The Impact of the Arts in Social Work Education: A Systematic Review

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Overview

- Rationale and background

- Method and approach to review

- Findings – 3 themes

- Limitations and recommendations

Background/Rationale for review

- Undermining of the, autonomy and creativity of the academy (Giroux, 2011; Bogo, 2013)
- Transformative potential of the arts (Huss, 2013; Sinding et al., 2014; Hafford-Letchfield et al, 2012; Schubert and Gray, 2015)
- History and significance of transcultural/transdisciplinary learning
- Complexity of measuring the impact of the arts and gathering evidence

What the arts can offer social work within education and learning ??

- Attention to the **process** of engagement;
- Effect on **acquisition** of knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- How it facilitates the **affective domain**
- Value in **supporting educators'** diverse use of pedagogy
- Facilitation of **different learning styles** and varied ways of knowing and understanding in diverse contexts (Huss and Hafford-Letchfield, 2016, in review).
- Challenge to formulaic attempts to manage increasing complexity and uncertainty of social work practice
- **Activist pedagogy** (Preston and Aslett, 2014).
- A **different interpretation** to enhance the diagnostic, analytic and action capabilities of social work in **collaboration with service users** to find **new ways of practising** (Schubert and Gray, 2015).

Method and approach

Developing a review protocol
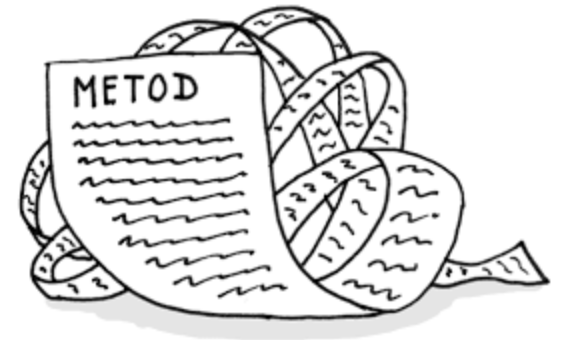
• To offer clarity in the definition of 'the arts' as applied in this review

• To examine any empirical studies able to provide evidence on the specific impact of the arts on social work education.

• To consider, identify and evaluate the different approaches to measuring impact

Databases and search terms used

- Social Care Online; SCOPUS; Education Research Complete; Higher Education Empirical Research; British Library EThOS; Psych Articles; CINAHL; Psych Info; SocINDEX; Educational Research information centre (ERIC) and Open Grey. The Cochrane Library was included for any previous SR.

- Search terms: Social Work AND Educat*OR Teach*OR Practice Teach*OR Learn*OR Assess*OR Curriculum OR Course OR Practice Learn*OR 'Practice Placement' OR Student* OR 'CPD' OR 'Continuing Professional Development' AND Art* OR Digit* OR Galler* OR Museum OR Exhibition OR Poetry OR Drama OR Film* OR Actor OR Creativ* OR Paint* OR Photo* OR Theatre OR Improvis* OR Novel OR Fiction OR Tapestry OR Quilt* OR Mim* OR 'Story Tell*' OR Potter* OR Ceramic* OR Circus.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

INCLUSION

- January 2003 to April 2015
- International but published in English.
- Studies with social workers across both qualifying and post qualifying education (did not distinguish between learning taking place in the academy or practice settings.
- Interdisciplinary or interprofessional learning studies included as long as social workers w
- Clear evaluation of pedagogies that demonstrated the explicit impact of arts based methods in social work education.
- Explicit reference to the value of artistic or arts based pedagogies in the evaluation.

Exclusion

- Outside the dates specified
- Not in English
- Arts based studies on education that di not including social work
- No clear evaluation framework/design
- Drama Studies using role play or simulation which did not make explicit refer to the value of artistic or arts based pedagogies in the evaluation

RESULTS

Full text articles retrieved and evaluated against inclusion   criteria n= 95

Excluded n=84 through use of CASP and inter-rater reliability

Critical appraisal of articles fitting inclusion criteria n= 9

9 studies subjected to Thomas and Harden's (2008:1) thematic synthesis approach - thematic analysis applied to develop emerging overarching 'descriptive themes' and 'the generation of analytical themes' in relation to the research question.

Strengths meant that the findings of each study could be successfully combined into a whole by listing themes which accounted and described what the authors of each study claimed as being successful in relation to the impact of the arts in social work education.

Analysing each paper in this way gave rise to three broad themes

Characteristics of 9 included studies reviewed

Study design
- Only 1 detailed a clear theoretical framework underpinning its evaluation design (Pawson and Tilly, 2000).
- One mixed methods design (Pomeroy, 2011) (USA)
- One quantitative design using validated scales (McPherson, 2015). (USA)
- Seven qualitative studies. Israel (2), UK (4) and Australia (1).

