

Reviews

Learning Organisations
What they are and how to become one
Alan Clarke
Leicester, NIACE 2001
ISBN 1 86201 116 8 (pbk) £8.95

This pocket sized reader sets out clearly and concisely its intentions within the title. In very simple and easy to follow steps it sets out for the reader what is meant by a learning organisation, why organisations would want to aspire to be one and then sets out a series of tasks for the reader to follow within the context of their organisation to facilitate the development of a learning culture within the organisation.

The tasks are focused and developmental to guide the reader through the process of becoming a learning organisation offering clear guidelines and exercises to facilitate this process.

The attraction of this book is the fact that it is a concise and easily read guide that could be used by many different organisations to facilitate this progression. It is not into heavy jargon or theoretical approaches but concentrates on simple tasks in bite size chunks. It also offers opportunity to reflect on the process by encouraging individuals to accept responsibility for their actions.

It demonstrates the significant role of senior management in carrying forward the notion of the organisation as a learning culture.

A useful appendix offers a review of other learning organisation books in order to widen reading opportunities for the reader interested in taking this work further.

In conclusion, this little book would be of use to many organisations interested in developing a learning culture. The book is a good beginning foundation text with the added extra of a comprehensive bibliography at the end should the reader wish to take this topic further.

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Collaboration in Social Work Practice

Edited by Jenny Weinstein, Colin Whittington and Tony Lieba

London, Jessica Kingsley, 2003, 255pp

ISBN 1 84310 092 4 (pbk) £18.99

The authors suggest that collaboration between professionals and with service users and carers is essential to the successful delivery of care services but acknowledge that, despite government policies, procedures and new forms of organisation, there are considerable and continuing barriers to working in partnership and collaborative practice.

The urgency of addressing these problems is illustrated by two reports which appeared early in 2003 as this book went to press. The first was Lord Laming's report into the terrifying catalogue of breakdowns in communication within and between agencies that led to their failure to prevent the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003). The second, the *First Annual Report of the Learning Disability Task Force* (DoH, 2003), illustrated the difficulties experienced by the new partnership boards in implementing the recommendations of the White Paper *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001) to create effective partnerships with people with learning difficulties and their families as a key to social inclusion.

This book appears at an opportune time as we embark on major changes and challenges to social work as a profession. It will be welcomed by many social work academics and practice teachers striving to enable social work students to work in a very different climate than the one in which they qualified as social workers. Read together with *Innovative Education and Training for Care Professionals: A Providers' Guide* (Pierce & Weinstein, 2002), it provides a useful guide to the changing context of social work.

The new degree in social work requires universities to involve service users at all levels of recruitment and selection, teaching, learning, and assessment, and places a much greater emphasis on partnership working and collaborative practice than the Diploma in Social Work. Although service users are currently consulted about their views by agencies and participate in some teaching sessions in universities, they will be expected in the future to play a central role in the whole process. This is relatively uncharted territory for many social work academics and this book provides useful guidance about

how to involve service users in a collaborative rather than patronising way.

The first two chapters provide the key theoretical concepts and repay careful study. In the first chapter Whittington discusses the many confusing terms for working together with service users and other agencies, and comes up with the following definitions: *'Partnership is a state of relationship, at organizational, group, professional or inter-personal level, to be achieved, maintained and reviewed'* whereas *'Collaboration is an active process of partnership in action'* (p.16). He suggests that the term 'collaborative practice' overcomes the limitations of existing terms and, in the second chapter, describes a model for collaborative practice with service users and agencies. In the first stage of the model the five key interconnected spheres in care practice and collaboration are identified as: service users and carers, personal, professional, team, and organizational. In the second stage of collaboration the key spheres of interaction are: service users and carers, Inter-Personal, Inter-Professional, Inter-Organizational, and Inter-disciplinary Team.

These two chapters are followed by an analysis by Leiba and Weinstein of the major players in the collaborative process and the factors that make for success or failure. A number of authors make the point that, although we have evidence to show that lack of communication between and within agencies and service users results in poor outcomes, we do not have much evidence to prove that collaborative practice results in better outcomes for service users.

Davis and Sims confront the problem of health and social care professionals holding different values. They illustrate this with a case study where nursing and social work students were asked to consider an ethical dilemma. Both groups agreed that the service user's interests should come first, but disagreed how the service user's interests would be best served in the given situation. They outline the movement towards 'common ground' in health and social services in terms of a progression passing through four stages, starting with 'separation and segregation within our professional fortresses' and ending with 'the conscious adoption of a common values base as the shared ground on which to build common rules for practice'.

The remainder of the book examines different aspects of collaboration in practice in relation to a number of different service user groups, including children and their families and carers, people

with mental health problems and their carers, adults with learning disabilities and their carers, older people and their carers, and working in primary health care settings. While there is a wealth of material on working together in partnership with children and their families and multi-agency working, the issues in relation to collaborative practice with adults with mental health problems, learning disabilities and older people, have not been so well covered. Each chapter ends with key learning points and/or good practice guidelines.

There are some exciting and challenging ideas in this book that will take time to digest. I intend to return to Whittington's chapters on definitions and his model for collaborative practice and Davis and Sims' chapter on shared values. I can strongly recommend this book to social work lecturers, practice teachers and social work students. The authors challenge us to think how we can keep the interests of service users and their carers central by promoting the core social work values of respecting and valuing difference and taking account of the social context of service users in collaborative practice with other agencies, rather than retreating into an entrenched and isolationist defence of the social work identity.

