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Professional Socialisation and Identity Formation
in Rural Health Education

by

Lisa Dalton RN, BN, Grad Dip Adv. Ng, MN

submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

June 2008

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The study offers a critical theoretical consideration of underlying perspectives informing rural health education in an undergraduate nursing, medical and pharmacy program. A new research approach was developed and tested for examining the effects of different individuals and groups (from academics to rural health practitioners to undergraduate nursing, medical and pharmacy students) using different patterns of language in the socialising process of rural health education. The thesis describes and demonstrates the use of critical discourse analysis as a means of facilitating critical awareness and stimulating research practice focussing on rural health education. Critical discourse analysis applies to a range of semiotic methods for examining text, such as natural instances of written and spoken language, with the objective of gaining insights into the meanings of a text and what it signifies. Emphasis is placed on the way individuals and groups use language, where texts construct the social world and influence the way identity is formed.

The study builds on and contributes to work in rural health education by specifically focussing on the practice of rural health education in the undergraduate nursing, medical and pharmacy programs at a university participating in this study. Although studies in this area have examined the predictive factors that might attract students to rural practice and described various education models, there has not been research into rural health education as a process of professional socialisation. The study provides additional insight

into drivers for students' adaptation to rural culture and the role health science academics and health professionals play in rural health education as socialising agents. Although numerous studies have studied students' satisfaction with their rural learning experiences, academic performance and claims of rural intentionality, little analytic attention has been paid to identifying other unassumed outcomes of rural health education. In this study, the analytic focus on students' personal and professional identity formation as an outcome of rural health education enables another contribution.

The study findings indicate that different groups construct rural health education in different ways, for different purposes to serve different interests. From this study it was concluded that the pedagogical space for rural health education in the undergraduate nursing, medical and pharmacy programs is a contested site. Findings shows the body of knowledge known as rural health, within the undergraduate nursing, medical and pharmacy programs at the participating university was found to be ill defined. The way individuals and groups know rural health education is always mediated by and through language. Thus, the meanings and interpretations available to them about its purpose, or even the nature of rural communities, are never transparent or neutral representations. In this study, these representations tended to construct rural communities within deficit understandings. Whether constructed as a rural health workforce supply strategy or a component of the generalist core curriculum, these rural deficit understandings had significance for students' socialising experiences

and the way they shaped their personal and professional identities.

The findings suggested in this thesis are intended to trigger subsequent research into the study of language in use and meaning-making within the day-to-day practice of rural health education. Language use in rural health education appears to play a central role in enabling or constraining the goal of attracting students to rural practice as a viable career option. It is therefore important that researchers within the discipline of rural health critically examine many of the concepts and constructs that have to date been largely taken for granted.

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TERMS USED IN THIS THESIS

Term	Usage
Boundary	A metaphoric indication of the limits of particular branches of knowledge and social practices.
Boundary Work	A set of differentiating activities that attribute selected characteristics to particular branches of knowledge on the basis of differing methods, values, stocks of knowledge, and styles of organisation.
Discourse	<p>A set of rules or constraints that make certain statements, and not others, possible in particular historical, social, and institutional contexts. More formally stated, it is "the multiple and competing sets of ideas and metaphors that embrace both text and practice" (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p 196).</p> <p>"[A] specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices through which</p>

	meaning is given to physical and social realities" (Hajer, 1995, p 44).
Governance	"[T]he process through which contemporary practices of governing take place" (Dillon & Valentine, 2002, p 6)
Hidden Curriculum	"... that set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory, non-linear and punctuational and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way".
Identity	A multidimensional set of categories that define sense of self, which are culturally and historically produced in relation to the available cultural texts
Ideology	"[The] value of belief systems accepted as fact or truth by some group" (Lotz, 1998). This can be understood as "an exercise of power through the manufacture of consent to or at least acquiescence towards' the uncritical use of language" (Fairclough, 1984, p 4).
Pedagogy	"[A] deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities [sic] are produced within and among particular sets of social relations" (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p 239).

Pedagogical Space	A metaphorical site in which the production of contested meanings and social practices are constituted in terms of what is appropriate or inappropriate to advance a particular interest.
Power	<p>Power is a key concept used for examining rural health education in this research. The theoretical understandings of power are draw from the writings of Foucault (1972, 1973, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1988, 1991, 1994). His main points on power are that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the most forceful types of power arises from the multitudinous, usually taken-for-granted rules that govern everyday social interactions; • there is an intricate network of rules that constitute the mechanisms of power; • power can therefore mold the thoughts and actions of people; • the analysis of power is best examined at the ground level - the everyday influences that affect people in their daily lives, and therefore, • practices, not intentions, must be the subject of study.
Professional Identity	The relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role (Schein, 1978).
Professional Socialisation	"... a subconscious process whereby individuals internalise behavioral norms and standards and form a sense of self and commitment to a professional field (Weidman, Twale

	and Stein, 2001, p 6).
Social Constructionism	“... seeks to explain the process by which knowledge is created and assumed as reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The basic contention of social construction theory is that meaning is created through social interactions.
Socialisation	“[A]n interpretative process involved in the creation of- rather than the transmittal of meaning” (Tierney, 1997, p 6).