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## Counselling and Psychotherapy Research: Linking research with practice

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### Towards professional wisdom: practical deliberation in the people professions

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Towards professional wisdom: practical deliberation in the people professions**, edited by L. Bondi, D. Carr, C. Clark and C. Clegg, Surrey, UK, Ashgate, 2011, 251 pp., Paperback, ISBN - 9781409407430

At a time when evidence-based practice dominates within the professions, this book is a welcome reminder of the value of the skills and knowledge that professionals bring to their practice. While evidence-based practice promotes the use of research evidence in decision making, this book brings together a variety of academics and practitioners to examine the role of wisdom in professional practice. The ‘people’ professions such as teaching, social work, nursing, ministry, psychotherapy and counselling, are represented in the book; professions which strongly rely on values, ethics, and caring. This book reminds readers that knowledge comes not only from scientific research, but also from the more tacit and intuitive aspects of what we learn and do in practice. The focus of this book relates to what constitutes ‘wise’ judgement and conduct in these professions, focusing on the art rather than the science.

The book is structured into three sections. The first section was the most valuable for me as a reader. It concretely outlines the theory and research behind such concepts as wisdom, knowledge, and expertise within the context of professional practice. Despite the many contributors in this edited compilation, the content flows well, building a strong case for the need for wisdom within the people professions. The value that wisdom brings through enabling professionals to possess good judgement, be adept, and deliberate on specific situations with the context of the general body of knowledge within a profession, is well reasoned.

The second half of the book focuses on personal and affective dimensions of the people professions, touching on topics such as ethics of care and the emotional side of practice. These chapters drive home the reasons why emotions, gender, relationships, and ethics are such an important part of the professions that, at their core, help people. Decisions

are not simple, and care must be carefully considered for each individual. Hence, the elements of practice which are subjective provide professionals with very important skills and knowledge, leading toward wisdom in professional judgment, as those practitioners learn and grow.

The third and last section of the book considers legislation and regulation in various professions. This section focuses on issues relating to the impact of state and professional bodies on how professionals work and make decisions. Several research cases in the fields of social work, counselling, and ministry are presented, and illustrate the complexity of this topic, touching on issues such as accountability, uncertainty, and relationship building.

This book is academic in that it uses research and builds its case in a scholarly manner, but at the same time, it is written for the practitioner, and is not simply theoretical, but is useful in its practical application of theory. It is pragmatic and provides good examples of how theoretical concepts such as wisdom, intuition and expertise apply to practice. This book is relevant for any practitioner working in a people or caring profession who wants to reflect on the various aspects of practice that contribute to their overall growth as a professional. While professionals need to keep up to date with the latest research for specific procedures or treatments in a field, this book allows readers to reflect on the importance of the more artistic side of the people professions, including those aspects which cannot so easily be measured, such as ethics and emotion. This softer side of practice remains important, and factors heavily into professional decision making. Gaining professional wisdom requires much learning and reflection throughout a career, as well as active practice that teaches through the very act of doing.

## *2 Book Review*

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to balance the application of research to their practice with a reflexive look at other forms of knowledge and why they are important. Combining the science and art of practice can only be beneficial to creating a well-rounded and thoughtful professional; essentially, someone who is wise.

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