

Editorial

Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education

James Lucas

Welcome to this new, general issue of *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*.

We are now almost two years into this global health crisis that is the COVID-19 pandemic, with some places facing their seventh lockdown (such as here in Melbourne, Australia). As a Queer social worker and academic, I find these times to be certainly those of strangeness, where barriers between what is considered “normal” are called into question and breaking down more than ever before. The pandemic has certainly become a catalyst for change. Now is the time to create and share our individual and collective knowledges as social work and welfare educators and practitioners – so we can all learn and grow from each other and come together as a diversity of communities.

This general issue of *Advances* is an example of this knowledge creation and sharing as we all face the uncertainty of the future. It is a form of collective meaning-creation in making sense of the uncertain world around us – and for that, it is something to feel proud of and to celebrate!

We begin this issue with the Editor’s Choice article authored by Hosken and Epstein. In this article, the authors provide a unique critical interrogation of the AASW education accreditation requirement for 20 days of mandated on-campus attendance, as well as of Australian universities’ Special Consideration policies, using Carol Bacchi’s (2009) feminist “What’s the Problem Represented to Be?” framework. They highlight the oppressive nature of these gender-neutral policies that assume a genderless university student and the privileging of traditional, physically co-located, face-to-face teaching over the realities of today’s diverse university students. The article paves the way for future critical interrogation of social work and welfare policies to foster greater social justice and gender equity.

The value of interprofessional practice experience and the use of DRUMBEAT group work as avenues for professional identity formation for social work students is the focus of the next two articles. Barns et al. qualitatively explore the learning experiences of first-year social work students as they began to navigate the dynamics of interprofessional practice. The authors outline how first-year students can feel lost, alone, and disregarded within multidisciplinary (student) teams, but that such experiences were invaluable in their understanding of social work’s scope of practice and how to articulate this scope to other professions. Similarly, in Wright et al.’s qualitative article, students’ facilitation of DRUMBEAT groups as part of their field education placement learning resulted in greater professional identity, personal reward, self-awareness, and confidence in their experiences.

In the following two articles, we travel across the boundaries of Australia and New Zealand social work towards the teaching, learning, and practice experiences of social workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Zimbabwe. Wagner and Majeed discuss “honouring culture and language” within UAE social work courses that use English-medium instruction. Using a reflective journaling methodology, they argue that culturally responsive caring, communication, curriculum, and congruity are required that honour the students’ local culture and language. We then move to Zimbabwe where Nhapi explores the social justice endeavours of the country’s social workers. They describe how, for social work in Zimbabwe to remain relevant in the current climate of food insecurity, poverty, and social exclusion, that there is a need for “imaginative intervention methods and resilience” on the part of social workers in fostering a “transformative and empowering” practice agenda.

We return to more local waters in the next two articles to explore the relationship between social work educator and student in the contexts of online learning delivery and field education placement supervision. Young and McAuliffe report on the barriers and enablers to building positive relationships of safety and connection in the online, virtual learning space from the student’s perspective. Their paper showcases the importance of the educator’s human face, together with the educator’s responsiveness and personal connection, are all important in facilitating the online educative relationship. Zuchowski et al. then provide a comparative analysis of student placement supervision provided internally (versus externally) to the hosting agency. The authors highlight how the supervisor–supervisee relationship quality was considered high regardless of its internal or external provision, although there was a call for greater synchronous observation of students’ practice. Both articles are timely given the recent update of the AASW’s (2020) social work education and accreditation standards.

In drawing this issue to a close, we explore the concept of “voice” and its importance in all aspects of social work education and practice. Whether it is through exploring the voice of international social work students in shared accommodation and the challenges of focusing on study (as Tasang and Goel outline), through paying attention to the voices of families and children in the application of child protection policies (as outlined in Plush’s article), with health and mental health workers navigating risk and decision-making in practice (with Martin et al.), or in challenging the medicalisation of everyday life (see this issue’s book review provided by Joanna McIlveen), we as social workers need to know, understand, and advocate for the diversity of voices to be heard.

It has been a pleasure working with the collective editorial board of *Advances* in creating this general issue and I hope you enjoy the knowledges contained in each of the articles. As we continue to face the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic – stay safe and take care of each other.

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References

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- Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing policy: What’s the problem represented to be?* Pearson Education.