

Editorial

In this final issue for 2019, we celebrate the role of research and research methodologies in health professional education. The Australian & New Zealand Association of Health Professional Educators (ANZAHPE) established *Focus on Health Professional Education (FoHPE)* in 1998 to promote quality research in learning and teaching. The aim was to improve learning and teaching in health professional education, leading to better healthcare.

Research and evaluation are closely related in health professional education. Illing (2014) distinguishes between the two, claiming research involves the discovery of findings through critical or scientific inquiry, whereas evaluation assesses the value of something to make a judgement, usually with the aim of improvement. According to Ringsted, Hodges and Scherpbier (2011), health professional education research involves the study of “phenomena, relations and how and why what works for whom” (p. 696). To best inform teaching practice and gain acknowledgement by the health professional education community, research methodology needs to be rigorous and clearly outlined in research publications.

An expanding array of research methodologies are available to health professional education researchers. These may involve qualitative approaches, generally focusing on exploration, or quantitative approaches, generally focusing on objective measurement. Each of these methodological approaches reflects different views about research—typically from an interpretivist or positivist theoretical framework, respectively (Johnston, Hodges and Scherpbier, 2018). Increasingly, researchers are expected to be explicit about the theoretical framework underpinning their research methodology.

In this issue of *FoHPE*, we launch a new format, **Focus on Methodology**, overseen by Professor Liz Molloy. This format aims to introduce research methodologies and theoretical frameworks to health professional educators, ranging from the foundational to the more advanced and novel. Articles in this format will initially be by invitation only but at a future date will be open to general submissions. Our inaugural **Focus on Methodology** article is written by Associate Professor Margaret Bearman of Deacon University. Following a brief overview of qualitative research, Bearman provides a thorough, practical grounding in writing semi-structured interview schedules to collect rich qualitative data.

Research reports in this issue showcase an array of research methodologies. Three articles demonstrate different qualitative approaches: Murphy et al. analysed free-text responses to an online survey using content analysis; Ghiam, Loftus and Kamel-ElSayed analysed focus groups through thematic analysis informed by narrative inquiry and dialogism; and Wilson et al. analysed semi-structured interviews through thematic analysis using the Theoretical Domains Framework. In contrast, Ingram, Forbes and Jones used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design involving a survey with quantitative data followed by semi-structured interviews. In a discussion paper, Thomas, Kumar and Chur-Hansen explored the issues involved in recruiting students for research, including

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motivations to participate, ethical considerations, ways to improve participation and the impact of low participation on research rigour.

A rigorous approach to health professional education research is essential with any methodology. However, O’Leary (2004) reminds us of the importance of both left and right brain activity in research design—that is, the rigorous, analytical left hemisphere and the creative, imaginative right hemisphere. Research rigour, theoretical frameworks and creative research approaches will be explored in future **Focus on Methodology** articles.

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