Using Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy. John McLeod. London: Sage, 2016, 138 pp.

Reviewed by:

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John McLeod's latest contribution to his research series *Using Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy* invites practitioners, researchers and students to reflect on the many ways research can be utilised, from encouraging practitioners to think about how they practice, to improving client experience. McLeod identifies the barriers to the uptake of research by practitioners and offers contrasting perspectives through an alternative model that is immediately available for use by practitioners and researchers. He introduces his "Multiple Points of Contact" model as a unique solution to address the research-practice "gap" (p. 31) with the aim of making research relevant, accessible and inclusive.

Readers are offered several ways to consider research, which for McLeod is primarily the creation of "knowledge products" (p. xi). This book, like others in the series, is underpinned by the understanding of research as a "systematic process of critical inquiry leading to valid propositions and conclusions that are communicated to interested others" (p. xi). He offers a fundamental definition of research as "a shared, interdependent, global system of knowledge that relies on open access to ideas and freedom of debate" (p. xii). Readers are reminded at each juncture of McLeod's pluralist position, with his attention on the wider social context in which research occurs, and values that promote participation and innovation with the aim of improving client's experience of therapy.

In chapter one "practitioner attitudes to research" (p. 1) are explored using findings from three contrasting research approaches with the concept of Evidence Based Practice (EBP) as a starting point, and background to the book. This chapter exemplifies how research design itself constrains or opens up inquiry as to what can be discovered. Setting the scene for the rest of the book McLeod introduces the reader to Nic Midgley's (2009) concept of two contrasting perspectives to EBP, the "disseminators" who are concerned with better translation of research to practice, and the "revisionists" who argue for a "re-visioning" of the relationship between research and practice to develop a more "meaningful form of EBP" (p. 10).

In chapter two the disseminator perspective is offered to review a range of strategies that aim to reduce the gap between research and practice. McLeod differentiates between "individual versus collective, and top-down versus collaborative" dimensions (p. 14) to

assist practitioner or researcher readers orienting themselves to current or future involvement in research. This could be through various means including practice-research networks, scientist-practitioner models or through further training and/or access to research material. Unpacking the idea that "researchers and practitioners exist in different worlds" (p. 26) McLeod suggests it has some cogency. He explains that strategies for increased collaboration such as the Practitioner Research Networks (PRN's) are initiatives led by researchers and educators, and even where successful long-term collaboration has occurred and therapists' attitudes to research are seen to be more positive, there is little evidence of increased effectiveness of therapy for clients.

A revisionist perspective, on the other hand, includes "research-informed practice from a therapist perspective" (p. 29). This perspective is offered in chapters 3–5, where McLeod presents an alternative metaphor to describe the gap between research and practice. "Points of contact" (p. 32) refer to the many and varied interactions between research and practice, relationships and locations that exist through time, and through which new understanding and action can contribute to therapist's professional knowledge.

Chapter three was a highlight for me for several reasons, foremost being McLeod's unsettling of the status quo in various ways. He takes readers beyond simplistic binaries suggesting that "research knowledge offers a valuable counterpoint and a critical standpoint" (p. 35) to the therapist's use of personal knowledge, and he offers a wider dialogue between different ideas that he sees as essential for creating research knowledge. He argues that the interactions between knowledge that is personal and particular, and scientific knowledge that is "critical, de-centred and communal" (p. 35) can offer many significant contributions to practitioner expertise. This is no empty challenge to proponents of strategies promoting EBP that we find in chapter two, but a refined and nuanced alternative that invites deep and ongoing reflection.

The text moves fluidly from broad conceptual understandings to detailed explication of, for example, perspectives of knowledge for clinical practice. Assumptions that knowledge is "static" (p. 38), neutral or value-free are disrupted, the focus is less on describing what knowledge is, and more on the uses to which knowledge can be put for research and practice.

The book has a distinctly Vygotskian (1978) flavour inviting readers to consider how they might step into research activity from where they are currently located, rather than from a pre-determined position associated with general notions of what it takes to achieve research readiness. McLeod notes that "at the present time, research articles are predominantly written for other researchers" (p. 46), and suggests "it would be helpful if authors and reviewers of research articles paid a bit more attention to what their practitioner-readers might need to know" (p. 47), and the ways in which clients contribute knowledge to the field.

The distinction between disseminators and revisionists was critical to my understanding of this book. I also envisage it as a useful framework for understanding how dilemmas arise in multi-cultural practice, for example, where a dominant system utilises symbols

from another culture to suggest cultural appropriateness and sensitivity, with little change to existing ways of thinking (see Sue & Sue, 2008).

McLeod's revisionist perspective sidesteps the usual methodological quantitative/qualitative divide and the later developments in mixed-method, post-positivist approaches, by applying a more critical and reflective approach to how knowledge is generated, by whom, for whom, and the intended effects. His emphasis is on dialogue and collaboration, multiple views and contributions that avoid relativist positions. He reminds the reader that clinical practice does not occur within an economic or political vacuum as decisions around funding, approved types of therapy, the number of sessions allowable, reporting and accountability are increasingly imposed on or taken up by agencies in order to justify the delivery of their services. He encourages practitioners to become politically aware of how research itself is a political act where stakeholders have the power to determine what should be investigated.

This is a warm-hearted book about research, written as an invitation to practitioners to come to the research table, bringing the voices of their clients with curiosity and openness, a sense of inclusion and the means of collaboration. The book presents clear evidence of the author's human-centred focus, and takes a welcome ethical stance in an increasingly neoliberal context for practice.

The last three chapters concern ways to improve clients' experience of therapy, increase professional competence and remain open to new ideas within and outside preferred models of therapy. Here McLeod is inviting therapists to contribute to their own professional development by identifying ways in which their practice and research intersect and potentially generate useful knowledge for the field. Examples of multiple points of contact are the use of client feedback forms, undertaking action research, participation in peer support networks and professional practice groups. All of which can be used as a direct means to identify "the task of doing better therapy" (p. 85).

McLeod's writing is reflexively and reflectively operationalised in service of the subject of inquiry. He does not write from the detached perspective or abstract universalism described by Castro-Gómez as *point zero* (see Cedeño & Villoria-Nolla, 2012). His pluralist stance and disinterest in hierarchies of knowledge delimits boundaries without becoming prescriptive or moralising, and are among the main strengths of the book.

I would recommend this book for seasoned researchers to review and reflect on their work, and novice researchers to explore the many possibilities available to them for conducting and using research. I can only imagine the difference this book may have made to my understanding of research gained from formal studies, and the shifts in thinking that educators and students could explore (or resist) using this material.

Initially I thought the text was a reasonably conservative addition to the research series, lacking some of the innovative approaches from humanising, decolonising and critical research (see Paris & Winn, 2014). However subsequent readings led me to re-consider as McLeod moved seamlessly from epistemological-level analysis to general and then

particular forms of localised knowledge or inquiry—all framed within an ethical stance that demonstrates a power *with*, not power *over* approach. I was inspired by the ideas of "communities of practice" (p. 38) once it was contextualised within a revisionist approach where change, innovation and development can occur.

Written by a researcher-educator-practitioner, this book is a good fit for a wide target audience. It would also be useful for educators and training organisations, managers and policy makers due to its comprehensive and diverse approach to the topic. It is an accessible and sophisticated work that highlights the importance of understanding what contributes to effective therapy, how that can be measured and how information can be shared with others. If relevance is one of the key indicators of good research, McLeod has achieved this admirably with this text.

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