

Editorial

Defending a broad definition of social work scholarship

Mim Fox

As a profession, we understand changes to our identity. We are inherently responsive to changes in practice, often stimulated by changes to legislation, governmental or organisational policy and, in more recent times, changes to the higher education context. In Australia social work education is situated in either universities or private colleges, whilst in New Zealand this has expanded to also include technical colleges. While this is the state of play that we currently understand, our professional history tells us that this dominance of academic context has not always been the case. We have, in actuality, a limited understanding of the history of social work in Australia, largely grounded in notions of early practice rather than education (Mendes, 2005). The result of this can be seen in the social work scholarship that has emerged over time. While social work has succeeded in developing a strong body of academically rigorous publications (Simpson, 2020; Tilbury et al., 2017), having earned a place in the academic/scientific landscape, we cannot help but ground our scholarship in the reflective and reflexive practice that is at the core of our professional identity.

We can become trapped in thinking that there is only one way to write about our profession, only one way to capture the complexities and implications of our work, and only one way in which to write about this or disseminate our knowledge. The identity of social work scholarship, however, is a changing beast and is reactive to external forces in exactly the same way that social work practice is. Social work academia has gone through enormous change in the last few years alone. The Covid-19 pandemic was the impetus for both immediate and more ongoing changes to the higher education sector, and social work has felt these changes. While some universities have had distance learning for a number of years now, following the pandemic almost all universities now provide some level of online learning in their qualifying degrees (Goldingay et al., 2020). This is a response to a changing profile in the higher education student population showing an increase in students' desire for online or flexible learning, a reliance by Australian universities on the international student enrolments, and cost-cutting measures by universities believing that online education is a cheaper higher education model. The impact of these changes is well documented in the social work literature (Neden et al., 2022).

Coming through the other side of the pandemic, social work scholarship has been found to have changed. Social work scholarship has embraced various forms of rigour and academic dissemination to reach our professional audience, whilst redefining academic rigour and dissemination of academic results (Singer, 2019).

Whilst there is still a reliance on peer-reviewed academic journal publication, the number of social work journals that actively encourage reflective narratives and teaching notes have increased. At *Advances in Social Work Education*, we introduced a *Teaching Notes* section for publication in 2022 and have consistently published high-quality, peer-reviewed teaching notes in each issue since. Whilst our *Reflective Narratives* section has a longer history, similarly our submissions to that section have risen and we are consistently including Reflective Narratives in each issue.

In parallel, social work scholarship has embraced a wider form of dissemination. Podcasting is one such example, where despite a short history social work content podcasting has been steadily on the increase. Podcasting history for the general population only traces back to 2004 with the first social work content podcast, *The Social Work Podcast*, being released by Professor Jonathan Singer of Loyola University (USA) in 2007. In Australia we are familiar with the podcast that came from Griffith University by Professor Patricia Fronek, *PodSocs*, in 2012 (Fronek et al., 2016). While globally, social work content podcasting had begun prior to the pandemic, in the last few years it has exploded with 45+ social work content podcasts easily accessible on freely available podcasting platforms, an unknown created regularly by social work academics for their student cohorts, and Australia leading the charge with podcasts such as *The Social Work Stories Podcast* garnering 600,000+ downloads and having 96 countries listening to stories about predominantly Australian social workers. Whilst I acknowledge my own role as one of the hosts of this podcast, I also acknowledge the global social work podcasting community that all contribute to this changing landscape in social work scholarship, both academic and practitioner alike.

After 5 years, I am now stepping down as Chief Editor of *Advances* and am handing over to Dr James Lucas from Deakin University, Australia. *Advances* is a unique journal in the Asia Pacific publishing landscape. Along with the Advances Editorial Board, we have been able to create a scholarly space where a range of voices are able to be heard, whether that be a traditionally research focused perspective, a yarnning circle, a student reflection, or an experienced educator's teaching advice. In doing so, we have never compromised on academic rigour and standards of peer review, gently reminding the peer-review community of the social work ethics of inclusion and mentorship in our process. It is my absolute pleasure to introduce you to the articles which make up *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, Issue 25(1). They demonstrate the breadth of articles we have been able to support to publication and contribute to the social work scholarly landscape.

The Editor's Choice for this issue is "A Poverty Informed Social Work Practice Framework" by **Pitt, Crichton-Hill, & Maidment**. The authors present an original practice framework whereby both students, educators and practitioners can all equally engage in the context and apply a strong theoretical positioning to what is always a changing practice context. Whilst this article has been authored in Aotearoa New Zealand its learnings are transferable across the Tasman. The authors are to be congratulated for their contribution.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on how we teach, support and resource field education subjects and students in our curriculum is the focus of discussion and advocacy in both the articles by **Betts, Bojkowski, & Peschar**, and **Cunningham, Windisch, Egan, & Haralambous. Sanders** and colleagues also contribute to this wealth of learning that the pandemic brought about, focusing instead here on student wellbeing and mental health and how the learning of practice skills and communication skills can support students both personally and professionally. While **McDonnell & Wayland** investigate the notion of self-disclosure in supervision, a hotly debated and often taboo topic, from **Bell & Hay** in Aotearoa New Zealand we are able to understand how the introduction of the Kaiārahi, or Family Court Navigator, has impacted those applying to the Family Court for support.

Two articles provide insight into the experience of undertaking research. The first is **Lucas** who reflects on their journey as a Queer-led “insider-outsider” researcher, importantly adding a Queer perspective to the hetero-normative colonised conservative space of academic research. The second is a Teaching Note from **Park & Arredondo** who illustrate an example of interdisciplinary faculty support with teaching research skills within curriculum. Meanwhile, bi-cultural research is presented by **McLaughlin** and colleagues who discuss a co-operative inquiry study whereby rural advantage and disadvantage are investigated from an Australian and Irish student perspective.

Finally, locally, **Hicks & Watts** reflect on the development of the *New Voices in Social Work Research* symposium which we have been proud to host as an annual inclusion in the ANZSWWER Symposium program. This has been important for doctoral students to continue in their PhD research with an external panel of reviewers to support them.

It has been my pleasure to serve as Chief Editor of *Advances*. I would like to thank the outgoing President of ANZSWWER, Associate Professor Lynelle Watts, for her unfailing support of me in this role and of the work that we do. Similarly, I would like to thank the ANZSWWER Committee of Management, often I have brought ethical issues that the journal has been debating and they have been receptive to debate and discussion each time. My wholehearted thanks go to the Advances Editorial Board, in particular to Helen Hickson and James Lucas. It is almost impossible to take on roles like this without the kind and generous support of colleagues, and I thank you. And to our authors, readers and community of peer reviewers, journals like *Advances* depend on you. It is with each article that is published that we are making a statement about what we want social work scholarship to look like, thank you for defending the right to alternate forms of scholarship and diversifying the publication landscape.

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