- Six used student participants' experiences main unit of analysis
- One auto-ethnography.

- Art interventions included drawing (2), sculpture (1), photographs (1), literature (2), music (1) and drama (2).

- Not all studies explicitly addressed or gained ethical approval for the evaluation

References for the 9 included studies

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- Author 1., Author 2, . & Author 3, . (2013). "'We're All Going Bali': Utilising Gamelan as an Educational Resource for Leadership and Teamwork in Post-Qualifying Education in Health and Social Care." *British Journal of Social Work* 43(1): 173-190.
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- Turner, L. M. (2012). "Encouraging Professional Growth among Social Work Students through Literature Assignments: Narrative Literature's Capacity to Inspire Professional Growth and Empathy." *British Journal of Social Work* 43(5): 853-871

Theme 1– **Positioning practice through linking micro and macro thinking**
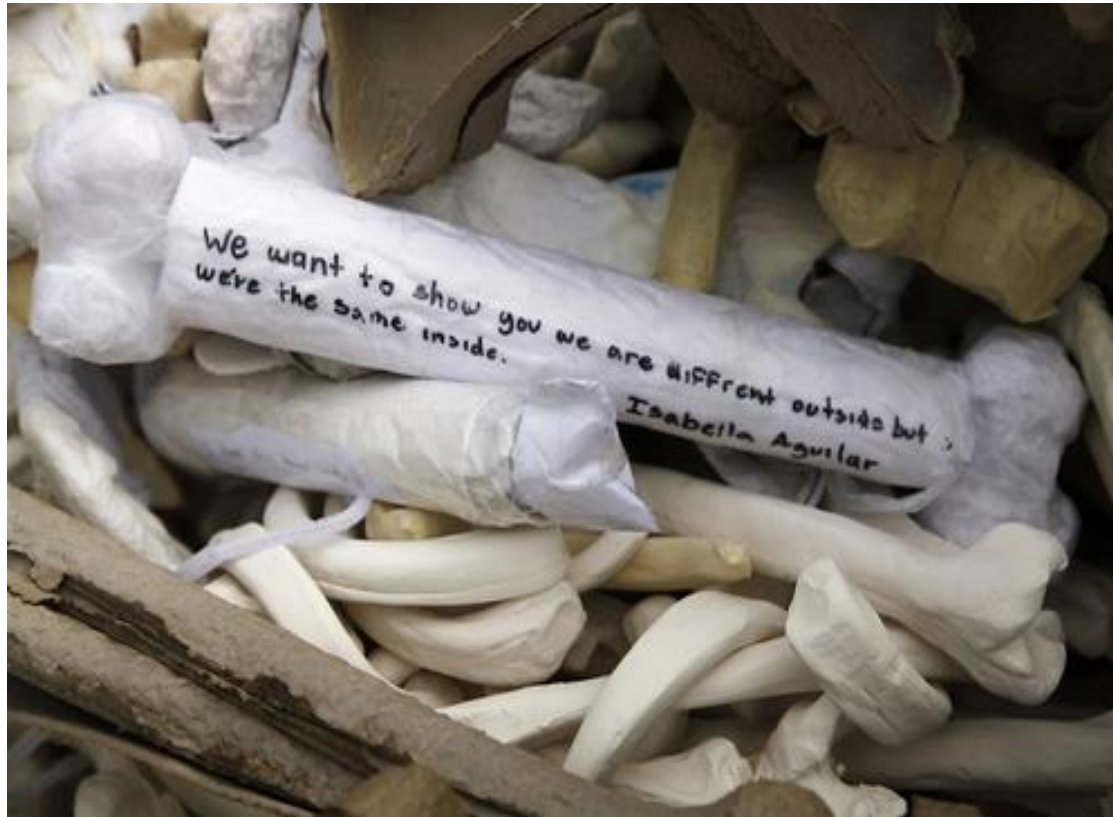
Theme 2 – Cultivating leadership beyond verbal reasoning

Theme three – **Art as pedagogy and pedagogy as art**

Limitations

- Quality of the studies included insufficiently rigorous either individually or collectively to draw any reliable conclusions.

- Limited in measures of impact of service user involvement and interprofessional learning in social work education - evidence points to advantages of integrating arts to explore these in a myriad of ways.

Discussion and Recommendations

- What constitutes effective evidence on the impact of the arts in social work education? 3 significant themes
- Explanatory models of arts-based learning the (Huss, 2013) one way in which to underpin creative evaluative methodologies.
- Adds to some theoretical perspectives on understanding of social structures, relationships, and other cognitive and emotive aspects of our selves
- Social work needs creative methods to find creative solutions
- Mirror values of the profession - measuring affect – important for achieving person centred practice.
- Comparability - do we really need to design and measure the impact of the use of the arts in social work education or challenging the dominance of scientific thinking (e.g EBP).

Publication

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