

Mental health discourse in education: Why practitioner psychologists need theory

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**18th Biennial International Society for Theoretical Psychology
Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen
21st August 2019**

Tom presented the paper as part of a symposium - *Education's measure: Today's student, tomorrow's citizen* - with Professor Jeff Sugarman (Simon Fraser University, Canada) and Associate Professor Tim Corcoran (Deakin University, Australia).

The presentation focussed on Tom's experience as both a researcher and a practitioner (in the family courts and also education settings) and the argument was made for ways of practising psychology that are founded on William James's dictum that '*...the faculty [mind] does not exist absolutely, but works under conditions; and the quest of the conditions becomes the psychologist's most interesting task.*' (James 2010 [orig.1890]: 1).

Tom concluded that practitioner psychologists need to:

Find ways of:

- problematizing the demands to measure young people's lives;
- identifying spaces in which we can challenge deficit models of the person.

Develop and maintain specialisms in:

- the experiential – subjective, emotional lives of children and young people;
- the relational – the nature of human relations across communities, schools, families;
- matters relating to representation – 'discourse', 'narrative'; 'voice'.

Change the curriculum:

- from a focus on psychopathology to consideration of theoretical principles;
- from processes of identifying and specifying difference to working out ways of reconstructing the environmental conditions that support young people's wellbeing.