

One Social Worker's Snapshots: Of students and poverty, a teaching tool and supervision

Thesis submitted by
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Statement on the contribution of others

This thesis has been prepared with the contribution of Professor Rosamund Thorpe as supervisor. No other person has actively contributed with statistical support, editorial assistance, research assistance or any other assistance.

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Abstract

Social Work is far from ‘just’ a job. How can it be when one of its paramount concerns is the pursuit of social justice? In the same vein, whatever social workers are involved with, they need to be able to examine their work in relation to how what they are doing contributes to a more socially just society. It is not enough to just do ‘the’ job. Logically following on from this then, a social worker employed as a lecturer must act in ways that promote social justice – it is not enough to aim only to be a good lecturer or an effective teacher, for underlying these roles is that one is a social worker. The papers presented here describe some examples of one social worker’s attempts to apply the objectives of social justice in her work as a teacher in a university environment.

This thesis is a portfolio of research papers and conference presentations. The common theme is students – in the higher education sector, in the classroom and in placements. The sub-themes are social work and social work education. It is the work of a practitioner researching her practice and looking for ways to improve that practice. It is therefore applied research that is descriptive and qualitative in approach.

Given the reflective research approach taken, some of the findings have been incorporated into teaching practices as part of the process. The success achieved in the application of some strategies, supports a recommendation for those involved in teaching and learning environments, to include a range of ways of cultivating the imagination of participants to enhance learning outcomes. Success also with a model of supervision which advocates the use of vision as a base for supervision, leads to a further recommendation for such an approach to be considered by workers and students wanting an egalitarian, cooperative, power sharing arrangement in supervision. Other findings such as the need for action to address student poverty and particularly when that poverty is exacerbated by the requirement of student placements, are matters for many stakeholders such as the professional associations, the universities, the government, the human services and agencies involved in placements, to address.

One does need to strive to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access, to work towards upholding the rights of participants in a range of processes, to encourage others to reduce the barriers that prevent access to essential resources, and to foster active participation so that people have real opportunities to have a voice and be involved in decision making processes. The research demonstrates that it is both possible and necessary for a social worker in a teaching role to work in a myriad of ways that do this and in so doing work to promote social justice.

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