CHARLOTTE ROYEEN AND PAULA KRAMER

3. PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE

A Pragmatic Overview

Professional preparation for practice is a complexity of knowledge, inquiry, aspirations and culture that spans a multitude of fields. Regardless of the professional field under consideration, the goal is the same – to prepare students to become practitioners in the profession. In this chapter, we focus on four main areas as a pragmatic overview to preparation for professional practice: (1) a brief history of professional preparation for practice in the United States, (2) based upon metaphor, a descriptive model, related to professional preparation for practice, and (3) issues pertaining to preparation for professional practice, culminating in a revised model. The chapter ends with (4) a summary and key considerations for the future of professional preparation for practice.

A Brief History of Professional Preparation for Practice in the United States

In the United States, the professions of divinity, law, and medicine were at the forefront during its origins. These three fields have long been recognised as mature professions, and preparation for practice in these fields has recently been the focus of ongoing study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Shulman, 2005). Mature professions are those having, to a greater or lesser extent, the following five characteristics: (a) a body of theory and research, (b) placement of personal need to greater good of service to society in some manner typically codified by a code of ethics, (c) privilege of the members of the profession to practise in an exclusive or unique area according to some form of community sanction such as accreditation, licensure, or other such regulation, (d) authority to practise without interference from those not in the field, and (e) embracing the cultural values or norms of the profession (Lal, Khanna, Chandani, & Nahar, 1998).

When the United States first began, in these mature professions, students attended classes and were granted degrees as a matter of course (in cursu) at the end of a program of study, with perhaps a short paper required. Mostly, however, the preparation for practice was the completion of a course of studies with minimal, if any, evidence of having learned. As university and graduate education evolved in the United States, professional preparation changed to granting of a degree qualifying the student, upon completion, to practise based upon merit (pro meritis) that consisted of completion of courses, examinations and a thesis

J. Higgs et al. (Eds.), Realising Exemplary Practice-Based Education, 25–32.

(Robbins-Carter & Seavey, 1986). Thus the United States changed, as did most of the world, to a process of deserving or merit to practise in a profession based upon successful completion of prescribed or delineated tasks that are, in some manner, agreed upon by the profession. Concomitantly, accreditation agencies for the specialty certification of these professions arose in the United States, posing a unique method of certification of professional education that is not replicated worldwide. Across the world, accreditation of training programs and professional registration ensure quality of professional programs and their graduates.

A Descriptive Model Based upon Metaphor

Prior to posing a metaphorical model for professional preparation for practice, just what is meant by professional practice needs clarification. Professional practice is defined as the use of one's knowledge in a particular profession. Higgs, Loftus, and Trede (2010) suggest that professional practice is "a social practice to serve, contribute and to improve the world" (p. 3). Preparation for professional practice is the collective set of activities prescribed for completion of study in order to be eligible to practise in a field. The categories of the collective set of activities are what constitute the metaphorical model of professional preparation for practice based upon Sullivan and Rosin (2008), as presented in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 presents a descriptive model based upon activities and attempts to capture categories of professional preparation across all professions in three metaphors – habits of the mind (to think), habits of the hand (to act), and habits of the art (to do in a skilled manner). A habit of the mind is the metaphor for cognitive learning, thinking, and other such intellectual activities. A habit of the hand is the metaphor for the skills or sets of skills unique to and shared across a profession. A habit of the hand includes the cycle of practice and reflection upon practice that transforms the tacit knowledge of novices into expert knowledge over time. A habit of the art is the metaphor for the doing of the profession at the highest level of practice while embodying the values and mores of the field. No metaphor is perfect. The metaphors depicted in Figure 3.1 may overlap, in part, since we believe that habits of the art include the cycle of practice, and reflection upon practice, which transforms novices' tacit knowledge into expert knowledge over time.

