

THE THEORIST-PRACTITIONER GAP: BRINGING THE TWO SIDES CLOSER TOGETHER

Lyn Gardner and colleagues outline the philosophy, principles and development behind projects to improve the links between nursing practice and academia

Abstract

As the gap between practice and academia grows, strategies are needed to ensure effective communication between the sectors. Failure to do this means nurses on the ward are at risk of becoming little more than technicians. Projects such as City Nurses and those linked to the Wales Centre for Practice Innovation are aimed at reducing the physical, social, psychological and professional gap between practice and academia. A practice innovation network connects and helps publicise a growing number of practice innovation units where clinicians and academics collaborate. Often the basic initiatives that result can have a greater impact on the lives of service users than larger and more ambitious projects.

Keywords

Innovative collaboration, nurse academics, practitioners, theory and practice

NURSE EDUCATION in the UK moved out of the health service and into the higher education sector in the 1990s. It was around this time that the term 'theory-practice gap' was first used in the nursing sector. As practising nurses and nurse academics continue to drift further apart, targeted strategies are required for them to communicate and work together effectively. This article outlines the philosophy,

principles and development of the Wales Centre for Practice Innovation (WCPI) and briefly describes some of the projects taking place at the Caswell Clinic, one of the first practice innovation units to be established and accredited by the WCPI.

Nurse educators used to be employed as part of the NHS, often working in the same buildings as their practice colleagues. After the move to higher education, educators found themselves with new employers, job titles, roles, mission statements, sometimes in buildings miles from the hospitals and clinics in which their practice colleagues worked. The emerging notion of the theory-practice gap was neither ideological nor academic; it was not simply a gap between two different ways of thinking about the relationship between theory, research and practice. It was the beginning of a growing physical separation between two groups of people with different jobs, employers and priorities, who were geographically separated from one another and who tended to enter each other's space on pre-arranged occasions only.

Practice development

The growing distance between nurse clinicians and nurse academics is pushed to its extreme by Roger Watson and David Thompson (2008), both eminent university professors, who argue that the development of nursing practice is no longer any business of nurse lecturers and professors.

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Date of submission
July 12 2012

Date of acceptance
October 24 2012

Peer review

This article has been subject to double-blind review and has been checked using antiplagiarism software

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