

Book reviews

Young People and The Aesthetics of Health Promotion: Beyond Reason, Rationality And Risk

Kerry Montero and Peter Kelly

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This is a sound and innovative text for all those practitioners researching and working with young people in the field of health promotion. The focus is on a tightly structured health promotion initiative Fit to Drive, which is aimed at reducing road deaths amongst young drivers within Western Australia. Young people engage in risk taking behaviours in whichever culture they live in. So despite the seemingly specific focus of this book, it does have a wide ranging appeal to all those trying to engage with young people, to empower them to make safe and informed choices.

The prelude to the book is particularly gripping, powerful and thought provoking. It challenges the reader to consider why health promotion is such an important concept suggesting that health promotion is often seen as “tragic theatre”. Indeed the authors state that the aim of the book is to unsettle and trouble, in order to explore what factors and strategies make health promotion interventions successful within the context of the school setting. The authors refer to spaces within schools, such as dining rooms and school halls, to uncover what engagement and interactions take place, and it is elements such as these that help enhance the text. There is a narrative story threaded throughout the book, which portrays Kerry’s story (the writer and facilitator of the Fit to Drive Programme), which provides a valuable context and insight as well as provoking questions about the intervention and its approach.

The chapters that follow explore concepts which include rationality and risk, emotions and values, the role stories play in health promotion using the Greek Tragedy and young people as choosing agents. An interesting and

useful discussion is presented exploring how young people fear being seen as ordinary, yet they are often viewed by others as being risk takers. But there is the connected notion that young people are actually at risk.

One of the most important messages within the book is that health promotion programmes aimed at young people need to evoke a sense of emotion. It is not enough to just present facts, statistics and didactic messages stating what they should and should not do. Young people need to be able to respond on an emotional level to the health promotion messages being delivered. Therefore the Fit to Drive programme uses powerful stories and in particular the personal narrative, by adopting techniques such as backshadowing; enabling the young people to step into the drama, consider how to rewrite the plot and then to make different decisions thereby helping them to transfer new thinking into behaviour changed action.

Overall the text manages to provide an excellent balance between theoretical discussion, laced with references to well established theorists such as Polkinghorne, Bourdieu and Bruner, alongside details of what activities actually took place with the workshops. Although on slight occasions the level of fine detail of the narrative appeared a little unnecessary. Within the conclusion the key themes of the book are brought together well and are then tied to the title of the book, i.e. the aesthetics of health promotion. The authors revisit their aim, which was to open up spaces for others working with young people to reorder their practices, by delivering effective health promotion messages using an innovative approach. Overall this book will be a valuable and stimulating text for all those working with young people.

Sarah Sherwin

Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing, University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK.