

Professionalism and Philosophy: Understanding Workforce Change

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Within the allied health workforces in Australia and New Zealand there is considerable effort being invested to enable workforces to work across professional boundaries, and determining how to better utilise the assistant workforces. Frameworks such as the Calderdale Framework have provided a systematic way to enable groups to work through this process. There is evidence to support the success of such approaches, but there is not as much in the way of examination as to what is actually occurring at the professional bounds that allows for this change to occur. Similarly, philosophy is not routinely applied to provide potential frameworks to understand what is actually occurring while professional boundaries are being challenged.

The intent of this presentation is to use the concepts described by Pierre Bourdieu (French Sociologist, 1930-2002) to examine the porosity of professional boundaries, and how change processes can influence how professional bounds are perceived, and in turn how they can change over time. Bourdieu contends that we exist within social fields, and the space an individual or a group inhabits within this space is their habitus. The nature of an individuals or groups habitus is informed in part by the doxa, or the innate rules by which the group or individual operates by. In this presentation, it is discussed how change frameworks can challenge the doxa or unwritten rules of a group, which in turn can influence the perception of how porous the bounds of a professional habitus may be. A case is then made that the willingness to allow individual professional bounds to be more porous can be attributed to the concept of professionalism, and how an individual or a group chooses to live out (or not) being a professional.