

undertaking research, study or training and professional development in ALLN, and has much to recommend it for those with a more general interest in adults' access to education and training.

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**The philosophy of nurse education**, edited by John Drummond and Paul Standish, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2007, 264 pp., £19.99 (paperback), ISBN 1-40-394833-X

The debate about the most effective method of, and home for, the delivery for nursing education is long running, from when changes were made to the pre-registration curriculum in the 1970s when training was delivered by nursing schools linked to local hospitals, through to the transfer of nursing education to higher education institutions in the 1990s, following a similar move in the USA in the 1970s and in Australia in the 1980s. The debate continues today. The move to a higher education environment may have represented for many the intellectualisation of nursing with greater importance being placed on teaching theory, whilst work-based learning and the role of professional practice play a lesser role (Royal College of Nursing 2007).

The complexity of what it means to be a nurse, the changes to the profession during the last few decades, and indeed the challenges faced in defining nursing as a profession (Royal College of Nursing 2003) have understandably contributed to conflicting views of how best to educate and train people to become good nurses. In this way nursing education is different from medical education, and higher education institutions as the most appropriate home for medical education have not been questioned in the same way, despite the importance of professional practice. This is probably because despite the modern approach of integrated learning in medicine, the science education involved in medical training sits more easily with the perceptions of traditional university learning. However, measuring 'professionalism' and the qualities required to be a good practitioner in terms of learning outcomes within the curriculum are challenges faced by both medical and nursing education, and indeed other professional education programmes.

*The Philosophy of Nurse Education* begins with an engaging introduction by the editors exploring ethics, politics and philosophy in and of nursing education and educational policy. The editors argue that although the current environment is less facilitative to the consideration of the philosophy of education, that is all the more reason for philosophy to play an important role (22).

What follows is a collection of papers written by renowned academics in the fields of nursing education, philosophy and professional education more widely. The book is loosely themed in four sections titled 'Ethics of Education and Practice', 'Profession, Knowledge and Practice', 'Curriculum and Expertise' and 'Politics of Education, Knowledge and Society'.

Standish's chapter reveals the complexity of nurse education, the relationship between the body of nursing knowledge and educational matters, the 'good' of nursing and what it means to be a nurse, noting that to 'educate a nurse is not merely to initiate them into a practice but to introduce them to the body of knowledge that informs practice' (109). The chapter enables the reader to explore why successfully educating nurses, striking the right balance and relationship between describing nursing and professional competency, is so challenging.

Lum examines this in more detail in Chapter 7. Lum argues convincingly that aiming to strike the right balance between theory and practice – the 'golden mean' – is unachievable and the belief that the golden mean exists is misleading. Lum's argument is particularly well presented and accessible to the reader.

In Chapter 9 Thorne and Sawatzky provide a concise overview of the role of evidence-based practice in educating nurses to work in the modern healthcare environment and the demand for accountability. They go on to argue coherently why this raises problems, both in terms of knowledge beyond the evidence versus solely evidence-based practice in effective nursing practice, and of the notion and definition of evidence within nursing.

In Chapter 10 Rolfe explores further nursing education, but also more broadly other applied subjects, within the postmodern university. Rolfe argues that the integration of nursing education within the university was 'driven by capitalist considerations of economy, efficiency and the modernization of the health service' (183), therefore highlighting the conflict within the modern university between traditional academic values of truth and justice and knowledge as a means to efficiency and profitability. Rolfe also offers some interesting thoughts about the challenges of nursing research (and research in other applied subjects) as academics struggle to maintain their roles as teacher and practitioner, and now researcher. Alongside this he describes the value placed on knowledge dissemination as opposed to knowledge generation in these subjects in order to produce effective practitioners, although the university continues to value research over teaching. The picture Rolfe paints for future nursing as an academic discipline could be a bleak one, unless there is a fundamental shift in higher education and the university adapts to become an environment where knowledge generation, dissemination and professional practice are equally valued.

One can't help but question whether a book of this title is the appropriate location for Allmark and Tod's chapter, 'Philosophy and Health Education: The Case of Lung Cancer and Smoking'. The chapter focuses on health education, with only a brief mention of the role of nurses as 'key-players in health education' (58) but does not discuss in any detail how nursing education prepares nurses for this role. However, the chapter does enable curriculum developers to explore ethics in health education and how this might be included in the education of nurses. Maybe *The Philosophy of Health Education* might be the title for the next volume in a series...?

This is a thought-provoking and distinctive addition to the literature on the philosophy of education, and in particular nursing education, with many of the chapters examining specific aspects of philosophical, ethical and political issues in a way which is accessible and stimulating for the reader. For those engaged in nursing education but who may be less familiar with philosophical enquiry, the book offers a route into exploring philosophy within the nursing education context. The papers examine philosophical challenges for the profession of nursing and nursing education in depth, whilst providing an overview of the context of the delivery of modern healthcare education. The book serves to remind all those aiming to train and educate the next

generation of nurses effectively, as well as those keen to learn how to be an 'expert' nurse, what a rewarding, but complex and challenging pursuit that is.

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**School choice: the findings**, by Henry J. Walberg, Washington, Cato Institute, 2007, 132 pp., £4.86 (paperback), ISBN 1-93-399504-1

This short, readable book provides an introduction to some of the key mechanisms through which the currently fashionable 'choice agenda' is being pursued in the US. It presents an overview of some of the empirical research literature on 'school choice effectiveness' to support an argument that it would be 'good public policy to give all families ready access to that choice' (110). Given that choice has become the watchword of current political discourse on public service reform in general, and schools policy in particular in the UK, the book is certainly topical for policy analysts here.

The introductory chapter positions the book's main discussion against a backdrop of failing public schools in the US and an assumption, itself questionable, that national economic growth is imperilled by educational under-achievement. In this context, the quest for policy instruments which might improve state education becomes public policy priority number one. Chapter 2 deals with charter schools, a US hybrid precursor of the new English city academies and trust schools, in which groups of parents, teachers, businesspeople or charities control schools which operate with relative autonomy outside of the usual constraints of the school district. Research is cited to demonstrate that these are more productive, costing less to achieve similar, or better, results than their public school cousins and that the competition generated by them spurs neighbouring public schools to raise their game. Other chapters report some interesting, sometimes counterintuitive, research findings. Private schools, half of which are Catholic, are attended by 11% of US children and are addressed in Chapter 4. We learn that they mirror more closely the ethnic composition of the population as a whole than do public schools, in addition to achieving better outcomes. Chapter 3 discusses voucher systems in which the parents of children in failing public schools are given vouchers which they may use to purchase a place at a private school. They appear to result in significant achievement gains for African-Americans to the extent, the author claims, that the race gap would be eliminated after seven years. Intriguingly, the same does not appear true for other ethnic groups. A fifth chapter examines how these three choice mechanisms – charters, private schools and vouchers – promote competition amongst schools and school districts which, in turn, leads to improved standards. This content might easily have been subsumed within the previous three chapters, since market competition is central to the overall analysis rather than a theoretical add-on. Throughout, the method is to present a meta-review of the literature on school choice policy programmes using outcomes of test performance, costs, parental opinion and social integration to calibrate their success.