to practice contexts creates conditions for practice transformation (Schwandt, 2005). The transformative potential of practice performances shape both practices and the individuals performing them. This understanding of the dynamic and transformative nature of practice draws attention to the significant influence of practice contexts on practice performances and the need to explore the manner in which these contexts shape particular professional practices. Practitioners have freedom to transform their practice.

In this section, practice has been illuminated as a complex phenomenon encompassing a dynamic and broad range of activities embedded in particular traditions and embodied in human performances. Practice traditions or contexts include both material (relevant equipment) and relational (individuals’ interactions with current practices) dimensions. Practices embodied in practitioners’ performances and embedded in practice traditions are continually evolving and are
transformative for both individuals and practices. Practice theory, therefore provides a useful tool to facilitate fine-grained examination of how both individual and contextual factors shape the development of specific practices enacted by individuals in unique contexts.

WRITING DISCOURSE FROM PRACTICE

In this section we explore how professional practice knowledge is developed in practice contexts. Individual practice contexts are united by their fragility, temporary nature, vulnerability and inclination to constant change (Bauman, 2000). Work life is undergoing rapid, profound and ubiquitous change, influenced by both technological development and the global economy (Lehtinen, 2008). These professional practice work contexts can exert powerful and often tacit influences on the development of practice knowledge, with the potential to either inspire the next generation of professional leaders or to perpetuate the weaknesses of the previous generation (Eraut, 1994). Thus, the development of professional knowledge in practice requires the critical use of concepts and ideas embedded in well-established professional traditions. This criticality demands intellectual effort, an encouraging work context (ibid) and ethical courage (Patton, 2014).

Professional practice is built upon a solid foundation of specific practice knowledge that comes to life through practice performances (Kemmis, 2012). Professional practice involves creation of new understandings during practice (Higgs, 2012), with professional knowledge constantly generated and transformed in the service of others (Pitman, 2012). Professional practitioners are not bound by a rigid set of rules and performance directives; rather they take justifiable and considered action in given circumstances, even if that action challenges taken-for-granted traditions in a field. Professional practice is therefore inherently particular, relating to a specific individual in a specific circumstance, and (as best practice) seeks to achieve the best outcome for each individual. Practice-based knowledge is developed through practitioners’ actions and is transformative for the practitioner, the people with whom the practitioner works and eventually, the practice tradition.

Knowledge generated in practice is developed through and from practice experiences and is therefore contextualised, authentic and dynamic. This knowledge constantly evolves as practitioners seek optimal solutions for often complex and unique problems. This knowledge is embedded in practice contexts and embodied in practitioners “doings” and “sayings”. As such, some, or even much, of this rich, relevant and authentic practice knowledge may never enter written practice discourses. For example, individual practitioners’ realisations from practice are rarely reported in peer-reviewed professional journals and textbooks. This knowledge is more often shared via verbal discourses between practitioners and sometimes during professional development sessions.

We need to develop strategies for sharing practice knowledge.
A MODEL OF PRACTICE-THEORY HARMONISATION

In previous sections we have discussed important contributions of research and scholarship as well as practice performance to the development of rigorous, credible and authentic practices and theories about practice. Building on previous sections, we now propose a broader model of practice-theory harmonisation. This model aims to bridge these two knowledge development spaces and harness the strengths of both in order to develop practice theory and knowledge that is credible, useful and most importantly enables practices that improve outcomes for those people with whom professional practitioners work.

We have placed practice at the centre of this model (Figure 2.1) and have identified socio-cultural or relational spaces as crucial to the harmonisation of practice-generated knowledge and practice theories. People are key elements of the success of this process. Relationships formed between scholars and practitioners are important because knowledge development in practice is largely an embodied and oral discourse while knowledge development through scholarship and research is largely a written discourse. Relationships between academics and practitioners provide a conduit for idea generation and for knowledge transfer between academic and practice environments. It is through this knowledge transfer, that propositional knowledge or practice theory can be enriched by practice experience and practitioners’ knowledge can be extended by research and theorisation. We propose that people, through the relationships they form, provide a bridge between these two important discourses.

Practice-theory harmonisation requires the development of sustained relationships between academics, researchers, theorists, students and practitioners. These relationships are best built on a solid platform of trust and respect. They should be mutually beneficial with each partner acknowledging the benefits of the relationship. Through these relationships academics are able to embed current practices in theory, and practitioners are able to combine current practices with theory. The end result is enriched, authentic and critical practice.

Practitioners who transition from practice to academia, often referred to as “pracademics”, are able to provide a bridge between practice-based knowledge and professional discourse. Practitioners entering academia bring authentic and rich practice knowledge, informed by theory and forged by daily practice in authentic practice contexts. As pracademics engage with university curriculum they refresh and extend their theoretical understandings of practice and this allows them to harmonise practice knowledge developed through practice with practice theory developed through research and scholarship. However, as time passes, pracademics (unless continuing to work in practice) may lose contact with practice and become more deeply steeped in academia and their ability to harmonise practice and theoretical knowledge will diminish. This highlights the importance of sustained relationships between academics and practitioners to enable continued harmonisation of practice and theoretical knowledge. Workplace learning educators, practitioners who teach pre-entry students in the workplace, provide a valuable link for academics, practitioners and students in this harmonisation and dialogue space.

What can we learn from practice colleagues?
Research relationships between academics and practitioners open up another important space for practice-theory harmonisation. When academics and researchers have strong relationships with practitioners, opportunities for authentic research projects can be explored. Importantly, practitioners are able to identify meaningful areas of practice to research and in so doing, shape research direction. Research partnerships between practitioners and academics, where practitioners contribute practice knowledge and academics contribute research knowledge and skills, open up powerful spaces to shape current and future professional practice discourses.

Figure 2.1. A model of practice-theory harmonisation

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have argued that coalescence of practice theories, developed through research and scholarship and knowledge generated in practice, is central to the development and enactment of exemplary professional practice and the dynamic generation and shaping of professional practice discourse. Understanding practice as a lived phenomenon and practice theory as its interpretation in professional practice discourse is an important foundation for this process. Theories provide ways of thinking about inspirational practices while practice incorporates embodied knowledge or “ways of doing” to achieve best outcomes for professional practice clients and communities in uncertain and dynamic contexts. We have introduced a model of practice-theory harmonisation to assist practitioners and academics to coalesce theoretical and practical knowledge in the development of inspirational practice. Practice is at the centre of this model. Practitioners and academics are
encouraged to purposefully seek and develop positive relationships with each other in order to develop exemplary practices that will meet the complex and fluid demands of 21st century society.

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