

Foreword

John Mckinnon's book offers a new and exciting perspective on nurses' professionalism. This is in stark contrast to the picture we have of nursing that we inherited from the 19th and early part of the 20th Century, where the ideal model was that of detachment, compliance to the dictates of the expert (usually a male doctor), a fixed rather than changing view of how to behave, relatively low levels of education and training and above all a non-reflective view of the profession. Indeed, it was only with the greatest of difficulty that one could have called nursing a profession.

There are three models of nursing: craft, technician and professional. Craft knowledge has the following characteristics. It is rooted in practice and this rules out certain types of learning approaches. This means that imitation and scaffolding various attempts to perform the activities are key to the development of this type of knowledge. The teacher or facilitator is the expert practitioner and knowledge is derived from exposure to the performances of the expert. The expert is therefore not a skilled pedagogue but a skilled practitioner. The emphasis is on observing and imitating the practice. The justification for this is that the nature of the practice is better understood in these terms, that is, the learning object, becoming and being a good nurse, are craft activities.

The second of our models is the executive technician. This requires the nurse to perform in a particular way; to have, and be able to execute, a repertoire of pre-conceived actions. This is a rule-based activity and learning is understood as the assimilation of these rules and ways of enacting them, without recourse to critical reflection or situated understanding. The executive technician model recognises the value of research findings, and this means that it is not thought appropriate for nurses to interpret those findings for themselves. Nursing researchers generate findings which are then expressed as protocols for action, and the role of the nurse is to implement these protocols in the most efficient way they can. One consequence of this is that the knowledge which is being transferred lacks a sense of change, emergence, immediacy or relevance. This positions the learning object, these rules and protocols, outside space and time and effectively reifies it. The rules they follow are therefore not situation-specific or even sensitive to the particularities of the setting in which they are being applied.

Both of these can be contrasted with professional learning. Professional learning emanates and is derived from an understanding of the characteristics and functions

of becoming and being a nurse. Apart from the content and methodological knowledge that nurses need in order to function, they also have to take a variety of other factors into consideration and integrate them in a coherent, efficient and effective way. But above all, they have to act therapeutically, and accept that emotional attachment is the key to successful performance. This is the gist of the argument that John Mckinnon makes in this book, and it is radical and emancipatory. It understands nursing as emotionally charged, meta-reflective, a professional learning experience and above all a caring profession.

Professor David Scott
University College London,
Institute of Education
University of London