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Methodological Considerations when Researching in a Diverse Assessment Landscape

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INTRODUCTION

Medical education researchers require a considered approach to their research questions.

This is particularly true around ontological, epistemological, and methodological considerations¹.

Correctly aligning the research aim(s), and these underpinnings, with the varied and diverse landscape that is often encountered in medical education assessment can present as the first and significant hurdle to researchers aiming to explore assessment practices.

The lead author of this poster is a PhD student. One part of his PhD has been to explore summative decisions that have been made in GP training in Ireland.

These summative decisions are influenced by individuals, communities of practice, and policies.

Exploring all factors in summative decision making in GP training requires careful consideration around the applied research methods.

AIM

To outline how, for one PhD researcher, a philosophical position and research methods were chosen.

METHODS

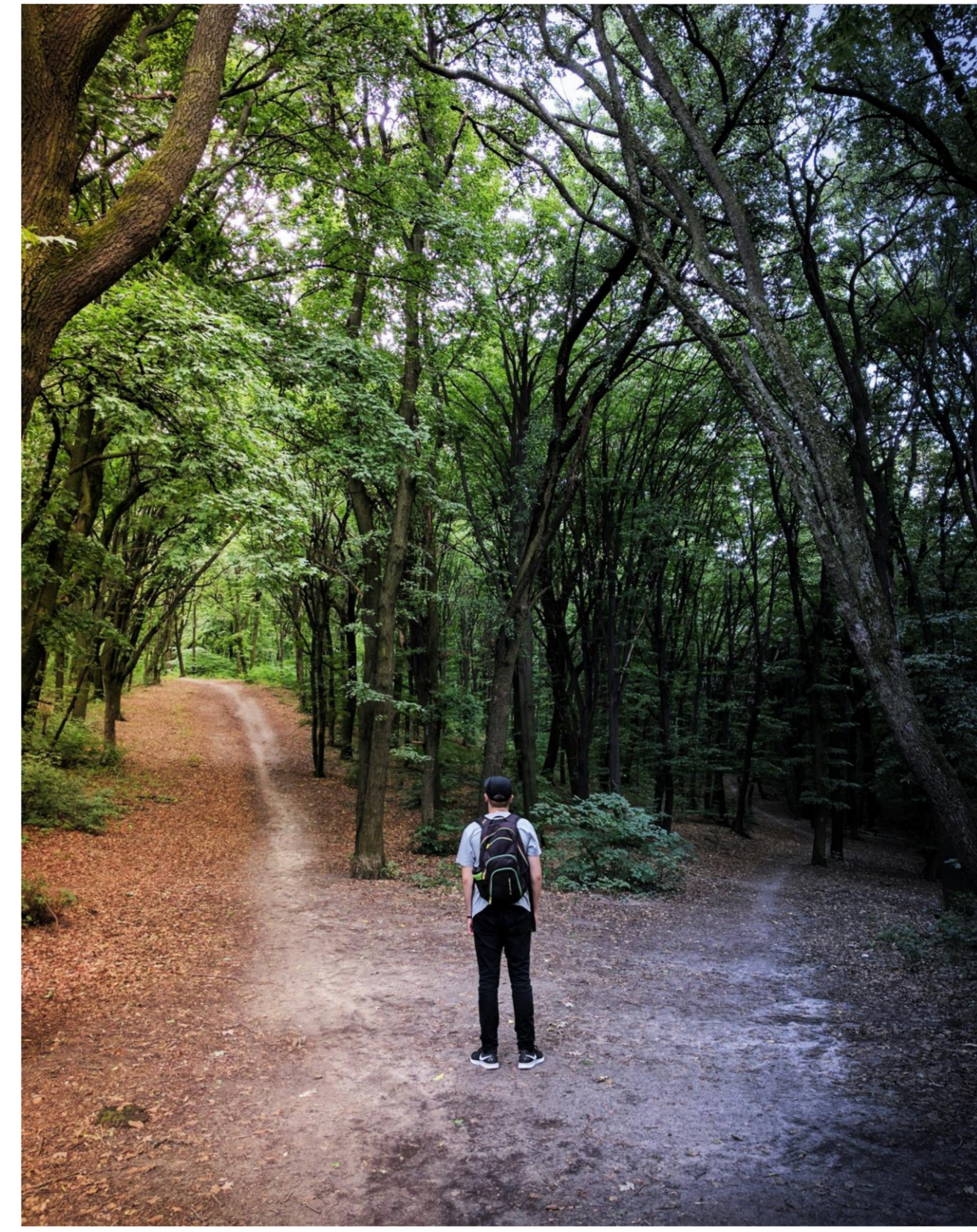
The framework of summative decision making in GP training in Ireland had up until recently centred around nine criteria.

Given that the overall research aim pertained to summative decision making, all criteria were included.

These criteria included hospital posts logbooks, clinical supervisor reports, academic supervisor reports, certification in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and a minimum number of hours spent in the out of hours GP service.

These areas vary in their ontological and epistemological underpinnings as assessment modalities.

The opinions held by both clinical and academic supervisors, and their considerations as groups have clear social constructionism elements. Whilst specific certification and minimum hours have traits in the spheres of realism.



When researching decision making – what are the right tools to encompass all decision-making factors?

OUTCOMES/RESULTS

The overarching philosophical position that was adopted was one of pragmatism.

Pragmatism allows for a variety of research methods, that align to areas of study, but also acknowledges the realities of *le travail prescrit et le travail réalisé [the work prescribed and the work carried out]*².

This encompassing approach was required to adequately address the research question – both the guidelines and the lived reality of the training community.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatism does not throw out the rulebook in relation to ontological and epistemological positions but deprioritises them to ensure that they do not act as artificial barriers, and instead focus on what works as defined by the consequence³. The consequence in this case being the summative decisions made in GP training.

Pragmatism allows for the following a thread of information across different methodologies and methods for the betterment of the research⁴.

When researchers are faced with research questions which, by their very nature, encompass multiple philosophical positions, we would recommend they consider acknowledging this and avoid being constrained to one position.

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Research Aim	Areas of Study	Philosophical Position of Area	Method Implemented	Overall Philosophical Position
Explore how summative decisions are made in GP training	Experiences of clinical and academic supervisors	Social constructionism (objective idealism)	One to one interviews	Pragmatism
	Policies and guideline documents	Critical realism (post positivism)	Discourse analysis	
	Certification required, hours spent in out of hours	Scientific realism (realism)	Discourse analysis	