

# Editorial

In the current edition of the journal we are introducing a new section, before the reviews section, entitled 'Practice Focus'. One of the things that academics, practitioners and students have said is most valued about the journal is its focus on practice, and the making accessible of learning experiences and research that people can transfer into and adapt for their own practice. In this issue we have two such pieces. The first represents musings by Niklas Hald's on his work as an actor, taking into schools his enthusiasm and reflecting on his impact. This provides important insights and useful thoughts. Health and social care, the helping professions, began a flurry of creative approaches to the human condition but in many late modern societies this engagement with performing and understanding social life has become somewhat occluded: a first step towards a special themed edition of the journal in 2012.

In the second of our practice focus papers, Jessica Proctor talks about her analysis and evaluation of a cross-placement student group that explored the theme 'advocacy', presenting the perceptions of both the facilitator and the students who took part. This paper considers the importance of reflective practice in the developing professional and uses contentious and sometimes maligned concepts in the harsher contemporary world of UK social care to argue for cross-placement learning.

Hopefully, this section will grow in popularity and become a forum where authors – students, practitioners, educators, people who use services – can present ideas, seek feedback, and generate thinking for improved learning in practice.

In the main section of the journal we have four papers. Marnie Sommer's paper stems from a public health perspective and presents a novel approach to student learning in a graduate masters of public health in New York. She incorporates methodological training in ethnography, both observation and fieldwork, into courses teaching students about structural and environmental factors impacting on health outcomes.

This provides a useful contemporary use of an approach that has been associated with time-consuming anthropological studies. It would be interesting, and exciting, to see Sommer's approach transferred into other health care and social care settings. There is, perhaps, much in deep immersion into the fields of practice that we can adapt for learning.

In the second paper, Karen Tapp introduces a competency-based integrated learning contract and student assessment for social work field education. Learning contracts and student assessments have often been two separate documents in the US and have sometimes appeared as though they were unconnected. She also identifies a perception of a lack consistency across placement settings where individually developed student learning objectives were used. The proposed learning contract, which is included as an appendix to her paper, considers some of these questions and proposes an integrated approach. Her paper describes the development of the instrument and its refinement. Findings from Tapp's research indicates that the contract provides clarity of direction and consistency for student field education while still allowing for individual student created learning objectives.

Gillian Thomas and colleagues, working in a rural and predominantly mono-ethnic setting in the UK, highlight the need of black and ethnic minority students to gain access to appropriate and ethnically sensitive support systems to help them deal with some of the challenges that they face in field education as part of their social work training. Their paper evaluates a local project undertaken to investigate and pilot how a mentoring support scheme may increase the successful completion of practice learning for students from a minority ethnic background. In our changing global society in which global migration and flux continue. This paper offers a localised perspective that may offer insights for use across other countries, programmes and disciplines.

In the final paper in this issue, Peter Szto and colleagues present findings from a cross-cultural project comparing mental health curricula across three schools of social work, two located in China – Shanghai and Hong Kong – and in Omaha, USA. The paper reviews Chinese philosophies and belief systems as they relate to mental illness and well-being. Additionally, the influence of dominant discourses informing professional practice and the development of indigenous social work practice are considered. As with the previous paper, the importance of culturally appropriate and sensitive approaches to practice come to the fore. Szto and colleagues' research indicates that in the Chinese

universities mental health social work curricula appears to balance pedagogical approaches towards providing students with up-to-date knowledge on psychopathology and psychiatric social work, while offering significant weighting to traditional philosophies and belief systems. The issue of developing Chinese practitioners equipped to work within medicalised, health settings but with sufficient indigenous knowledge to offer culturally congruent practice to local populations was highlighted.

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