

BOOK REVIEW

Promoting Health and Well-being in Social Work Education

Edited by Beth R Crisp and Liz Beddoe

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This book is an extended version of the special issue of *Social Work Education: The International Journal* (vol 30, no 6) published in 2011. Three new chapters include the introduction and conclusion by editors, Beth Crisp and Liz Beddoe, and an additional chapter on 'Social work education and health: knowledge for practice'. These additional chapters provide thematic structure to previously published chapters by social work educators from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

The content is nicely balanced with examples from research and practice and the thematic progression of the chapters enables the reader to make easy connections. Inclusivity is a theme throughout, expertly demonstrated through a variety of mixed method research inquiries and the critical interrogation of existing paradigms extending and building knowledge, concluding with well thought through arguments that support the repositioning of health and well-being in social work education.

One of the personal challenges I experienced moving from a long career in practice in the health field to an academic position was working out ways to approach the dominant views held by colleagues about what constituted health social work and the influence of these views on curricula. These views often mirrored the stereotypes of practice evident in much social work education. This book brings together in a theorized way what many health practitioners have long known and those outside the health field are now coming to understand that social work is health work (Bywaters, McLeod and Napier, 2009). These new understandings are emerging from wider world-views where relationships between health, social determinants and the life-course intersect.

In the introductory chapter the reader is immediately positioned within a broad and encompassing understanding of health that includes physical, mental and social well-being, drawing on the work of the World Health Organization (1986), the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (2008) and the IFSW International Policy on Health (2008).

Early chapters present the reader with well-written pedagogical perspectives examining curricula and relationships with knowledge. In Chapter 2, Beddoe suggests the repositioning of new and wider understandings of health within the social work curriculum drawing on 'wide-lens' and 'narrow lens' perspectives. Demonstrating the complex intersections of theories, practice and context, Ashcroft critically examines the paradigms that frame social work health education, and Coren, Iredale, Rutter and Bywaters argue the importance of life course approaches and the reduction of health inequalities as being a new agenda for social work education.

Whilst expressions such as 'health and well-being' are often used together in literature and in everyday vocabulary, there is scant attention given to the social dimensions of 'well-being' in health literature. The psychological construct of subjective well-being is a frequently used empirical measure, however broader social considerations are limited. The populism associated with 'wellness' and 'well-being' approaches has also contributed to academic resistance to consider their merits in professional literature. The recent history of social work as a professional activity has also placed an emphasis on objectivity and technical rationality to the exclusion of other approaches. The inclusion of 'well-being' in the book's title focuses new attention on some of these approaches and represents paradigmatic movement in social work education and practice that rebalances some of these more dominant perspectives. Chapter authors theorise these approaches effectively, establishing social considerations of 'well-being' as the bridge between more established views about what health social work is all about.

The collection of work not only explores and challenges existing taken for granted relationships between social work and health but presents constructive and innovative approaches as well as revisiting 'old' ideas with new insights. In chapter 9 Crisp raises the contentious issue of religion and spirituality in social work education arguing that promoting well-being is based on a holistic approach that by definition includes the acknowledgement of religion and spirituality. Ideas of embodied practice and well-being are explored by Messinga in relation to personal experiences with yoga, and Maidment and Macfarlane bring new insight into the value of creativity to well-being, reporting on a small Australian study with older people and craftmaking.

Implicit in much of the content is the foundational theme of subjectivity/objectivity that underpins social work education. Knowing oneself, the use of self, critical reflection and so on are all iterations and are discussed here in terms of social work's relationship with wider understandings of health and well-being. These themes are reprised in studies that involve social work students (soon to be practitioners) and social workers as participants in the process.

In chapter 10, Fouché and Martindale explore work-life balance and practitioner well-being in social work education, arguing that discussions about life satisfaction and dissatisfaction

can be a useful starting point for social work students building foundational understandings that make a significant contribution to later workforce issues of stress and burnout, quality of service delivery, professional development and career progression. Hughes explores the use of students' sense of well-being as an indicator of an internalized relationship with the values and beliefs of social work in chapter 11. The self-care of students is investigated by Napoli and Bonifas in chapter 7, drawing on mindfulness in classroom teaching. Illustrating their approach, they report on the evaluation of a 16-week graduate 'Quality of Life' course that facilitates students' personal exploration of self-care and supports their acquisition of practice skills in mindfulness. These they argue have longer-term benefits for them as practitioners as well as for clients in managing change and the unexpected circumstances of life.

Engaging with the concept of well-being in a slightly different way, Simpson critically examines its use for practitioners working with service users with 'moderate to severe' learning disabilities. Drawing links with wider understandings of 'community' he argues that students' understanding of social well-being is crucial for 'critically reflective and engaged practice'. Similarly in chapter 5 Marlow and Adamson critically examine 'trauma' as a taught concept using case examples about resettled Sudanese refugees in Australia and the use of critical incident debriefing that illustrate understandings of well-being and the intersections of pedagogy and practice.

In the final chapter Crisp and Beddoe discuss the developing agenda to promote health and well-being in social work education, suggesting its repositioning to a more central place. To those who already hold this view the book provides well-theorized examples of inclusive curriculum design and pedagogical approaches, and to those who aren't necessarily of this view, the book should be a pleasant surprise with well developed arguments supporting this approach.

The book's originality has resonance and relevance for social work educators and practitioners in the development and delivery of curricula that is 'inclusive of multiple paradigms', positioning health and well-being centrally in social work education.

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References

Bywaters, P., McLeod, E., Napier, L. (2009). *Social Work and Global Health Inequalities: Practice and Policy Developments*. Bristol: Policy Press.