

Book review

Dementia studies: a social science perspective

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There is much knowledge about dementia from the social sciences and one way of organising it is to see it as part of professional learning. This book is such a text: it provides social scientists with an insight into dementia knowledge and for those with practice experience it provides illustrations of how the social sciences can help to make sense of this work. There is room for such a text in meeting student needs by providing an up-to-date overview of social science perspectives. Educationalists will find it reliable and multi-purpose, in being a 'primer' for those new to dementia or to social science. It will also be a potential resource for nurse, social work and other practice educators who are new to dementia programmes or wish to expand their teaching. In my experience, this is particularly helpful when trying to convey key messages about multi-professional or integrated care. Very quickly, professionals from many disparate disciplines realise that they do not have all the answers. This book will therefore be of interest to the student or researcher on their own, but also to classes and teams.

The book is based on the author's experiences in teaching on the well-regarded educational programmes of the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling in Scotland. These programmes are generally taken by students with personal and/or professional experiences of dementia work, notably in nursing, social work, social care and psychology. As the programme has grown, it has attracted students based in other parts of Europe and from China. This is reflected in the wide range of material presented here which often goes beyond Scottish and United Kingdom examples. This means that the author's discussions of dementia and the importance of culture reflect different perspectives about stigma, care and medical contexts, and views of mental illness.

The six chapters of this book outline current perspectives on what is known about dementia. Chapters explore the political, economic and social context of dementia studies. They take an expansive look at care of people with dementia, the interaction of dementia and cultural contexts, research into policy and practice. Innes concludes with an analysis of what is being presented to various audiences as dementia 'knowledge'.

Two key themes underpin each chapter. These are that the voices and experiences of people with dementia are becoming much more central to 'dementia knowledge'. In studies of many settings or of various interventions, they are now reporting lived experience. Obviously, this is not universal and Innes clearly favours research and consultation where people with dementia have seized the opportunity to be heard. Nonetheless, as many professionals have observed, this is a major achievement of the past decade. It means that we can draw on new insights. Much credit is due to funders of research and of services who have taken the risk of listening to patient/user views. However, equal credit must go to researchers who have worked with people with dementia collaboratively. Similarly, it is campaigning and voluntary sector groups that have often enabled people with dementia to work collectively to combine their strengths.

Innes identifies the growing importance of disability studies in permeating dementia knowledge. This shift over the past two decades has thrown up new areas of understanding, such as the importance of stigma, the sociology of the body, and critical analysis of care and care-giving. It has also been a major underpinning of debates about institutions and institutionalisation, dependence and independence and gender. In any integrated service or setting it is helpful to know the past when seeking to improve understanding and interventions.

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