Samuel Stones and Jonathan Glazzard (2019) *Supporting Student Mental Health in Higher Education,* **St. Albans: Critical Publishing (ISBN 978-1-912508-77-8 [Pbk], 144pp)**

Samuel Stones' and Jonathan Glazzard's, *Supporting Student Mental Health In Higher Education* is part of a new series, Positive Mental Health, that aims to provide a "modern and comprehensive set of evidence based strategies for promoting positive mental health". The authors write from perspectives informed by research focused on special educational needs, disability and LGBTQ+ inclusion, and the promotion of mental health in educational contexts based on their experience as educators in compulsory and post-compulsory settings. Consequently, they impart an appreciation of the crucial contributions that educational professionals can make to student mental health, given appropriate training and practical guidance informed by contemporary research. At just 144 pages, the authors have focused on offering concise explanations, which enhances the book's accessibility. Mental health is a complex area and can be daunting to many practitioners, new or experienced. That said, the book is commendable in its scope, covering: transitions, risk factors, common mental health needs and how to support specific groups of students.

At the outset, Stones and Glazzard emphasise the significance of the increase in mental health concerns in the UK, setting it against a backdrop of funding cuts and strained services. Broadening the scope, they highlight the diversification of the student population, the associated increased equality of opportunity, and universities' consequent legal obligations, as well as the ethical and fiscal arguments for adequately supporting students' wellbeing, as additional challenges. In this context, the opening part of the book highlights the importance of the relationship between smooth transitions and positive mental health as well as the implications of failing to facilitate these. (This is explored more fully in Chapter Six.) The need for a preventative focus is stressed and the suggestion that an institution wide approach would facilitate this is made. This

is explored in Chapter Four, which discusses the importance of openness and collaboration between the institution and external partners, such as the NHS. By way of a postscript, the authors mention emerging concerns around the mental health of higher education staff due to workload, cultures of bullying, and the impact of this on the student experience. Propitiously, at the time of this review (December 2019), Student Minds released their *University Mental Health Charter*, which endorses the 'whole university' approach, recognising the importance of *both* learner and staff wellbeing (Hughes and Spanner, 2019).

Risk factors are covered in Chapter Two, which are categorised into course factors, campus climate, individual, external factors and assessment pressures. Particular attention is paid to the latter and how assessment design and implementation can create, exacerbate or alleviate mental ill health. Stones and Glazzard provide numerous and varied examples of differentiation and inclusive practice that promote positive mental health including developing students' assessment literacy.

The authors explore definitions of mental health and their multifaceted causes in Chapter Three. They draw attention to the legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the ways in which staff can encourage disclosures through the promotion of rights. A variety of common mental health needs in students is also described, myths dispelled and advice offered on how to identify these and directly support students, including knowing when to refer on. This is particularly useful in raising awareness and as a quick reference guide for tutors.

There follows, for me, the most compelling part of the book, in a description of 'student as producer framework', wherein students are not passive recipients of knowledge and, with imagination, a rhizomatic learning environment – stimulated by boosting the student voice and diligent curriculum design - has the potential to create connectivity and empowerment.

The final part of the book (Chapters Five to Eight) focus on supporting vulnerable and specific groups of students. Barriers to learning, participation and achievement are identified and how they can influence mental ill health. Specific groups include those with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQ+, the care experienced, caregivers and international students: the *absence* of an explicit focus on BAME students was noted. The authors offer strategies for addressing the needs of the specific groups but advise caution on homogenising students with shared protected characteristics.

The focus is not wholly on the undergraduate experience. The authors also outline the challenges for postgraduate research students who experience loneliness or feel 'the imposter syndrome'. They provide practical advice for setting boundaries, negotiating relationships (e.g. with supervisors), preparing and assessing students, building research communities and working with international students.

Of particular poignancy is the role of the personal tutor and the demands on staff. As has been noted in the literature – particularly research from Student Minds (Hughes et al., 2018) – staff need to be supported and equipped with the basic mental health

training needed to spot the warning signs, and personal tutors require the professional supervision to de-brief and discuss cases with sensitivity. However, personal tutors are detached from the professional services – and it is at this point that other teams within the university are discussed, who can also assist in reducing stress and anxiety (e.g. academic skills teams, careers) – in other words, recognising the whole university approach.

This is a timely and engaging book. Mental health and wellbeing is a complex area and, in the UK, numerous resources and policy reports are being produced on a regular basis (Mistry, 2018). This book was published before *The University Mental Health Charter,* and as the Charter comes into effect, our experiences and senses of embedding good practice relative to mental health and wellbeing is likely to change. Nevertheless, the book is well-structured, engaging and is a useful primer for those working in UK higher education – teacher, student, leader or support service provider.

References

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