From the Editor—Integrating the Grand Challenges Into Social Work Education

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This is my last editorial as editor-in-chief of the Journal of Social Work Education (JSWE). Even before I started my tenure in this role, I anticipated opportunities to encourage my colleagues in their efforts to build a body of high-quality research about social work education (Yaffe, 2013). Somewhere along the way, I, like many of my friends and colleagues, became almost paralyzed by the political events of the past 3 years, and my editorials seemed to focus increasingly on ways that social work as a profession and social work education could respond to what I saw as important threats to our social safety net, our political democracy, our environment, and even to science as a way of knowing. With each successive issue, I grew more disappointed that I was not focusing on issues I thought I should be addressing in editorials for JSWE. I would like to use my last opportunity to address one issue that has been nagging at me for some time: the relationship of the grand challenges for social work (GCSWs) to social work education.

I suspect that like myself many of my colleagues in social work education have a limited understanding of the GCSWs, despite discussions about them at social work professional meetings, in faculty meetings, and in professional journals. Until recently, I thought the challenges had originated in social work to highlight the very good research being conducted by members of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW), and, not being a member of that organization, I felt somewhat detached from the initiatives. Just a few weeks ago, I learned from Wikipedia (!!!) (Grand Challenges, n.d.) that grand challenges are common to a wide variety of disciplines and professions and represent difficult, important problems. Establishing these challenges is intended to encourage the development of research-based solutions for global problems. To really fit the concept of grand challenges, these issues must capture “the popular imagination, and thus political support” (Gould, 2010, p. 64). Grand challenges have been promoted by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (Obama White House Archives, n.d.) and by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (n.d.) among others.

So what exactly are the GCSWs? The GCSWs were proposed, as mentioned earlier, by the AASWSW. Beginning in 2013, several working papers about the GCSWs were presented and eventually published on the AASWSW website (n.d.). These papers included a definition of the GCSWs by the Grand Challenges Executive Committee (Uehara et al., 2013); an impact model specifying scope, products, impacts and time frames (AASWSW, n.d.), and several other publications specifying the context (Sherraden et al., 2015a) and accomplishments (Sherraden et al., 2015b) and providing a strategic road map for identifying and tackling the GCSWs (Uehara et al., 2015).

There are currently 12 GCSWs, organized in three broad categories: individual and family well-being, stronger social fabric, and just society. In individual and family well-being, there are four initiatives: Ensure healthy development for all youth, close the health gap, stop family violence, and advance long and productive lives. The stronger social fabric category also has four initiatives: Eradicate social isolation, end homelessness, create social responses to a changing environment, and harness technology for social good. Finally, the just society category also has four initiatives: promote smart decarceration, build financial capability for all, reduce extreme economic inequality, and achieve equal opportunity and justice. Each of these initiatives has multiple champions, position papers, and lists of resources. Many of these initiatives also have associated research products and publications, and some also have fully developed educational modules. (See Grand Challenges for Social Work, http://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org/ for more about these initiatives.)

Although numerous articles about the GCSWs have been published in social work journals, including a special section on financial capability and asset building in Journal of Social Work Education (Special section, 2016) and an upcoming special issue addressing homelessness in
2020, there has been relatively little discussion of the GCSWs in social work education. Ideally, proponents for each of the 12 challenges should be developing some materials to help social work educators conceptualize curricula, develop pedagogical materials, and test the efficacy of their efforts. If these initiatives are truly important to social work, they should be integrated into social work education, and social work educators ought to be attending to the specific competencies related to these initiatives in the Council on Social Work Education (2015) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. Thus, my final challenge to my colleagues as outgoing editor-in-chief of JSWE is to work on the preceding issues: Articulate competencies, conceptualize curricula, and report on the outcomes of your efforts so that we can truly incorporate the GCSWs into social work education.

It has truly been an honor to help steer this journal; I see grand challenges ahead, but I know I am leaving the journal in excellent hands. The name of the new JSWE editor-in-chief will be announced at the Annual Program Meeting in Denver (October 24–27, 2019). I hope to see many of you there.

