



Forward via the Past? Evidence-Based Practice as Strategy in Social Work

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ABSTRACT

The concept of evidence-based practice is enjoying resurgence across the applied social sciences. This paper examines the concept's deployment in social work, an activity that exemplifies the optimistic institutionalisation of the applied social sciences within post war welfare states. Employing the notion of the professional project, I chart the development of Australian social work in the 20th century, noting the ambiguities and tensions of working in a humanist profession acting on behalf of the state. Evidence-based practice is one way some social workers have attempted to manage these tensions, a means congruent with the professional project. As the welfare state is destabilised, and in response to managerialist-inspired modes of

reform, evidence-based practice has been revitalised. I assess the capacity and merit of evidence-based practice as a political strategy articulated by sections of a destabilised occupational group to promote the goals of social work in a context of institutional upheaval.

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