



University of Dundee

Reaching students and international audiences

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Published in:
Social Work Education

DOI:
[10.1080/02615479.2021.1927940](https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2021.1927940)

Publication date:
2021

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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Fenton, J., & Ingram, R. (2021). Reaching students and international audiences: the positive trajectory of the journal. *Social Work Education*, 40(5), 575-576. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2021.1927940>

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Reaching students and international audiences: the positive trajectory of the journal

The Social Work Education journal is concerned with international perspectives, issues and practices relating to the provision of social work education. The key demography of our contributors are social work academics and practitioners. Many of the papers published within this journal highlight the active and crucial contributions of students to the development of social work knowledge and of course the impact of their practice. It is less common for the voices of students to be included within the authorship of published papers. We are delighted to open this edition with the winning entry to our annual student essay competition. Justin West from La Trobe University in Australia was the winning author with his insightful, well-researched and reflective essay on recovery approaches in mental health. The challenges to implementing a recovery approach are many and range from a history of the stigmatisation and alienation of service users to neoliberal efficiency models of practice and the dominance of bio-medical treatments. These challenges persist even when alignment between recovery approaches and social work values are apparent. Justin advocates for social work to reclaim its identity and for the need for practitioners to critically reflect on values, practice and power.

The response from students across the globe was overwhelming and we were privileged to read essays from students from geographies as diverse as Australia, Rwanda, USA, Spain, UK and Canada. The contributions were required to have an ethical dilemma at their heart, but beyond that students could have free rein in terms of focus and content. Whilst the nature of the essays were diverse, there were many recurrent themes and synergies in evidence including relationship based practice, anti-racist practice, addressing neoliberal policies and co-production. It was very heartening to read about the critical thinking and ethical practice being achieved by the next generation of social workers, and we are looking forward to launching our 2021 competition, and widening reach and participation yet further.

A further development in terms of the international reach and representation of the journal has been the recent establishment of East Asian and African advisory boards. The names of the founding members can be found on our homepage, and they will be taking forward the promotion of the journal in these geographies in terms of encouraging article submission, seeking new reviewers and more generally raising the profile of the journal across their networks. The establishment of these boards is to help address the scale of the dominance of perspectives from the UK, USA and Australia. The journal has at the core of its mission to promote the exchange and development of social work education knowledge across the globe and these new boards will stimulate an expansion of this at a time when people and knowledge cross boundaries with ever increasing frequency. Our early discussions have revealed many synergies and shared practices, whilst also identifying challenges relating to funding, access and language which we will explore moving forward.


This edition of the journal continues from Justin's essay with another outstanding example of critical thinking embodied in Liodden's exploration of how bureaucracy is considered within social work texts. Although usually negative, with social work values operationalised as a defence against the dark side of bureaucracy, Liodden points out that there are also strengths and opportunities in bureaucracy. This is an interesting and thought-provoking angle. Iglesias et al share their research on 'self managed youth spaces' or clubs, finding different views on the clubs from varying stakeholders. The main finding was the opportunity for educational intervention that could help build trust between the clubs and their communities. Interestingly, past research has shown local government involvement to have been 'aimed at regulating, supervising and controlling the clubs' once again highlighting the interface between bureaucracy and participatory social work highlighted in Liodden's article.

The next 3 articles consider simulations as learning techniques for student social workers. Tyler and Franklin consider dyadic simulation for counselling transgender children and their parents, whilst Duffy et al compare role plays with both drama students and service users; finding unique strengths in both. A theme from both articles is the nervousness of students or fear of saying something wrong. Thus, simulation and giving opportunities for practice are very valuable. Sewell et al's research focuses on students' emotional reactions to the content of simulated social work interactions. Asking students to reflect after the interaction allowed space and time for students to surface their emotional reactions and to process them. In summary, all 3 examples of simulation had something very positive to offer.

Ogden and Rogerson explore how positive psychology can be used in the social work classroom to impact on mental health and well-being. They found promising results in the well-being measures of students undertaking the positive psychology course as compared to the control group. This is a very interesting finding given the authors' point that mental health concerns are particularly acute amongst graduate-level social work students. It is interesting to note the efforts going on within the social work education field to help students with nervousness and anxiety—normal aspects of learning how to be a social worker—and with, perhaps, deeper levels of mental health problems. The responsiveness of the field is reassuring.

The final article is an exploration of a non-traditional field placement opportunity in a public library in New Jersey. The community nature of such a placement is a clear strength and the author's analysis of strengths, concerns and supports needed convinces the reader that library partnerships are very worthy of consideration. As the struggle to find placements continues, this article offers a new and exciting opportunity.

In conclusion, we hope that you enjoy this edition of the journal and that you find Justin's essay as enjoyable as we did. We also hope that things are getting easier for everyone as lockdown measures ease and we can restore those human connections that are so important.

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