

Editorial

“Looking Above the Parapet”: Learning from Local and International Contexts

Kathryn Hay

Welcome to this new, Special Issue of *Advances in Social Work Welfare and Education: Social Work in a Climate of Change*.

Social justice, human rights and supporting communities are core values of social work education and practice internationally. Relatedly, *Ubuntu* is the International Federation of Social Workers’ global theme for 2021 and can broadly be described as seeing an individual through their family, community, environment, and spirituality. These social work values resonate with the articles in this edition, which traverse Australian, Aotearoa New Zealand, Canadian and Cambodian contexts and embody international, local and Indigenous agendas. Reflective and autoethnographic approaches are employed by several authors and, in combination, the articles offer insights into a range of education and practice settings.

We begin this edition with the Editor’s Choice article by Dunstan Lawihin from the University of Papua New Guinea. He offers a reflection on the tensions and opportunities in the internationalisation and localisation of social work education. Lawihin contends that both agendas are, and appropriately so, incorporated into social work curriculum in his context. While caution should be applied to adopting Western concepts, models and theories in non-Western curricula, he contends that internationalism is important for the development and progress of social work education and practice and offers examples of regional initiatives that have contributed to recent publications and collaborative opportunities. Indigenisation is considered alongside the notion of localisation wherein locals need to be engaged in theorising and facilitating new developments although limited resources and skilled locals may constrain rapid changes in both social work education and practice. Lawihin also draws attention to the African concept of *Ubuntu* which is the focus of the next article by Abur and Mugumbate. Their autoethnographic approach sheds light on how this concept is experienced in the lives of black people of African origin living in Australia. They offer valuable suggestions to assist social workers to practise more meaningfully with service users. Advancing current practice approaches is also highlighted in the next article by Henley and colleagues whose study is situated in a non-government organisation in Cambodia. The article draws on the learnings from a student placement in which social work models including strengths-based approach and a decision-making framework based on the Johari window were used in a school setting. Positively, staff in the school felt empowered and students exhibited positive behaviour change.

Maideen and Goel, in their article focusing on migrant Muslim women's experiences of coping and building resilience in Australia, also offer insights for social workers and other professionals to consider in their practice. This insider research highlights many of the challenges and complexities for these women in the early stages of settlement. Hope, ways of coping and resilience are emphasised in the findings and several important formal and informal systems that can assist with the settlement process, including personal attributes, faith and religion and favourable living conditions, are highlighted.

The following two articles by Australian authors, Gunning and Townsend, and Canadian author, Lin, focus on social work practice areas less commonly researched. In their literature scan, Gunning and Townsend explore how acting and performance can be used as a form of trauma-informed personal development for different groups of service users. They draw on examples of war veterans, disabled people and people experiencing homelessness and recommend that acting teachers incorporate basic psychosocial skills as well as relevant theories and models in their work to enable their participants to benefit from the acting and performance process. Acting and performance could also add value to the repertoire of skills social workers currently utilise, especially in group work contexts. Lin acknowledges the limited scholarship on psychosocial support for people with acquired brain injury and outlines their doctoral research process that will seek to address this gap. An emphasis on social justice and anti-oppressive practice underpins her research and this theme is picked up in the catchily titled article "Unauthorised access to the soap dispensers" by Edenborough and colleagues. Creating deliberate opportunities for social work students to engage in social change and activism has become somewhat of a minefield in social work education mainly due to the pervasiveness of risk management discourses. Experiential learning, however, is known to aid in the development of knowledge and, through the employment of an activist pedagogy, the authors illustrate how engaging in social action facilitated student learning. There is a good challenge (and suggestions) in here for those of us employed in the education sector.

Student learning continues to be the focus of the next two articles from Aotearoa New Zealand. Douglas reflects on her experience of utilising different online tools to build whanaungatanga with students. Whanaungatanga is described broadly as community, connection, and relationship. She encourages educators to "look above the parapet" to risk different ways of building relationships and engaging with students, especially in the current environment where online learning and teaching are more prevalent. Matthews continues this theme by exploring how the popular pedagogy of mindsets can be considered in social work education and practice. She concludes that social workers are positioned in complex and constantly changing contexts and therefore benefit from having a growth mindset wherein the learning process is continual and viewed positively.

This idea is picked up by Cash and Harvey in their response to a perceived need that arose early in the Covid-19 pandemic. The article explores their experience of sharing knowledge in a rapid manner when a specific evidence-base was not yet developed. Their initiative led to the creation of a repository of ageing-focused Covid-19 resources that were openly shared online. Open access to knowledge is contested in academia but requires closer consideration by social work academics and practitioners whose values include equity and non-discrimination.

Sharing knowledge and advancing practice is also highlighted in the final article for this edition by Nguyen, Elmer, and Harms in their reflection on their Master of Social Work field placement. The placement with a road trauma support service enabled them to examine the relevance of models of grief in this context and recommend the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement as beneficial for social workers to utilise with service users.

To conclude the edition, Goldingay positively reviews *Aboriginal Fields of Practice* edited by Bindi Bennett. Many of the themes in this new text resonate with elements of the articles in this edition. Learning from Aboriginal wisdom, we are reminded of the importance of employing reflective thinking to encourage better practice; activism as a social work modality; cultural responsiveness, safety and humility; and the ethical concept of doing no harm. For those of us who are non-Indigenous, we can also learn how to be allies and accomplices to Indigenous people in the spaces in which we meet, learn, teach and practise.

The contributions in this edition offer many gems of wisdom and knowledge that are transferable into different contexts and are particularly relevant in this climate of change in which we find ourselves, and our profession. We hope you take the time to enjoy them.

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