

ABSTRACT

Deconstructing Understandings of 'Readiness for Practice' in Social Work:
Multiplicity and Meaning

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This thesis is informed by a research-oriented study in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The researcher's interest lay in deconstructing understandings of 'readiness for practice' in social work from the perspectives of multiple shareholders in social work education and practice. This research was initiated in response to increasing demands for social work interventions and concerns raised by allied professionals and others regarding the extent to which graduates of social work programmes are fit-for-purpose or ready for practice. Social constructionism provided the theoretical framework for this research and was paired with transcendental phenomenology to promote reflexivity, generate intersubjective knowledge, and deconstruct meaning-making processes about readiness for practice. The study employed four individual focus groups with selected shareholders in social work education, and a mixed group comprising educators, students, practitioners and allied professionals. The findings revealed the complexities in understandings of readiness, such as the powerful role of social work educators, practice teachers and the wider community, the significance of practicum experiences, critical discourses in social work and the role of heuristics and representativeness heuristics. They also pointed to the integral role of the student in translating learning into practice and reinforced the importance of self-evaluation and professional identity development in social work. Additionally, attention was drawn to practice assessment processes and interactions and professional gatekeeping responsibilities. This thesis highlights the need for professionals and schools of social work to pay deliberate attention to the numerous dimensions of social work training, not separately or sequentially, but simultaneously, to appreciate and influence how key factors come together to prepare professionals for practice. It recommends policy development for practicum and practice assessment and a status of social work study for The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Keywords: Karene-Anne Jacinta Nathaniel; social work education; readiness for practice in social work; preparation for practice in social work; social work practicum; professional gate-keeping in social work; social constructionism in social work.