Brint (1994) and Sullivan, Colby, Wegner, Bond, and Shulman (2007) presented six characteristics of professional learning for practice which are related to all professions. Although they do not agree on the order, the concepts presented are quite similar. As their ideas are presented, they too shall be linked to the metaphors presented in Figure 3.1. First, there is learning fundamental knowledge and skills – including academic knowledge, theories, understanding of research and the ability to recognise changes in society that relate to knowledge. We postulate that this area of learning most relates to habits of the mind as presented in Figure 3.1.

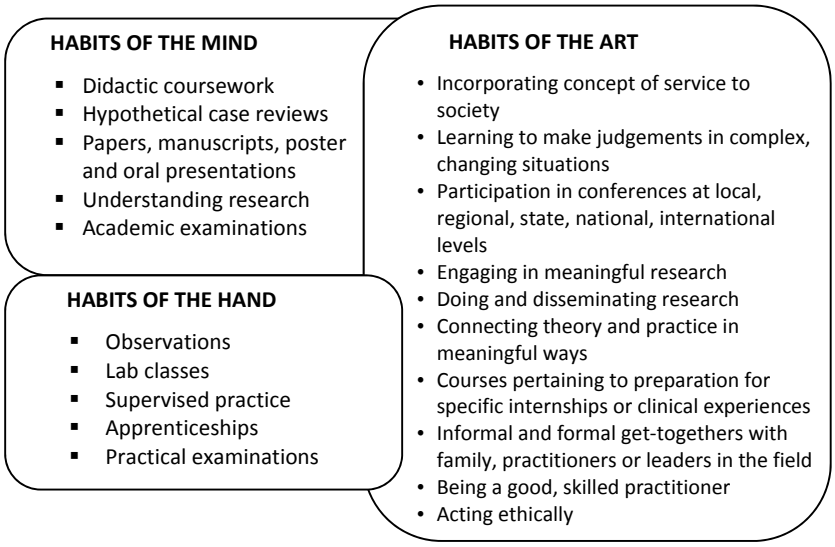

Figure 3.1. Metaphorical habits. Model based upon Sullivan and Rosin (2008)

Second, there is practising learned knowledge and skills in the field, which may be referred to as an apprenticeship and is reflected in Figure 3.1 as habits of the hand, or doing. Third, Brint (1994) and Sullivan et al. (2007) each speculated upon the ability to engage in complex practice – this involves learning from experience, combining the knowledge from the academy with knowledge learned in the field. Learning to be reflective and reflexive in one's own practice to enhance further learning is a part of this. We postulate reflectivity and reflexivity to be in the metaphorical category of learning the art of the profession, or habits of the art. Fourth, preparation for professional practice requires learning to make judgements in a situation that is uncertain. This involves taking knowledge learned in the academy, using professional judgement that is gained in the field and applying it to particular situations in the field, which we postulate belongs in the metaphorical category of habits of the art. Fifth, a sense of service is part of professional preparation for practice, since professions serve society and students must understand (learn) that they are responsible to society and be willing to serve society. We categorise this as the metaphor of habits of the art. Sixth and finally, Brint (1994) and Sullivan et al. (2007) identify learning to engage in a professional community as preparation for practice. Professions are communal and students need to learn to become part of and engage in the professional community. We also place this last characteristic in the category of habits of the art. It is interesting to note that most of these six characteristics presented by Brint (1994) and Sullivan et al. (2007) fall into the metaphorical category of habits of the art – though undoubtedly they are related to the other two categories in some manner.

Issues Pertaining to Professional Preparation for Practice

Each profession typically has a prescribed set of activities that have different percentages of time or commitment within each of the categories of metaphor of the model, and which are addressed in various ways in the other chapters in this book. For purposes of this chapter, categories or professional preparation activities are listed as mutually exclusive, when in fact they are not. The salient point is that almost all preparation for professional education includes educational activities pertaining to each of these metaphors. It is the methods and tools of how the activities are accomplished and the amount of value or related time spent in each of these metaphorical categories that vary by profession and standards of education. Different professions emphasise these six characteristics to different degrees.

