Editorial

Social Work Academic and Industry Partnerships: Engagement and Impact

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This Special Edition invited researchers and practitioners to put a spotlight on research engagements between social work academics and industry partners, and share the outcomes and impact. This is an important topic for social work academics in particular, as government and organisations increasingly are required to engage in research that demonstrates quality, visibility, impact and outcomes (Fouché, 2015). In Australia, the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) measures the impact and engagement of academic research. This followed the lead of other countries, such as the UK, where the Research Excellence Framework (REF) assesses the quality and the impact of the research on the society and the economy (Parker & van Teijlingen, 2012), and New Zealand, where the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) assesses individual academic outputs and the impact of research. Social work research in the past may have attracted less support in academia than other disciplines and lower visibility in practice (Fouché, 2015; Orme & Shemmings, 2010). The research excellence agenda has led to a greater focus on social work research partnerships and engagement with industry. Specifically, social work research seeks to improve the everyday lives of disadvantaged peoples, groups and communities through building inclusive research relationships (Hughes, 2016), and therefore it is well placed to have real impact.

Unfortunately, while practice research is important, the complexity and time demands of social work practice can mean that research becomes a lower priority for practitioners (Beddoe, Yates, Fouché, & Harington, 2010). However, through research partnerships with universities, new knowledge can be generated with, and for, service users, and practitioners can become established practitioner-researchers (Harvey, Plummer, Nielson, Adams, & Pain, 2016; Langer, Tripney, & Gough, 2016). In summary, partnership research has been seen as a way to ensure research findings are translated, brokered, and mobilised to facilitate their application to practice.

What has presented a significant challenge is ensuring that such translations are readily accessible to practitioners for evidence-informed practice. Many authors continue to call for strengthened bridges to close the ongoing research–practice divide in the best interests of service users and the community (Denvall & Skillmark, 2020; Hameed, 2018; Palinkas, He, Choy-Brown, & Locklear Hertel, 2017). One of the barriers to practitioner uptake of relevant research recommendations is the availability of such findings. Articles can be hidden away in journals behind pay-walls, making practitioner access hard to achieve.

At this point, it is important to note that, as of this issue, *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education* will now be available via open access. Discussions exploring open access for this journal have taken place over many years with input from previous editors. We are delighted that, under the current leadership of the journal editor, Mim Fox and her editorial team, Australian New Zealand Social Work and Welfare Education and Research (ANZSWWER) have progressed the move to open access. This will strategically make the research published in this journal easily accessible to educators and researchers world-wide and ensure free access to practitioners and service users.

This Special Edition has been prepared over the course of a very disrupted 2020, a time when we all have been challenged to live with the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. We acknowledge there has been enormous impacts for many individuals, families, organisations and communities. As we all look forward to a time of eased restrictions, we offer you this collection where authors have been keen to share their research experiences of university–community partnerships.

The seven contributions and one book review in this special edition report on two themes, first, the challenges of practitioner access to research and second, the unique perspectives, relationships, outcomes and recommendations from research partnerships.

To position and introduce the issues raised in this collection, we begin with a Commentary by Deb Stanfield (2021). She explores social work attention to the world of knowledge, how social workers gather and engage with it, and how they employ it in their practice.

In the first of the two articles that explore practitioner and agency access to research, Mark Hughes, Clare Tilbury, Christine Bigby, and Mike Fisher report on a study of how research end users in practice accessed research knowledge and the benefits and challenges related to different sources. Hughes et al. (2021) found that participants used "grey literature" (research and policy material not published on commercial sites and often not peer-reviewed) for several reasons including difficulties faced in accessing academic journals and wanting to read more digestible material.

Our own contribution to this collection (Susan Gair, Ines Zuchowski, and Liz Beddoe, 2021) targets the inaccessibility of research findings that are often locked behind paywalls. We argue that, while the research excellence, engagement and impact agenda purports to produce benefits and impact for end users, research impact looks less certain if practitioners, organisations, policy makers and the wider public cannot access emerging research findings. We propose that open access publishing is a social justice issue that is key to research-informed practice. Finally, we call on social work authors to unlock their research findings by presenting them through more open portals.

In the next article, Margaret Doherty, Ann McGuire, Robyn Martin, and Sue Gillieatt (2021) identify that, while social work academics have an established history of collaborating with

organisations and practitioners, examples of industry partnerships between social work academics and service users, families and carers have emerged more recently. Specifically, they discuss a successful partnership between a grassroots lived experience group and two social work academics which is based on genuine engagement and significant positive impact for both parties. They reiterate the need for deep listening; the prioritising of relationships over task; the opportunities for transformation and the emergence of new knowledge through non-tokenistic partnerships.

Three papers in this collection report on partnership research in field education. Field education, by its very nature, is where partnership with the field is active and dynamic; the field collaborates with academia to socialise social work students into the profession (AASW, 2020). While generally focused on direct practice, field education is, moreover, an opportunity to embed teaching, research and learning within community service and engagement (Harms et al., 2017). Field education that is focused on or includes research can extend student learning and increase the research capacity of practitioners and the organisation more broadly (Appleton, Rankine, & Hare, 2016; Beddoe et al., 2010). However, a systematic literature review of research placements highlighted that the outcomes of student placements need to be reported more consistently (Zuchowski, Heyeres, & Tsey, 2020).

Encouragingly, articles in this collection reporting on field education-related partnerships include practitioners and students as co-authors. In such a contribution, Jo Bentley-Davey et al. (2021) report on the collaboration between a group of students and a community partner, working together to develop a domestic violence practice guideline for a health setting during the Covid-19 pandemic. The article describes the context of the Community Connectors Project employing the Asset Based Community Development model as a framework and explores aspects of the student leadership, the domestic violence project and the collaborative partnership. Bentley-Davey et al.'s reflections consider the contributions of students as knowledge brokers, challengers and enablers of collaboration and future research engagement.

Exploring another field education partnership Fiona Stevens, Tammy Milton, Janine Rhodes and Phyllis Chee (2021) describe how a community housing organisation and a university in Queensland collaborated to support the social justice outcomes while concurrently meeting the learning needs of social work students on placement. This article, jointly authored by the agency and university, describes the processes of development of mutual benefits and the growth of relationships between the field education team and a housing agency with an aim to support and shape practice.

The article by Monica Short et al. (2021) reports on a co-operative inquiry to explore experiences of placement opportunities and partnerships in social work in Australia and Scotland through the exploration of engagement, connections, and collaborations. The findings define and explore connectivity, collaboration, a quality placement experience and opportunities such as employment in new settings. Short et al. stress that consideration of these factors can support quality, practice-based learning and the development of clarity of

the social work role and identity. The authors highlight the usefulness of interprofessional connectivity as a driver and facilitator for collaboration, innovation and quality field education learning opportunities. The article provides a useful overview of co-operative inquiry as a research methodology.

Jennifer Cartmel, Debbie Miller, Hyacinth Udah, Paul Harris, and Kerry Smith (2021) report on an evaluation of the professional development program, "Wings", that aims to support educators in early years services. They provide an overview of the program and describe the partnership between academics and the industry partner in evaluating the program. Cartmel et al. highlight the learning that participants have gained from attending the program with a focus on how WINGS worked as a professional development strategy in childcare services. The authors state that the joint research has led to a formalised knowledge partnership and the development of a range of deliverables.

Finally, closing this edition is a highly relevant book review. The reviewed text is entitled *Practice Research in the Human Services: A University–Agency Partnership Model* by Michael J. Austin and Sarah Carnochan. Here the authors share their wealth of knowledge to foster practice research in human services informed by, inclusive of, and in collaboration with, practitioners and service users.

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