

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Practice research partnerships in social work: Making a difference**

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Christa Fouché  
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Through the inspiring leadership of Professor Helen Rehr, Mt Sinai Hospital in New York was one of the first sites to establish practice research collaborations in social work. Her pioneering vision for practice research was to train future leaders who would develop international academic and practitioner collaborations that would focus their research on practice. Mt Sinai trained world leaders, among them Professor Irwin Epstein from Hunter College, at the City University of New York and Professor Lynette Joubert from the University of Melbourne. Epstein went on to write the wonderful book *Clinical Data-Mining* (2009), an exceptional resource for practice researchers. Joubert's seminal article, *Academic-Practice Partnerships in Practice Research* (2006) and her innovative mentoring of practitioners over the past fifteen years has resulted in writing partnerships that have advanced scholarship and created research that is critically relevant to practice (Joubert & Epstein 2006, 2013). It is heartening therefore to see that practice research has also engaged interest in New Zealand, with this new book providing an entry level text for practitioners who are interested in building practice research collaborations.

*Practice Research Partnerships in Social Work* provides practitioners with a good exploration of the nature of practice research and the way in which it can support quality social work practice. Set out in three parts, the book begins with a discussion of the context in which practice research sits, and the importance of developing and maintaining successful collaborations. Curiously Fouché suggests that emerging practice researchers may lack interest in this first part of the book. Yet this foundational understanding of the ways in which communities of practice come together to understand and strengthen practice seems to me to be a critical part of building a practice research culture that understands the important relationship between practice research and theory.

The second part of the book focuses on the practical aspects of designing and implementing applied research. In many respects this part is relevant to all beginning applied researchers, including those interested in practice research, as it lays out some of the fundamental elements of the research process, for example: undertaking a literature review, framing the research and developing research questions. It goes on to discuss two methods that Fouché considers

to be most relevant to practice research: action research and evaluation research. The argument for the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methods is well made, and there is a good discussion of data gathering methods and analysis.

Part three concludes the book by exploring the benefits of nurturing networks. It starts with a discussion of the ways in which research findings can be disseminated. This at first seems out of place in a section dedicated to nurturing networks, but when findings dissemination is used as a method of maintaining collaborative momentum, the logic of its inclusion becomes clearer. There is also a short section on research mentoring relationships drawing upon Fouché's *Growing Research in Practice* work (Lunt, Fouché & Yates, 2008). It is a pity that this important part of developing collaborative relationships is only touched on briefly. Researchers, I'm sure, would value a good exploration of some of the complexities of engaging in practice research partnerships. But maybe that is a book yet to be written.

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