Health Promotion: Ideology, discipline and specialism


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John Kemm has been a public health lecturer, manager and planner for many years, and has spent nearly all his time in the western part of England. His work has been entirely within the UK and has been heavily influenced by the National Health Scheme.

The book is also entirely about the health education, health promotion, disease prevention and health protection in that country. Authors of articles from outside the UK are only referred to if they have been published in a local journal. One example of an author who is writing on very much the same theme is David Seedhouse with Health promotion: Philosophy, Prejudice and Practice. He is not cited. Dr Kemm, now a consultant with his own firm, writes that “Health promotion is indeed everybody’s business and the many people for whom health promotion is part of their professional role should find the message of this book relevant to them.” He tries to define the indefinable: “The numerous names which have been applied to health promotion indicate the confusion which surrounds it.” He makes a case for adopting Salutogenesis as a way to redirect the activities associated with the aims of health promotion (and therefore, public health). Introduced in 1974, Salutogenesis is concerned with the relationship between health, stress and coping, and is not much used in Australia. Another matter that Kemm raises is the World Health Organization’s Health for All 2000 and Health for All 2020. He extends the concepts in these policies to include health promotion, which they do not.

This book would be useful for UK health professionals; he gives a clear coverage of health promotion in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. There is nothing about Australia, North America, Europe or any other part of the world, with two exceptions: the work of Marc Lalonde in Canada and Lawrence Green in the US and his Precede-Proceed model.

A section on the ethics of health promotion, with the work of Rawls and Marmot, would be useful to any public health worker in the field of health promotion, because ethics and bioethics are now universal in theories and application. A section on evaluation was very clear, except that the planning of any project that is to be evaluated, and not just monitored for process or outcomes, must include the evaluator, who – as he stresses – must be independent.

Kemm concludes with “This book has criticised current practice in several areas.” One criticism that was not apparent is the diminishing of the role of the community. He mentions social capital, but not civil society; community development, but not non-government organisations. He does display the use of websites, but not their initiators.

The book is well structured and referenced. However, it is of no value to a health professional outside the UK. It is, very correctly, provincial in its discussions and examples as it is clearly aimed at beginners, rather than long-serving professionals, with the latter being warned that there are new models and techniques available, including social media, social marketing and professional bodies.