

The Pocket Guide to Health Promotion: Book Review

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Abstract

The Pocket Guide to Health Promotion by Glenn Laverack is a book that has been written for the practitioner and undergraduate student market. The combination of communicating complex concepts in easy-to-understand ways and the use of international case studies to contextualise theory makes this a very attractive text. The book is expertly written by one of the leading commentators in the field and, reflecting the author's expertise, the book is particularly strong on international issues; community-based health promotion; policy and health activism; and empowerment. While The Pocket Guide to Health Promotion is very comprehensive, it does stop short of discussing some issues – the book, for example, does not discuss behaviour change and social marketing in detail. However, the book remains a must have for practitioners and for undergraduate students studying courses with a health promotion element.

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On reading 'The Pocket Guide to Health Promotion', my overall impression is that Glenn Laverack had one thing on his mind when writing the book – the reader. While this may sound blindingly obvious and an essential prerequisite to successful writing, it was clear that Laverack had thought carefully about his intended audience. Laverack's accessible style of writing and ability to communicate effectively shows his understanding of the target readership; in this case, health promotion practitioners and the undergraduate student market. Over ten chapters, the book provides an overview of health promotion almost in its entirety – highlighting key concepts as well as practical approaches to planning, strategy and evaluation. The book has a logical coherency starting with clear historical explanation of health promotion as both a discipline and practice and then moving through to health promotion planning and evaluation. The book is written extremely well, meticulously referenced and considers recent policy, practice and research. There are many contemporary ideas and themes within the book, many of which are currently en vogue in current health promotion discourse. 'Asset-based' approaches; the focus on volunteers and lay health workers; and the use of modern technologies within health promotion strategies all feature in the book. As

well as focussing on the cutting-edge and the modern, Laverack also reverts to drawing on seminal works by the likes of Antonovsky which gives the book a pleasing balance. The book also effectively draws on Laverack's own research and interests which means the book is particularly strong on international issues; community-based health promotion; policy and health activism; and empowerment. The book clearly has a real-life, practice-based application, which makes it quite dissimilar to other texts on the market that purport to present health promotion in succinct ways (Nutbeam et al., 2010). Other helpful features within the book include a detailed glossary of terms as well as a summary of key points at the end of each chapter.

Given the 'pocket-sized' billing, Laverack is able to cover health promotion in a comprehensive way but the book does stop short of discussing behaviour change and social marketing in detail. While the advantage of a 'pocket-sized' resource book will be very appealing, inevitably the succinct and concise format of the book means that some areas in the book are absent of a more critical commentary that we have come to expect from Laverack (see for example, Laverack, 2007, Laverack, 2013). The section on health promotion evaluation, for

instance, tends to skirt around rather than articulate fully the debates and controversies. That said, the discussion of evaluative methods such as 'community stories' is helpful in demonstrating the range of evidence that can be used in health promotion evaluation. Those studying beyond undergraduate level or those practicing health promotion at senior levels may wish to consider more critical commentaries on the discipline (Green et al., Forthcoming, Dixey, 2013) in addition to the book. However, those new to the theory and practice of health promotion would be wise to purchase the book and would no doubt use it as a key resource text.

Overall, the book is a must have for practitioners and for undergraduate students studying courses with a health promotion element. The content of the book and the writing is of a high-quality and is written authoritatively by one of the leading experts in the field. The marriage of complex concepts being defined in manageable ways and the use of international case studies and examples to contextualise theory makes this a very accessible book. In my opinion, the book fills an important gap in the health promotion textbook market. I would anticipate this being a welcome addition to the book shelf of any practicing health promoter or for anyone studying the discipline for the first time.

References

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