**In this issue**

This issue of *JSWE* contains a special invited article, one conceptual essay, several empirical studies, and two teaching notes. I am very excited about our invited article from Abramovitz and colleagues (“Voting is Social Work: Voices From the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign”), which describes a national initiative to engage social work faculty, field educators, and students in a nonpartisan voter registration drive. For me, voting is a sacred right of citizens to use their voices in governance and policy. It is particularly important to encourage the people in the communities we serve to register and vote in the 2020 elections, and I was elated when these contributors agreed to write about their efforts for *JSWE*. This article will remain free access for 1 year to encourage social work educators to mount similar efforts.

This issue’s conceptual essay by Mersky, Topitzes, and Britz (“Promoting Evidence-Based, Trauma-Informed Social Work Practice”) offers a framework to understand psychological trauma and the means by which systems, organizations, and social workers can work toward its prevention and amelioration. Following this article are five reports of qualitative studies. The first of these by Burke (“Teaching the History of Colonization in the Postsecondary Classroom”) explores the ways indigenous social workers experience colonization and uses this exploration to recommend incorporation of this material in the social work classroom. Next, Garcia, Crifasi, and Dessel (“Oppression Pedagogy: Intergroup Dialogue and Theatre of the Oppressed in Creating a Safe Enough Classroom”) explore the concept of a safe enough classroom and use intergroup dialogue and Theatre of the Oppressed to promote student self-reflection and openness to learning about oppression. Third, Rogers, Braband, and Gaudino use Photovoice as an assignment to help nursing students gain a deeper understand of their own and their patients’ grieving processes (“Implementing the Pedagogy of Suffering: A Photovoice Innovation in Students’ Exploration of Grief and Loss”). Next, Kiesel and Abdill use semistructured interviews to examine the experiences of social work students with disabilities in field education (“Mapping Social Justice: Integrating Policy Practice Across the Curriculum”) and discuss strategies for improving opportunities for students with disabilities. Finally, Willis, Wick, Han, Rivera, and Doran report on professional identity and skills development for Latinx students completing internships or service-learning projects in Costa Rica (“If I Did It Over There, I Can Do It Here: U.S. Latinx Social Work Students in Costa Rican Service Placements Deepening Their Professional Identity and Skills”).

Three articles report on mixed-methods research in this issue. John and Schrandt (“Social Work Practice With Individuals With Intellectual Disability: Social Work Students’ Perspectives”) explore BSW students’ attitudes and readiness to practice with people who have intellectual disabilities, and they discuss implications for social work education. Wilson, Bender, and DeChants (“Beyond the Classroom: The Impact of a University-Based Civic Hackathon Addressing Homelessness”) assessed the feasibility of a hackathon, a 7-hour event incorporating expert panels, rapid iteration, and solution pitches. Miller and colleagues (“Student Experiences Engaging in Interdisciplinary Research Collaborations: A Case Study for Social Work
Education”) report a case study of a collaboration of graduate students from social work, civil engineering, and computer science working on the design of a mobile app to collect data on critical transportation needs of older adults and homeless individuals.

In addition, three articles report on research using quantitative methods. Amerman Goerdt and colleagues (“Teaching Characteristics and Student Satisfaction: Impact on Social Work Students’ Interest in Policy”) explore the characteristics that influence the effectiveness of policy instructors and promote interest in policy work among social work students. Lee and Rispoli (“Head Start Impact on Fathers’ Involvement and Black Children’s Development”) examined Head Start’s impact on fathers’ school-based involvement and associations with Black children’s cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional skills. O’Reilly, Pecukonis, and DeForge (“Maternal and Child Health Leadership Program in Social Work: An Alumni Survey”) examined self-reported competencies and program satisfaction among MSW graduates who participated in a problem-based learning maternal and child health leadership development program and offer recommendations for similar programs and related research.

This issue of JSWE wraps up with two teaching notes. Rodenborg and Dessel (“Teaching Note—Learning About Segregation and Cultural Competence”) present the Social Contact Survey, a pedagogical tool designed to help students understand their level of segregation, its effect on their daily lives, and its relationship to social work practice. Kuilema and colleagues (“Teaching Note—Time for a Teach-In? Addressing Racist Incidents on College Campuses”) offer a timely description of a teach-in organized to address events on campus, arguing that teach-ins are a model for responding to hate crimes and other racist incidents and for developing the competencies of social work students to do the same.

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References