

data collection as it reminds us of the many valid and reliable research methods available to researchers to inform evidence-based practice.

Youth health and welfare: the cultural politics of education and wellbeing

By Johanna Wyn. Published by Oxford University Press, South Melbourne. Paperback, 144pp. plus index. ISBN:9780195560466 RRP\$59.95.

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The audience for this text is broad; teachers, health workers, youth workers and parents. Readers may be misled by the title *Youth Health and Welfare* as the dominant phrase used is not welfare, but youth health and wellbeing. Welfare does not appear in the index nor in the contents page, whereas a whole chapter is devoted to wellbeing. The subtitle *The Cultural Politics of Education and Wellbeing* more accurately reflects the contents. Wyn adopts a critical perspective in order to develop new ways of thinking about young people's lives. The text does not present a medical, individual behaviour, personal responsibility perspective, but rather youth from a sociological backdrop of social, economic and political change with young people placed as the referent point in this bigger picture.

Sociological concepts such as 'risk society', individualisation of health', and 'consumer identities' provide a valuable divergent position to a public health perspective of individual's free choice and responsibility. Understanding these concepts offers health promoters a theoretical base for a 'social determinants' approach to their work. Youth is conceptualised as a culturally constructed phase that is socially and historically specific, a social process and a product of social conditions and processes.

There are eight chapters: Youth and social change; Young people and health issues in 21st century; Young people's health and wellbeing; Official responses; Constructing youth; Health markets and identities; Being young and well; and Challenges for health and education. Additionally, there is a Glossary and 20 figures describing, analysing and synthesising approaches. Each chapter finishes with a box with about five Key Concepts and Questions for further exploration. These

all contribute to making the text accessible to the reader.

The chapter exploring current understandings about the life phase labelled 'youth' documents an examination of assumptions underlying policies and institutional processes. The content of this will be instructive for many public health professionals. Wyn argues that in a time of rapid social change, it is easy for policies and programs to be out of step with the reality of young people's lives. In particular, young people are positioned as 'a problem', experiencing different types of transitions, and a group who can be slotted into particular categories of vulnerability and risk. This is informative reading that would help public health policy makers and practitioners to reflect on their work and its currency for the lives of young people. This call for reflection about the forces that shape current professionals' views about young people, their needs and identities, is echoed in other chapters about young people as consumers, their digital world and the market economy.

A critical analysis of the health professionals preoccupation with a biomedical orientation is approached through a discussion on disease prevention and risk factors, linked to an exploration of social exclusion and marginalisation of young people. There are details in this discussion that are valuable for professionals not only those who work with young people who are on the edge of socialising institutions, but also for workers and policy makers whose conceptualisations and practices in relation to young people can contribute to exclusion. The outcome of this, Wyn argues is that social, structural and contextual factors (that underpin social determinants of health) are ignored.

One of the sub themes of the text, wellbeing and young people draws on the longitudinal study – the Life Patterns project in Australia as well as international research. These studies reiterate the dominance of the theme of self management of health and wellbeing, but they also identify how young people put energy into choice and finding a balance. However, the point is validly made that there is a dearth of research and writing in this field particularly in relation to specific groups such as young people in rural areas and indigenous youth. This is identified as one of the challenges in the field. Other challenges include providing conditions for the empowerment of young people; developing greater clarity about the social processes that impact on young people's wellbeing; the impact on the utilisation of normative models in policy making, of the growing diversity in Australian society; and models for how adults could engage with young people's agendas.

This text is a highly accessible exploration of young Australian's lives. It is logically structured and cogently argued, challenging readers to reflect on the assumptions about young people and their lives, that underpin their work.