

Round-table Discussion - Theme F

Tuesday 10th November, 13.30 - 14.15

Challenges in the Delivery of Professional Doctorates: Integrating Clinical and Research Training for Psychologists

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The overall aim of this paper is to offer a perspective on professional doctorates derived from a specific setting driven by the accreditation requirements of a particular professional body and the ways in which these interface with QAA standards for the achievement of doctoral level work. More specific objectives relate to an elucidation of the many different facets of such an exercise, and an assessment of the generalisability of these factors to the design of professional doctorates in other fields of practice.

The development of the programme under review will be described with a particular

illumination of its overall aim and overarching philosophy that address the professional doctorate issue of integrating research with professional practice. In the context of the programme considered here, the overall aim of the course is to enable candidates to become competent reflexive counselling psychology and psychotherapy practitioners with the capacity to integrate theory, research and practice at a high level of personal and professional functioning, to apply a broad range of insights and skills in different practice settings, and to make a contribution through their professional activities to developments in the field of

the psychological therapies. The programme draws attention to the fact that, from a more general and traditional perspective, research and practice sit alongside each other in an uneasy relationship that brings to the fore a particular tension that is generally in evidence in many professional fields; namely, that there has been a tendency for practitioners to talk to each other in one setting, while researchers talk to each other in another. The dominant focus in the programme described here, in terms both of curriculum design and related debates, concerns itself directly with these tensions and their implications and offers an opportunity to review the implications of inviting candidates to find their way through these in order to bring some cohesion to this particular professional field as a whole, as well as to the clinical setting.

Three key areas will be reviewed as central to the development and delivery of the doctoral programme being considered here, and which, it is argued, have more general relevance to the development of professional doctorates. Firstly, there is the requirement for a critical reflexive capability, a requirement of considerable complexity and challenge, and highlighted as such by a number of authors writing within different fields and from different perspectives (e.g. Etherington, 2004; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; McLeod, 2001). Secondly, there is the requirement to produce evidence of a significant contribution to the practice field, a requirement which means that candidates cannot engage in 'ivory tower' research, but instead must enter the practice field directly and evidence the ways in which the field being researched either underwent some change as a result of research efforts (e.g. Reason and Bradbury, 2008), or at least the ways in which that potential is present. This demands also an understanding of the importance of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) and the ways in which this is manifested in particular professional settings. Thirdly, there is the development of an authoritative stance. Traditionally this has been connected with a rather narrow form of knowing that has tended to exclude experiential forms of knowledge that might not be in immediate awareness (Giddens, 1987). Finally, there is the issue of the kinds of research methodologies that need to be considered in the context of a professional doctorate and the ways that an integrative stance, combining both research and practice, challenges more traditional forms of research that support the potential fragmentation derived from attempts at 'objectivity'. The fields of counselling psychology and psychotherapy, based in subjective and intersubjective ways of knowing, represent professional settings that raise key philosophical and epistemological issues, and that demand a more complex understanding of how knowledge is derived

and evidenced. The positivistic and more fragmented approaches to research are difficult to support within this reflexive, phenomenological and practitioner focused realm.

The different issues highlighted above will be considered separately, as well as from the perspective of how they interrelate. The objective is to highlight the ways that these requirements potentially differ from those of a more traditional PhD, as well as bringing out the ways in which these can pose a considerably greater challenge to candidates who undertake an educational programme of this kind. In the current climate, where the professional doctorate is sometimes portrayed as 'less than' the PhD, these considerations are interesting and will hopefully stimulate some debate. It is suggested that the programme reviewed here is both unique in terms of the ways that it brings a number of different ideas together, while also being indicative of the issues faced generally in the development of professional doctorates.

References

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- Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2008) *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (second edition). London: Sage.