References

- DoH (2001) *Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disabilities for the 21st century*. London: TSO
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- Pierce, R. and Weinstein, J. (2000) *Innovative Education and Training for Care Professionals: A Providers' Guide*. London: Jessica Kingsley

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Breakthroughs in Practice
Theorising critical moments in social work
Edited by Lindsey Napier and Jan Fook
London, Whiting & Birch, 2000, viii+230pp
ISBN 1 86177 032 4 (hbk) £39.95

This book is essentially about how engaging in critical reflection can act as a catalyst for real change and development in professional practice. It contains an interesting and diverse collection of 'reflections' from a range of practitioners, representing practice settings mainly in Australia and the UK. The editors are themselves from Australian universities, with Jan Fook already having been widely published on the subject of critical reflective practice (eg. Fook, 1999, 2000; Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 2000).

In addition to the mainly theoretical introductory and concluding chapters by the editors (placing the discussion of reflective practice within its current context), there are 14 further chapters, each by a different practitioner. The contributions address areas of practice that are particularly challenging, and ones in which practitioners may frequently feel disempowered by the seemingly intransigent or hopeless nature of the issues they are trying to work with. Through the process of critical reflection the contributors demonstrate how they have begun to deconstruct the issues, their own assumptions, assessments and responses, and the systems in which they operate. The thoughts and experiences they share are on the whole very honest, exploring how personal, and indeed accepted professional, values impact on our approaches to service users. Indeed a common theme running through the book is about recognising and reflecting on the 'power that can be generated by the way we construct people's lives' (p.82).

The areas of practice included cover critical incidents from such diverse aspects of social work as working in a maximum security prison; community work in the Gorbals; community crime prevention work; palliative care; grief counselling at a mortuary; the process of 'doing referrals' in a referral team; working with a young mother who chooses prostitution to support herself and her child; working with a mother who loses yet another child to adoption; and supporting a young woman dying of HIV.

The range of areas addressed, I think, is a real strength of this

volume. It pulls no punches and allows us to reflect with the authors on some of the most difficult aspects of the work social workers do. It helps us, for example, to reflect on what the role of social work actually is, and indeed on what it can and cannot be. Difficult and sometimes painful questions are asked and explored. It is not a book of 'answers'; it is about recognising the importance of giving ourselves the time to take an honest look at what we do, and the influences that shape our practice.

In drawing the themes together, the editors identify a number of challenges in their concluding chapter: for example, the importance of seeing service users as 'whole' people; a more appropriate use of 'self' in developing understanding and responses; and the importance of recognising and challenging the often unhelpful kind of 'dichotomous' thinking that is rife in professional practice and the institutions within which it operates (eg. notions of 'care' vs 'control'; practice vs theory; etc.).

Overall the main contribution of this book is to emphasise the central importance of reflective practice in helping practitioners to see possibilities for change, empowerment, openness to new theories and 'theory-building', and the ability to both act with confidence 'yet remain receptive to uncertainty' (p. 224).

As such this book will prove a useful and challenging read to a wide range of practitioners and educators. Other recent books have used case material to help us explore the process and importance of reflective practice (eg. Martyn 2000), and this book will appeal to a similar audience - in particular, experienced practitioners, those engaging in post-qualifying training, practice teachers, and all those interested in developing and supporting a 'learning culture' in their organisations.

References

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Fook, J., Ryan, M. and Hawkins, L. (2000) *Professional Expertise: Practice, theory and education for working in uncertainty*. London: Whiting and Birch

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Social Work Practice

Assessment, planning, intervention and review

Jonathan Parker and Greta Bradley

Exeter, Learning Matters, 2003, 160pp

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Parker and Bradley's book is neatly divided into the themes indicated in the title, and leads the reader systematically through a social work process. Each chapter offers a range of activities, theoretical approaches and suggestions for future reading. These are interwoven with case studies, some of which provide a narrative reappearing several times in the book. There is excellent coverage of work with particular service user groups and reference to a range of settings. Integration of this into a thematic approach offers the reader support in developing an understanding of social work as a whole. The authors have also attached specific key roles in the National Occupational Standards and QAA Social Work Subject Benchmarks (2000) to each theme, which will be helpful to students and practice teachers alike.

The authors consider and place in context a range of very contemporary social work topics, for example implementation of the single assessment process, and the Laming Report (2003). There is also good coverage of related statutory and social policy issues.

This is a very accessible and comprehensive book that should be a key text for students undertaking the new social work degree. The authors themselves describe the book as primarily aimed at first stage/year students. It is arguable that the level of detail and complexity of the issues covered would best support the learning of second year

students. For people starting out in social care the book would also be a valuable resource for general reference.

This will also be a useful teaching and learning aid for practice teachers and social work academics.

References

Laming, H, (2003) *The Victoria Climbié inquiry report*. CM 5730. London: TSO

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2000) *Social Policy and Administration and Social Work; Subject Benchmark Statement*. Gloucester: QAA

TOPPS *The National Occupational Standards for Social Work* www.topss.org.uk.

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