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# Reviews

## Contemporary Child Care Policy and Practice

*Barbara Fawcett, Brid Featherstone and Jim Goddard*

Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 188pp. ISBN 0 333 97379 8 (pbk) £16.99

This book is a valuable and comprehensive study of child care policy and practice in England at the start of the 21st century. Covering, with some ease, the wide range of topics within its remit, the text is well-structured, well-written and well-informed. It will be useful to academics, students, policy makers and practitioners alike.

The authors perform two primary tasks very well indeed. First, they provide a journey through a whole range of policy arenas – providing cogent and clear data on the way that policy is emerging and signposting the key moments of policy and practice formation. As such is serves a valuable function as a helpful and accessible textbook and reference book. The chapters analyse in turn family policy, child protection, looked after children, youth justice, disability, mental health and (the oft ignored issue of) children as carers.

Second, it provides a well-argued and consistent theoretical analysis of the developments it describes. The authors draw on the concept of the 'social investment state' – which acts well as a key connecting theme of their analysis. The authors argue cogently that this concept allows us to perceive key connecting themes throughout the diverse areas of child care policy they explore.

Inevitably the text also has some weaknesses. First, some of the chapters share a structure which then seems to disappear. Specifically Chapters 3, 4 and 5 have a useful section called 'discussion' which is then absent in the later chapters. Second, there are some annoying errors, such as Gordon Brown, being spelt with an 'e' on the end of his surname (p.6) and 'Every Child Matters' (2003) being wrongly dated at one point (p.52). The final weakness cannot be reasonably aimed at the authors – and ironically arises from a point they make. The authors are keen to point to the 'hyperactivity' of New Labour child care policy. One consequence of this 'hyperactivity' is that the policy framework in England has shifted fundamentally even since the book was written – the pace of change following the publication of 'Every Child Matters' has been incredible and has moved many of the goal posts in relation to child welfare. For example the five outcomes, as outlined in 'Every Child Matters', are now arguably the primary drivers of policy and 'joined-up' practice is increasingly central to the policy and practice agenda. Nevertheless, this is a truly valuable, readable and indispensable guide to New Labour's child care policy from

1997 until 2003. The authors deserve both our thanks and congratulations.

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## Protecting Children *in Time*
## Child Abuse, Child Protection and the Consequences of Modernity

*Harry Ferguson*

Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 262pp.ISBN 1-4039-0693-9 (pbk)

'*In Time*', the italicised component of the title, draws the attention of 'would-be' readers to, not the only, but perhaps the most important textual motif of this book. Child protection is considered '*in time*' as Ferguson chronologically traces its evolution from 1890 until the present day. This time period is divided into three distinctive phases: 1890 until 1914 was the key phase for the development of child protection; simple modernity shaped child protection between 1914 until 1970; since 1970 reflexive modernity has provided the context for its evolution. '*In time*' also refers to the way in which technological change impacts upon cultural practice in relation to child protection. For example, the introduction and ready availability of the bicycle, and later the car, meant that NSPCC inspectors were able to travel faster and further with this speed allowing them to see more families. Cultural difference between child protection workers and service users is marked 'In time' as workers keep abreast of trends whilst service users often perpetuate by-gone or out-of-date life-styles. Importantly, 'In time' reflects the urgency with which vulnerable children should be helped in order that their deaths are prevented: children will be saved if they are seen '*in time*'.

For the historical component of his thesis, Ferguson draws on primary sources. Case records of the NSPCC are supplemented by newspaper accounts, police court records and the records kept by children's homes. Contemporary data are gathered quantitatively and qualitatively from three social work teams. All of these data appertain to one English region. Through his analysis of these data, Ferguson has attempted to develop a complex thesis concerning child protection that shuns both structuralism and post-structuralism, and encompasses the multi-dimensional nature of practice. This thesis involves three constitutive aspects of child protection: instrumental reason; aesthetic sensibility; and psycho-social dynamics. For example, Ferguson acknowledges the increasingly bureaucratic and procedural approach that is taken in this area of work. At the same time, he takes into account lifestyle choice as a component of the practitioner's assessment. Finally, he examines the way in which social workers remove children from families in an attempt to purge society of the chaotic and disruptive 'Other'. In so doing, social workers are agents of the collective unconscious.

Although Ferguson acknowledges the authority allocated to social workers, he does not see them as all powerful. On the contrary, both social workers and services users can be understood as social scapegoats, yet the agency of both is taken into account. For example, services offered to families may be refused and the opportunity to change rejected. In an attempt to assert themselves service users may intimidate and use violence against practitioners. Ferguson's thesis on life-politics is evident within the text. Those who have criticised this work (see the debate in the British Journal of Social Work) will not be impressed with this book. Certainly, Ferguson does not engage with the economic context of child protection, either in terms of the financial limitations of service users or the organizations attempting to protect children. Ferguson, however, is attempting to offer a contemporary perspective and this he does very well.

