**Editorial, Vol 35, Issue 4**

Andrew Whittaker and Gloria Kirwan (2021) Editorial, *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 35 (4)

This general issue has the themes of connection and identity, with contributions from authors in the UK, Sweden, Italy, Canada and the US. The theme and tone for the special issue is set by the winner of the Clare Winnicott prize for a student essay, Emilie Wright, with her article entitled, ‘A message of hope: the challenges of relationship-based practice in a time of social distancing, but why it is more important than ever to come together’. Wright argues that, although we have had difference experiences of COVID-19, we have gone through the experience together at a global scale. The paradox is that, while our immediate social identity and relationships have been threatened and strained through social isolation, facing a shared global threat has helped us forge a stronger identity as humankind. However, she argues that we must pay attention to differences as well as similarities, highlighting that our individual situations are so different and increases in inequalities are inevitable.

In the first article of this issue, Philip John Archard examines the dynamics that occur when child protection practitioners consider whether to disclose their parental status to the parents that they work with. Situated within a wider study of how children’s services professionals experience the suffering of parents, the article examines how practitioners negotiate their parental identity status and how this affects the connection that they seek to form with parents. The article concludes that whether and what to disclose can be influenced more by anxieties about the maintenance of a particular professional identity than consideration of the benefits for their working relationships with parents.

The theme of professional identity and connection is continued in the second article by Peter Andersson and Carolina Øverlien about violence within a therapeutic residential institution for adolescents in Sweden. The article uses narrative inquiry to analyse how a staff member narrated an incident of violence, what this reveals about the negotiation of his work identity and how this influenced his ability to connect with the adolescent involved. The article concludes that such narratives have a valuable role to play in understanding and preventing both psychological and physical violence.

In the third article by Sheila Yousuf-Abramson, the application of Worden’s tasks of mourning to social work are examined, including how grief affects our sense of identity and ability to connect with others. The theory is situated within the history of theories of grief and explores the practical application to the social work role. The article concludes that loss and grief are universal human experiences and social workers in all fields require the understanding and skills to support clients and promote meaningful health and growth.

Separation and loss and its effects on identity and a sense of connection are central to the fourth article by Efren Gomeza, Keith Alford, Ramona Denby and Amanda Klein-Cox, which discusses how smartphone technology can support relational competence in foster youth support in the US. The study is part of a larger project aimed at building relational competence and the use of smartphone technology was explored in focus groups with professionals. The study concluded that, despite implementation challenges, the findings suggest that young people had a positive experience.

The fifth article in the issue is titled, ‘A critical review of social work interventions and programmes that support disabled youth with their sexual well-being’ by Ami Goulden. The article highlights how sexual well-being is central to individuals’ sense of identity, but social and structural factors can present significant barriers for disabled young people. This include ableist notions of asexuality or hypersexuality that can restrict participation. The article concludes that social workers are well placed to respond to young people’s needs but that challenges include practitioners not feeling prepared and a lack of sexual positive work combined with a dearth of literature to inform practice.

The next article is a qualitative study by Davide Galesi that explores how transcultural consultation can act as a tool in multicultural social work. It is an exploratory case study based in a local authority in Italy that used participant observations and semi-structured interview to examine how social workers could address the psycho-social vulnerabilities of clients from a migrant background. Transcultural consultation is informed by an ethnopsychological approach and the similarities and differences between this and other forms of cross-cultural social work models are outlined. The study concludes that this approach strengthens the cultural competence of social workers and discusses the implications for the social work role.

The next article by Ian Dore takes up the theme of connection and identity by exploring how psychosocial thinking helps to connect and integrate the individual’s inner world of emotions with the outer world of relationships and events. Comparisons between the role of the social science researcher and that of the social worker are explored, highlighting how both roles seek to make sense of the lives of others and how reflexive self-awareness creates new opportunities for seeing. It concludes that vulnerability can enhance knowing, allowing greater consideration of both unconscious and structural influences.

The final article by Eunjung Lee and Marley Tratner focuses upon the challenges of connecting with service users when developing a single session therapy (SST) framework. The article uses the analysis of the stages of a single session on Emotion- Focused Therapy to demonstrate how the therapist rapidly forms a therapeutic alliance and manages multiple tasks. The article discusses the compatibility of this approach with social work values and concludes by discussion how the SST approach could enhance social work values and practice.

Finally, as we begin the slow process of learning to reconnect and relate in a world separated by lockdowns and masks, we are increasingly aware of the value of our relationships. It is increasingly clear that, although relationship-based social work has many challenges, it has never been so needed. We would like to finish with the injunction by E M Forster,

‘Only connect… Live in fragments no longer’.

Andrew Whittaker,

London South Bank University

Gloria Kirwan,

Dept of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University, Ireland