EDITORIAL

This special issue of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* comprises ten papers presented at the annual conference of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) held in Cape Town in September 2010.

The theme of the conference was *Social Work educators and practitioners: partners in teaching and learning.* The purpose of the conference was to bring together educators and practitioners as partners in teaching and learning. The themes of the articles reflect some of the major issues that confront teaching and learning in South Africa today.

The selected papers fall into three sections: practice education; distance learning; and Social Work pedagogy.

In the first section the articles focus on practice education in participatory approaches to community work and research, a university-community outreach initiative, and the role of field instructors.

In *Emancipatory pedagogy and community work: the teaching-practice nexus* Sewpaul, Osthus and Mhone draw on fieldwork and research with undergraduate students, based on an assumption that engendering critical understanding among students contributes to critical action. It identifies the role of the educator in promoting democratic and participatory approaches to community work and research, and discusses the cascade effect from classroom to community engagement and research. The central thesis is that participation intersects all levels of relationships as well as the complex and circular power dynamics between educators, students and communities.

In their article *A university-community outreach: an innovative approach to Social Work practice education* Simpson and Sathiparsad explain how this university-community outreach initiative provides placements for Social Work students in community-based student units, and how students are supervised and managed entirely by university staff. Drawing on the experiences of university staff and students, the authors discuss the value and challenges of the project, and the possibilities for further development.

The important role of field instructors in practice education forms the subject of the article by Strydom. In *The rationale of field instructors for their involvement in practice education* the author reports on a study in which the rationale for field instructors to become and remain involved in practice education was explored. The perspectives of the field instructors on the value that practice education holds for the welfare organisation was also investigated.

In Section II challenges facing teaching and learning within an open distance-learning context feature prominently in four articles.

Alpaslan and Lombard's article *Studying to become a social worker: examining the motivation of, and challenges facing, students at an open distance-learning university* deals with the motivations of a sample of students choosing Social Work as a career path, as well as their reasons for studying at an open distance-learning university (ODL). The challenges students faced in studying to become social workers at UNISA as an ODL institution are also discussed.

In light of the fact that through-put of students at tertiary institutions needs to be increased, the article by Botha on *Obstacles and facilitative opportunities while studying Social Work within an open and distance-learning context* emphasises students' need for regular contact with

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lecturers, clear communication, counselling facilities, early exposure to the profession, coordination of support efforts and effective use of technology.

In *Challenges and changes in teaching person-centred counselling to Social Work learners via distance education* De Kock focuses on the challenges of, and changes in, teaching a person-centred approach to develop the counselling skills of Social Work learners at UNISA as part of the quest to be leaner-centred in open distance-learning. The author concludes with some recommendations in this regard.

The article by Makofane describes *Perspectives on the factors influencing student social workers in the execution of their research projects in an open distance-learning context*. The purpose of this article is to examine the complexities and challenges associated with the implementation of a research project at undergraduate level and social work research instruction in an open distance-learning context. The article concludes with suggestions to stimulate further thinking and discussion in this area.

Section III is about Social Work pedagogy for merging e-learning strategies with traditional face-to-face teaching strategies; spirituality in pedagogy; and self-concept development of students.

In *Implementing a blended learning approach in a Social Work course: the perceptions of first-year students at a South African university* Pillay and Gerrard explore how the value of the teaching and learning process by merging e-learning strategies with traditional face-to-face teaching strategies can be enhanced. Findings indicated that although most first-year students regarded the blended approach as an effective practice to enhance the learning process, there was much scope for development and improvement in course design and implementation.

Bhagwan's article *Spirituality in pedagogy: a qualitative study with educators* reports on a study which explored educators' personal experiences of spirituality and their views on its inclusion in education. Analysis revealed diverse conceptualisations of personal spirituality. Considerable support for the inclusion of spirituality in pedagogy through a gradual interweaving of it into existing courses is recommended by the author.

The article by Dykes about *The implications of adverse childhood experiences for the professional requirements of Social Work* foregrounds the notion of resilience to explore university students' self-concept development experiences and their impact on social work professional requirements. From assignments of first-year Social Work students, their family-of-origin experiences were used to explore social challenges that had shaped them. Findings indicated that students' self-concept development experiences reflected adverse childhood experiences. Elements of resilience were discerned for some participants, which augured well for their professional practice while for others these experiences may be a source of concern.

Finally, we are also pleased to publish one of the first substantial reviews, written by Antoinette Lombard, of James Midgley and Amy Conley's indispensable study *Social Work and Social Development: Theories and Skills for Developmental Social Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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