

# Reviews

*The Practice Educator's Handbook*  
(*Post Qualifying Social Work Practice*)

Sarah Williams and Lynne Rutter

Exeter, Learning Matters, 2010, 160pp.

ISBN 9780857250940 (pbk) £20.00 (also available as ebook)

Timed to coincide with the publication of the draft Practice Educator Framework (Skills for Care, 2009) this book is aimed at social workers supporting learners in the workplace and specifically those undertaking practice educator training under the new Framework. It is hoped that experienced practice educators wishing to develop their practice in the light of the new standards will also find the book useful.

In essence the book captures the discussions and proposals promoted by the Task Force and Social Work Reform Board and offers an application within the field of practice education and work-based learning that places the practice educator at the core of an effective learning organisation. In their introduction the authors summarise the key themes of the book: that the role of practice educators should extend to supporting and enabling all learners within an organisation and that the notion of professional capability should be developed by educators through the medium of critical and reflective practice, in order to supplement competence-based assessment. To underline this, Chapter 1 offers a review of the evolution of social work education with its growing emphasis on learning in the workplace and explores the highly developed skill base needed by practice educators in order to help a learner bridge the gap between work-based and academic learning.

The book is presented in the familiar style of the Learning Matters series,

structured in four parts covering the four domains of the new Practice Educator Framework: planning learning, enabling learning, assessment and continuing professional development. The book is easy to read and dip into by topic. Learning themes are underlined through chapter summaries, activities, case studies, research summaries and reflection points, some of which, although on occasion simplistic, would be helpful as material in group learning situations as well as for individual learning.

The book achieves a balance between research and theory-based discussion and practical tips for managing a learner's experience. I found the sections on planning and on assisting less skilled learners to 'learn to learn' particularly helpful. Many practice educators are under-confident in linking theory and practice and using research in practice and these themes are explored in depth. Working with learners who are not reaching competence is addressed throughout, underpinned again by the premise that practice educators need to be aware of their own professional development in order to promote that of others (Chapter 5).

Much of the content is familiar, for example around learning styles and assessment. However, the fact that throughout the book the authors maintain their persuasive argument for the symbiotic connections between effective critical practice and learning makes this book feel relevant to the current debates about social work education and practice. Research and experience emerging from the last thirty years of practice learning and education are drawn on to remind us that these debates are evolutionary and the authors demonstrate constructively that adaptive and applied skills are essential tools for educators as well as practitioners, given the seemingly increased complexity of the world we and our service users live in.

As an HEI practice learning coordinator I found it useful to review familiar material through the prism of the four domains of the new Practice Educator Framework and to shift my thinking into a more holistic model for enabling learning which can also be applied to partnerships with employers, for example in preparation for the suggested Assessed and Supported Year in Employment initiative. I think experienced practice educators and practice learning coordinators will be most receptive to this book, but I would urge inexperienced practice educators to use it also as a way of supplementing the more practical guides to practice education also on the market.

Pessimists may fear that the upbeat conclusion of the book has been overshadowed by the subsequent announcement of the demise of the GSCC and lack of clear indication of how the Practice Educator Framework is to be implemented and monitored in practice. However, the spirit of the book

is true to what many of us hope is a real momentum towards improving the professional standards of social work and to that end the promotion of enablers and educators to a central position within organisations.

## Reference

Skills for Care (2009) *Proposals for a Practice Educator Framework*. [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/socialwork/practiceeducation](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/socialwork/practiceeducation)

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*Social Work, Social Policy and Older People*,  
Robert Johns (Ed.)

Exeter, Learning Matters, 2011, 208pp

ISBN 978 1 84445 349 8 (pbk) £19.00 (also available as ebook)

Robert Johns' and his fellow contributors have produced a book which will become an essential resource for students of social work and social policy. It is clearly written, demystifying and making explicit the links between social policy and its direct impact on people's lives. The book serves as a valuable resource bringing together in one space all you need to know about past and contemporary social work and social policy in relation to older people; which in itself is an area that often gets neglected.

This well constructed book interactively engages the reader with an introduction to why social policy is an essential area of knowledge for social workers and it tracks the ideologies that shape the development of social policy relating to older people. This is achieved by chapters exploring political ideas and social policy in the Edwardian Era of non intervention, the development of the state dominated welfare state, the rise of community care to the transformation of adult social care in the twenty-first century. Johns illuminates his analysis with interesting literature extracts and each chapter has the obligatory summary and further reading suggestions which are so essential to promote reader self directed learning and enquiry.

Johns also provides excellent chapters exploring the lived experiences of

older people highlighting issues of ageism and diversity of the older adult population and the celebration as well as challenge of an ageing population. Johns also offers in Chapter seven 'Local and Global' an excellent exploration of international comparative perspectives of social policy relating to older people. By providing case studies and clarifying welfare paradigms Johns supplies readers with the analytical tools to undertake their own examination of international perspectives.

It is important to note that this text is much more than a historical explanation of social policy, as it seeks to encourage readers to be actively involved with its content by engaging them cognitively and practically. Each chapter's content and exercises are linked to skills development derived from and mapped to QAA Social work and Social Policy subject statements. Johns assists readers in developing and reviewing their critical thinking skills of understanding, application, evaluation and assessment and link to practice by using case studies, critical thinking exercises (with useful suggested answers at the end of the text), suggestions for further optional study and a checklist to review their critical thinking skills and understanding of key ideas.

Johns' concluding chapter, as well as revisiting key concepts applied through the case study used in the opening chapter, poses us with important questions about the role of family based care, the future responsibility of the state and the role of social work in promoting the welfare of older people as we experience significant cuts in services for some of the most vulnerable citizens in our society. In uncertain times like this a crystal ball would be useful!

## References

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2008) *Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Work*. York: QAA. Available at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2007) *Subject Benchmark Statements for Social Policy*. York : QAA. Available at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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