By drawing on recent social theory, and adding his own original approach, Ferguson challenges the conventions that have dominated this literature. Not only this, the book is written in a lucid and accessible style. Case studies, which illustrate the points made, are captivating and once started the book is hard to put down. In short, Ferguson has analysed empirical data with sophisticated theory and reached complex, and possibly for some, controversial conclusions that have been presented in an exceptionally engaging way. This book is an achievement. It deserves to be read widely and should constitute a rich source of discussion.

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## Having Their Say
## Young people and participation: European experiences

*David Crimmens and Andrew West (Eds)*

Lyme Regis, Russell House, 2004, 155pp. ISBN 1898924783 £15

Nearly 20 years ago, a politician was heard to say that he did not care what young people wanted or thought as they could not vote. Apart from that being a risky strategy as young people have an alarming habit of growing older and becoming voters, it demonstrated a short-sighted attitude to the important contribution that young people can play in setting the social welfare agenda. Thankfully, thinking in this area has moved on very considerably in the intervening years, and young people's participation in policy formation is now becoming increasingly accepted as both important and valuable. Indeed if we consider the latest documents around 'Every Child Matters' the genesis of the so-called 5 outcomes which have so much prominence in the government's policy agenda is the expressed wishes and feelings of the child.

This is why this book is so welcome. In twelve chapters (along with a comprehensive index) Crimmens and West have collected a series of papers from the four nations of

the UK and from other European countries. In the introductory chapter they begin by acknowledging the centrality of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Ratified in 1989, this has become more than a policy document or even fine principles; it has become a campaigning tool. The legal and policy implications arising from the Convention are discussed perceptively and in a way that lays a very good platform on which the rest of the book can build.

Andrew West's chapter goes on to address the obvious but vital questions which are part of the wider participation debate – what precisely is participation and what is its purpose. He then helpfully goes on to discuss, with the use of a series of matrices, how active and meaningful participation can be undertaken.

In his chapter on his experience of participation in Wales, Bert Jones takes us (to borrow from his chapter title) 'beyond the rhetoric'. This is a particularly interesting and helpful piece which begins to develop a sense for the reader of how young people's participation can be embedded in the development of policy and practice. His discussion of Youth Councils and Forums is interesting.

The chapters describing the experience of non-UK European countries each stand alone and are both interesting and insightful. There is an honesty throughout this book that the whole participation 'movement' is still a work in progress and these chapters make it clear that, while progress has been made, there is no universal panacea. Ingvild Begg, in her chapter on the Norwegian experience, writes:

> Norway is regarded by many as a country where children are well looked after .... This impression is basically correct, but not without flaws.

This honesty is important. In no sense are the authors floundering around without direction. The chapters are engaging and have taken time to address the emerging theory around participation as well as making very many excellent practical suggestions as to how it can be best undertaken. However, it does not argue that all questions on this issue are answered within this book. That is good and to the authors' credit.

The constant danger in the both the wider children's rights agenda and specifically issues around participation is how to ensure that the work is not overly narrow in focus and therefore tokenistic. While this book certainly considers these issues, I did not come away from it entirely convinced that this particularly complex conundrum had been fully unpacked. Perhaps it is in the nature of young people's participation that tokenism is a constant and live risk and needs to be dealt with in a creative and often individualistic way.

This publication has the strap line which makes it clear that this is a discussion of young people's participation. Perhaps because of that there should not be a sense of disappointment that the participation of younger children is not discussed. However, there is a gap here, and a chapter on working with children (even quite young children) within a participation agenda would have filled that gap.

Young people's participation is a crucial and, it is hoped, permanent part of the social policy landscape. It is essential that its purpose and legitimacy is understood and this book is a very valuable contribution to the debate. If you are involved in working with young people, if you are a policy maker or if you simply want to know more about this interesting issue, you will find much of value in this book.

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## Social Work, Critical Reflection and the Learning Organisation

*Nick Gould and Mark Baldwin (Editors)*

Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2004, 209 pp. ISBN 0 7546 3167 2 (pbk) £17.50

There is a pressing need within social care for a thorough analysis of workplace organisations and how they and the individuals who inhabit them can learn and develop. The stressful and unpredictable nature of the work social care organisations undertake gives them particular learning needs and presents those organisations with particular barriers to that learning.

