

Reviews

Social Work Ideals and Practice Realities
Mark Lymbery and Sandra Butler (Editors)
Basingstoke, Palgrave 2004. £17. 99
ISBN 0 333 74976 6 (pbk)

If like me you have felt for years that the stress of your job as a social worker comes, not so much from direct work with service users but from the quality of management and the culture of your organisation, then this book is for you.

The purpose of the book is to provide an understanding of the context of social work practice and then illustrates this in six social work settings. It begins with a discussion of society and social policy, followed by an analysis of how social welfare organisations adjust to the social and political environment. It explores the effect of these on social work practice generally and then moves to specific examples of workers engaged with service users in order to show the effects of the interaction of the three dimensions on the delivery of service.

Among other things, the book provides a critique of managerialism and bureaucratisation in social welfare organisations and, in order to prevent the de-professionalisation of social work, proposes the promotion of reflective social work practice as their antidote. Its several contributors have a shared vision of the tension between social structures, organisational expectations and practice aims and values.

Theirs is not a neutral position. The book bulges with warnings about how prescriptive roles in the form of political imperatives, filtered through organisational priorities, impact on professional autonomy. The contributors do not want social workers simply to swim with the tide of social and economic change. They want to provide social workers with the understanding and approaches to challenge the inequalities and injustices we encounter and which, they remind us, social work should exist to combat.

The points are clear and well argued and the settings chosen as illustrations are highly relevant to everyday social work practice, making this a book that is very accessible to people starting out in social work and those of us who have been there some time. There is an air of optimism that pervades all the contributions, reinforced by the final chapter that looks to the future.

This may not be an easy book to read in isolation, without any experience of social work organisations. However, it is a must for students who have already embarked on practice learning opportunities and equally will be essential for social workers undertaking post qualifying study.

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The Unsung Sixties, Memoirs of social innovation
Helene Curtis and Mimi Sanderson
Whiting and Birch, London
ISBN 1 86177 044 8 (pbk) £14. 99

This book comes at a time when social work education is in a state of change. The first year of the degree course has been completed and we have seen the profile of our students change. Next year we are expecting an even higher proportion of our students to be in the under twenty age group. The proposals for the changes in post qualifying social work education are being discussed with the prospect of practice teaching being possibly taught only at the post graduate level. The question arises whether 'The Unsung Sixties' is a text for the long time practitioners and educators to look at fondly and remember the 'good old days' or whether it has a useful place in this changing scene.

In discussion with colleagues recently we have debated the question of whether the teaching of social policy specifically in relation to social work practice has become more difficult and if it has become more difficult can we ascribe this to a gradual de-politicisation of certain sections of society allied with the possible effects of third way politics on the delivery of social work/care. Whatever the reason we have noticed that many more of our students arrive for their social

work programme with little idea of the connection between politics and social work. This book helps to make sense of that connection between politics, social policy and social work.

'*The Unsung Sixties*' is a collection of unashamedly subjective stories by people involved in setting up voluntary organisations in the sixties. The stories range from Shelter and Child Poverty Action Group to Newcastle Consumer Group and Centrepont. Some of the organisations are still in existence, some have changed their names and some have ceased to exist entirely. The stories are told to Helen Curtis and Mimi Sanderson by

people who founded or worked with groups or organisations dealing with the underside of the 1960s

What is common to all of them involved in their activity, what one contributor calls 'do it yourself politics', is the passion and commitment evident in their narrative. The various chapters illustrate the way in which many of the contributors did not see their activity as political in the sense of being allied to a particular party line but saw the projects they were involved in as action to alleviate a particular need or raise awareness about a particular issue. David Bull who worked with the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) writes

.... doing something at CPAG was much more immediate than being in a political party . . . somehow you felt that if you decided something at CPAG the minister would know about it. (p. 118)

I would recommend this book as a background text for those who are interested how politics both with and without a capital 'p' can be the impetus for good social work. It shows there is an alternative to the managerialist, process driven social work which many students assume is the norm if not the only valid form of social work. Many of the lessons learned and recounted in the book could inform current projects and I also see it as having relevance to the debate about public / private partnerships and the fragmentation of social care delivery.

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Making Links Across Specialisms:

Understanding Modern Social Work Practice
Jan Horwarth and Steven M. Shardlow
Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing, 2003
ISBN 1 898924 42 2 (pbk) £16. 95

This is an ambitious book that aims to draw together aspects of good practice in the United Kingdom in order for it to be translated into Czech for use in the Czech Republic. It is, however, of use to a range of practitioners and students.

It is not a book to read from cover to cover at one sitting but contains some excellent chapters that would be useful for students and practice teachers and students in different settings. Common issues are addressed as themes-disability, HIV and AIDS, working with carers, substance problems, domestic violence and the role of social work in the protection of vulnerable adults. The editors state that all chapters raise a series of issues and questions and I found this to be the case.

There are chapters that discuss particular groups of people eg children, older people, people with mental ill-health.

I found the chapter on learning disabilities a useful overview that covered a range of aspects very clearly and provide challenges for social workers in the conclusions.

Further reading has been provided at the end of each chapter, but I found it a minor irritation that there was not a bibliography for each chapter but an all-encompassing bibliography at the end of the book.

Case vignettes were presented throughout the material and the final chapter had exercises for practitioners and managers working across specialisms. In this regard managers and trainers may find these initially of more use. Some of the exercises could be readily adapted for work with students and be of value in the future challenges of practice learning.

This is a timely publication as we consider the inter professional agenda and the role of specialisms and specialists. There are a variety of tables in the text which I thought would be helpful in presenting a broad overview of modern social work practice.

The book would work best thereafter for a specific focus rather than trying to encompass the whole.

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Ethics, Accountability and the Social Professions

Sarah Banks

Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004

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This book forms an interesting development from Banks's previous book *Ethics and Values in Social Work* which is well loved by students and practice teachers alike. Entering the debate on the impact of managerialism on values and ethics (eg Harlow, 2000; Parton & O'Byrne 2000), Banks describes this book as focusing on

the implications for professional ethics of changes in the organisation and practice of ... the social professions. (p.1)

The book has two distinct elements. The first four chapters provide a historical and philosophical discussion of professional ethics. Banks considers the functions that codes of ethics fulfil and suggests that increasingly regulation is emphasised more than aspiration.

In the remainder of the book Banks develops her theme from the impact of ethics on practice to the impact of organisational change on professional ethics. She uses the term 'new accountability' to describe the increasing influence of procedures on professional tasks, which she suggests, limits the professional role and therefore professional ethics.

The increasing demands of internal and external regulation and audit appear to restrict the space for the exercise of professional discretion and the autonomy of professional decision-making. (p.149)

Banks has conducted interviews with a range of practitioners to illustrate her argument. She accepts that her research was neither systematic nor representative of wider populations, rather it provides anecdotal information to illustrate her theme. Interestingly participants were divided between those who felt that 'new accountability' contributed to good practice and those who felt that it detracted from good practice. Banks expresses concern that organisational changes may be detrimental for this latter group of 'voices'.

Whilst this may not represent a key text for practice teachers or practice learners it does develop a number of important issues.

Professionals signing up to codes of conduct or codes of practice should be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of such documents. An appreciation of the complex nature of ethics and values might also help students and practice teachers to better understand the dilemmas that they face.

Practice teachers need to recognise the increasing tendency towards prescriptive practice as they seek to encourage reflective practice. The two approaches may not be incompatible, and achieving a balance between them will be one of the challenges for social work in years to come.

References

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