From our collective experience and from the literature, it appears that most of the "academic" university time is spend in habits of the mind, with habits of the hand the next most addressed, and with habits of the art receiving the least amount of academic educational time. Perhaps these relative weights need to be changed, with habits of the art receiving the most focused time and study on part of learners. If so, how would educational preparation differ?

There is rarely equal attention given to thinking, performing and professional activities. For example, the education of lawyers emphasises "how to think like a lawyer," with minimal attention to habits of the hand and habits of the art (Sullivan et al., 2007). More recently, medical education has focused on learning from experience and problem-based learning (Garvin, 2003), which attempt to assist learners in transitioning from habits of the mind to habits of the art. In many professional education programs, however, the two key concepts that rise to the surface are signature pedagogy (case methods in law; medical rounds in medicine) of the profession, coupled with some form of apprenticeship. Yet apprenticeship may not even be called that, as the intensity, length and commitment required in each profession vary greatly.

A great concern arises related to how to increase knowledge and skills as practice changes and grows over time and how best to foster well-reasoned decision making, including the development of practical judgement in complex situations. Decision making and practical judgement are potentially the most difficult of the six characteristics to teach. The Carnegie Interdisciplinary Seminar held from September 2002 to December 2003 focused on teaching for practical responsiveness (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). This was viewed as potentially "a unifying calling for educators in the contemporary academy" (p. 45). Working with professors from a wide range of liberal arts and sciences, they found that a common theme emerging was the hope to foster practical judgement in their students. The intent was not to teach critical thinking, but to develop students' responses to ever-changing situations in ways that demonstrated skill and insight and could be defended (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). Sullivan (2010) described the twin elements of learning as the development of knowledge and judgement as a foundation of joining theory and practice, the penultimate habit of the art.

All the previous literature cited indicates that the most complex and intangible part of preparing professionals is helping students and novice professionals to deal with the nuances of practice. Practice requires us to think on our feet, understand the client's needs, discern the context of the situation and provide the best possible response. This requires us to quickly and, hopefully, expertly use our practical reasoning to make professional judgements about the situation. To do this, one should have a thorough understanding of what we are calling the habits of the mind, coupled with the habits of the hand. One expects that the habits of the art will be the outcome, but we have all seen professionals who were excellent students and yet were just competent professionals or could not successfully complete apprenticeship education.

How does one teach the art of being a skilled lawyer or the bedside manner required of an outstanding physician? It is somewhat intangible. It requires people to be able to use their knowledge in action, to automatically respond to needs as if that response was intuitive rather than based on learned information. Does it come from mentoring? Is it based on experience? Is it personality based? It is somewhat amorphous, and even mystical? Can it really be taught? Garvin (2003) suggested that case-based teaching and problem-based learning experiences enhance this ability by providing group learning situations where students learn from each other and are exposed to different ways to think through problems. These methods may promote more reflection on actions and models of how to work through a complex situation.

Our second iteration of the model, Figure 3.2, reveals one view of how to model and conceptually think about these issues as presented.

Figure 3.2 presents a "triangle of experience," predicated upon mentorship, interaction with practice, coupled with reflection and reflexivity as the critical, intervening set of experiences that address the integration and synthesis essential for the habit of the art called for by Sullivan and Rosin (2008). That is, we may not know exactly how to foster and develop integration of all three metaphorical habits, but we have a pretty good idea that it is the triangle of experience that allows it to grow and develop, from the student level to the expert level, over time and engagement in the activity of the practice of the profession. How much do our current academic programs truly address learning in the triangle of experience? Is that another venue for assessment of how we develop practitioners?

Along with Figure 3.2, two additional key elements should be considered. First, there are the major influences on practice-based education that Higgs et al. (2010) identified. These are consumers, interest groups, practitioners, professional groups, disciplinary groups, associations, funding agencies, regulatory agencies, governments and employers. This is an exhaustive list of influences on practice that greatly contribute to its complexity and ever-changing nature.