As Nick Gould points out in his introduction to this collection, Lord Laming's report into the death of Victoria Climbie highlighted the organisational failures that led to this tragedy - failures of management, supervision and accountability that have been a depressingly familiar litany in all the child abuse inquiries since that concerning the death of Maria Colwell in 1973, a familiarity that suggests that social work organisations have failed to learn from their mistakes.

Over the last decade or so Gould and some of his collaborators here have been prominent amongst those who have drawn on writings from a range of disciplines to create for social work a distinctive body of research and theory about the nature of reflective thinking and practice, professional expertise, judgement and decision-making that has questioned much of the profession's modernist, technical and rationalistic foundations. What Gould, in an earlier work (Gould & Taylor, 1996), referred to as the 'reflective paradigm' – a mode of thinking that takes account of the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the experiential and imagistic basis of much learning and thought – has become embedded in social work education to the point of becoming the new orthodoxy but has failed to make much impression on current practice, dominated as it is by a managerial and procedural ethos.

In his introduction Gould argues that the traditional Weberian view of organisations, divided between highly qualified thinkers and more lowly doers who learn from and then carry out the thinkers' bidding, has been undermined by new theories of action, experience and problem-based learning, by new ideas about the nature of communication and by the need for organisations to learn and re-learn continuously in a world dominated by risk,

uncertainty and change. Can this volume extend the reflective paradigm into a cogent critique of the organisations within which social work practice takes place?

What do we mean by the term 'learning organisation?' Briefly, it means an organisation that changes not just in response to political or economic pressure from outside but values and responds to the experience and knowledge of its' workers, turning away from the traditional hierarchy of knowledge that values external knowledge over knowledge generated internally by people engaged in the everyday business of practice. Such learning tends to be ignored or dismissed as 'common sense' in most organisations and, as several contributors here remark, often doesn't feel like learning because what is being learned is practice.

There is a lot of rather breathlessly enthusiastic writing about learning organisations which to the average social worker in a hard-pressed team (where reflective learning is seen as at best an indulgence, at worst a hindrance) must sound as relevant as a discussion about the ice caps of Mars. On the whole this volume avoids such pitfalls but a number of the contributors make the business of learning and reflecting in organisations sound a little too easy and this may be because the contributors are almost all academics. Only in one chapter, about conflict in a homeless project in Canada, does the voice of the practitioner predominate and only then do we get a real taste of the huge complex of obstacles – organisational and personal – that can act to prevent change and growth. In a book about reflective practice this seems odd and I couldn't help feeling I was witnessing a process where the theory of reflective practice – potentially so emancipatory for the practitioner with its focus on real practice and the generation of practice-based knowledge – is being technicised and turned into yet another area of academic expertise. Certainly, little thought seems to have been given to making this book widely accessible: it's yet another volume written by academics for academics.

The chapters where the authors engaged with real organisational practice offer the best insights such as the chapter referred to above by Badwall *et al* and an authoritatively written contribution by Jan Fook discussing her experience of running a training programme for a statutory agency based on reflective workshops and peer reviews. Fook's emphasis on the distinction between reflection and *critical* reflection, with only the latter able to focus on the power structures that dominate organisations, is particularly valuable. Other chapters that involve work with practitioners, usually students or practice teachers, fail to fully explore organisational issues, tending to assume too easily that individual learning will lead to organisational learning.

Of the more theoretical chapters, the contributions by Baldwin and Taylor offer cogent analyses of the nature of workplace-based learning and the obstacles that all too often prevent it from developing. But, as with most edited collections, the quality of the chapters varied, and those on supervision seemed to me particularly superficial and disappointing. Organisational pressures often compromise the learning potential of supervision and, for many practitioners, supervision is a rarity and they must look elsewhere for their learning: perspectives these authors did not explore.

There is useful material here for managers and policymakers to absorb but overall I was

disappointed by this book. It wasn't just its overly academic emphasis that frustrated me but the many aspects of organisational activity that were overlooked. Insufficient attention was paid to the understanding of organisations as systems, for example, and I was fairly amazed to read a book about social care that barely mentioned work-related stress and anxiety – two of the most effective barriers to workplace learning. It is as if Menzies' seminal work on the nursing profession (Menzies, 1970) had never been written. And I searched in vain for anything about the importance of learning from service users.

More than thirty years ago Olive Stevenson, in her minority contribution to the Maria Colwell inquiry, made a plea that the sheer complexity, ambiguity and stress of what in later years would become known as child protection work needed to be better understood if we were to learn from our mistakes. A book on organisations that involves itself more intimately with the dirty, messy business of practice would have engaged me more.

## References

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