

Reflections from the Guest Editorial Team: Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective

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Abstract: This serves as an introduction to the Special Issue on Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective for *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*.

Keywords: continuing education, lifelong learning, professional development, integrative practice, practice competency, program development, social justice

Two years ago, Patricia Gray and Dr. Darlyne Bailey began conversing about Patricia's role as the director of continuing education (CE) at the academic institution where she worked. Dr. Bailey and Patricia continued their discussions on CE and its importance to social workers and other allied professionals. Their conversations moved from the philosophical and the exchanging of ideas about the micro-macro divide in social work practice to the less discussed topic of "bridging the role of Continuing Education and lifelong learning." Dr. Bailey asked Patricia if she would be interested in filling this unmet need and in doing so through the *Reflections* journal's long reach.

At the same time, Patricia and other CE directors had recently started to share ideas about their roles and responsibilities in programming, adhering to multiple regulations, and working in collaboration with New York State Education. These conversations led to creating the "Continuing Education Consortium of New York City," with the group members' primary goal being to provide support to one another as they planned their independent programs. In one meeting, Patricia broached the idea of writing about CE in *Reflections*; the CE Consortium team said yes, and just like that, the journey began.

We all knew that, as it had for decades, CE provided staff and professionals opportunities to acquire and improve their knowledge, skills, and competencies. Further, with the increase in licensure renewal requirements for practice, professionals such as social workers needed CE units. Acquiring post-graduate competencies allowed professionals to respond to new and everchanging issues affecting individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations.

Considering the many benefits ascribed to CE, our Consortium knew that professionals wanted to ensure that they remained well informed to serve their clients. Additionally, Laal et al. (2014) opined that those who wanted to cope better with workplace changes continuously learned new skills and trained for new challenges.

The CE Consortium answered the call to reach across America through *Reflections* to provide social workers, allied professionals, directors, faculty, and other individuals the opportunity to

write about this lifelong journey called continuing education. We received manuscripts from CE consumers, who offered challenges to create a futures perspective for CE, such as combining social work and police. One author wrote about the possibilities that could bloom from supporting conversation and intervention between two distinct professions, thus benefiting clients served by both. Consumers challenged CE not to continue to offer the same mundane individual workshops where boredom quickly sets in, but to expand and think about ways to integrate professional practice, be on the cutting edge of social work practice, and disrupt the status quo. Finally, we reviewed manuscripts that depicted professionals sharing their commitment to mentoring, supporting, teaching, and learning from participants attending their workshops.

Ultimately, sixteen of the manuscripts reviewed showcased professionals dealing and coping with challenges to program design, strategies of helping experts become effective teachers, securing funding to support professionals, and the pros and cons of continuing education. Additionally, the authors reflected the teaching and learning notion outlined in the rich descriptions depicted in the manuscripts.

If there was ever a time in which we need CE, it is now. We live in a world where the coronavirus pandemic continues to create havoc across the world, especially within the United States' BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities. The virus seized upon the physical, emotional, and mental health of these individuals indiscriminately. Glaude (2020) speaks to the notion that the ugly underbelly of racism is out in the open where the hate, strife, oppression, and inequality exists and where the lie is more acceptable than the truth. Similarly, Yang (2018) discusses the advent of artificial intelligence and the disappearance of jobs, widening the chasm of income inequality for the poor. Finally, environmental issues such as fires and hurricanes affect and destroy communities, leading to food insecurities and making it almost impossible for individuals, families, communities, and organizations to flourish. Practitioners need tools to hone their knowledge and skills and to make a difference in the lives of our clients, institutions, communities, and organizations.

In hindsight, it felt like the stars aligned with Dr. Bailey's exploration of designing the Special Issue and the creation of the CE Consortium. Together, and with the support and encouragement of the *Reflections* team, a remarkable partnership now exists. Practitioners across the United States answered the call through an outpouring of submissions, which resulted in an entire issue entitled *Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective*, of which we are proud.

We hope that this Special Issue on continuing education reinvigorates your passion for sharing your wisdom, knowledge, and skills. Please continue to walk with us in CE's ongoing offerings and the pledge of lifelong learning.

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With Gratitude...

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