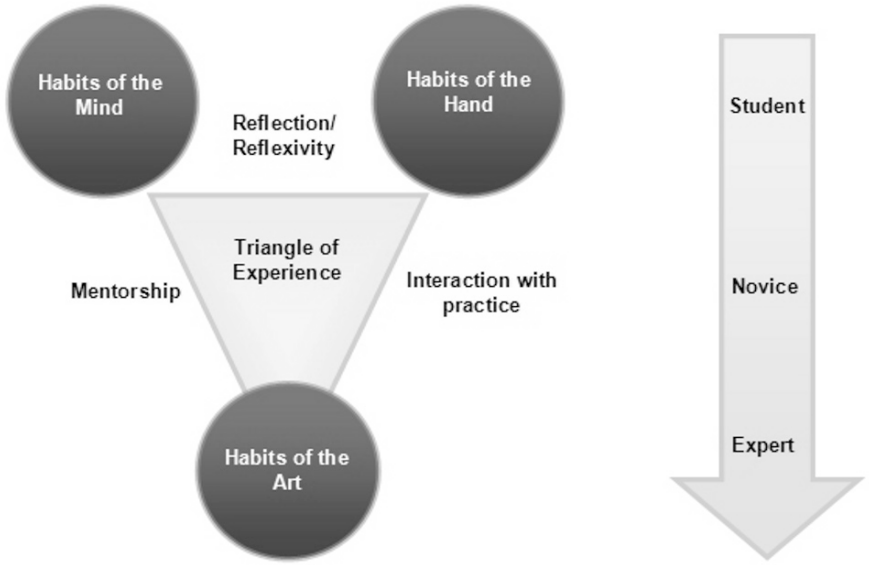

Figure 3.2. Revised metaphorical habits for preparation for practice
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The second key element that needs consideration is what Cherry (2010) calls white space. White space may be considered as yet another metaphor, but this time for the unknown. The white space is that which research does not yet reveal and may not reveal regarding preparation for professional practice. It is a novel concept that allows for expansive consideration of that which we do not know about professional preparation for practice.

Summary and Key Considerations for the Future of Professional Preparation for Practice

This chapter has presented a brief history of professional preparation for practice in the United States, a descriptive model for considering professional preparation for practice, and identification of issues pertaining to education for professional practice culminating in a revised model. We now present what we consider are three fundamental issues that need urgent attention in preparation for professional education in the future. These are the amount of content addressed, the management of content, and an articulated way of developing the art of practice.

In 1974, Mayhew and Ford identified that with increasing amounts of research and knowledge, the ability of any educational platform to keep a student abreast was lacking. That was in 1974. How much has changed since then? Yet how do curricula typically address this issue? By adding more content – something which

Dewey would view askance. We have to be better at developing core knowledge for what Meyer and Land (2005) termed "threshold learning," that which serves as a throughway or portal for the learner to go to the next level of knowledge, understanding and synthesis.

Similarly, we are inadequately developing professionals as information managers. The successful practitioners of the future will have ways and methods of effectively and efficiently managing data to discern salient points and key features for synthesis and application. Just as there has been a call for general health literacy, we make a call for data and information management literacy as expressed by Mandinach, Gummer, and Muller (2011). This would, in fact, take us beyond "evidence-based practice" into "information-based practice" using all forms of evidence, including understanding and implementation of theory, experience of practice, and use of records and context synthesised or tailored for targeted use.

Finally, we need to continue to explore ways to educate students for the art of practice. Despite how amorphous this may be, students need to learn how to think on their feet and apply their knowledge. They need to learn how to become reflective and use all the resources available to them, both from an information management perspective and drawing from their own experiential perspectives.

In closing, the words of Higgs et al. (2010, p. 11) foreshadow how to address the future of education for practice:

> Education for future practice involves the pursuit of clarity of shared purpose in the midst of turbulence.

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Charlotte Brasic Royeen PhD, OTR/L
Dean of the Edward and Margaret Doisy College of Health Sciences
Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, Missouri, USA

Paula Kramer PhD, OTR
Professor and chairperson, Department of Occupational Therapy
Samson College of Health Sciences
University of the Sciences, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA