

Reviews

Critical and Radical Debates in Social Work, Ferguson, I. & Lavalette, M. (series eds.)
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Adult social care, Ferguson, I. & Lavalette, M. (eds.)
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Mental health, Weinstein, J. (ed.)
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Personalisation, Beresford, P. (ed.)
ISBN: 978-1447316145, £7.99 (pbk.), pp.76

From the 1970s Macmillan published an influential series of textbooks that presented an alternative view to mainstream thinking on the causes of social deprivation and exclusion. Edited by Peter Leonard, *Critical Texts in Social Work and the Welfare State* were written from the perspective of *critical social work*, which has been described later by Healy (2005) as 'concerned with the analysis and transformation of power relations at every level of social work practice' (p.172). Critical social work is built upon the traditions of radicalism (which in turn draw heavily on Marxism), but can now be differentiated from earlier approaches through the 'incorporation of themes and concepts drawn from post-modernism and post-structuralism' (Ferguson, 2007, p.104). Critical social work thinkers are concerned about the role of the profession and wider social care service in implementing top-down policies that are based on assumptions that it is the deficits of individuals and their communities that are to blame for their difficulties. Such practices are seen to mask the influence of underpinning structural injustices, and result in social workers acting as conduits of oppression. Topics of the original book series included 'Social work practice under capitalism: a Marxist approach', 'Feminist social work', 'The politics of mental health', 'Striking out: social work and trade unionism', and 'The politics of disablement', with authors such as Lena Dominelli, Paul Corrigan, Peter Leonard and Michael Oliver.

The current series similarly seeks to provide a critical and radical social work perspective on current social work policies and their implications for the profession. The series editors are clear that whilst not all of the contributors would align themselves within these traditions *per se.*, they do share a view that social work is 'much wider than the currently dominant neo-liberal models' and that 'human rights and social justice should be central to its mission' (Ferguson & Lavalette, 2014, p.ix). There are five books in the series so far, with this review covering three – *Personalisation* (edited by Peter Beresford), *Mental Health* (edited by Jeremy Weinstein) and *Adult Social Care* (edited by Iain Ferguson and Michael Lavalette). All of them have a similar format, with the editor(s) providing a lead essay to which multiple contributors provide brief responses. They end with final concluding remarks by the editor. They are all under 80 pages and are therefore a brief (although intense) read.

The lead essays consistently provide thoughtful and passionate critiques of current social work and its policy environment. Ferguson and Lavalette seek to demonstrate that crises such as care provided by Southern Cross and Winterbourne View are but the tip of the iceberg of the problems in adult social care policy. They present a picture of a system that has been built on discrimination, undermined by marketisation and ravaged by austerity cuts. Its salvation, they argue, will require new alliances between those supported and those providing support, social care contributing to campaigns against injustices, and learning from global best practices.

Weinstein sets a context in which 'madness' is still connected with 'badness', compulsory treatment orders promote stigmatisation, and general welfare policies conflict with official government recognition that poverty negatively affects mental wellbeing. He paints a grim picture in which health-led integrated teams and fears over public safety have led to social work losing its creativity and becoming over-shadowed by psychiatry, and with connected falls in

morale, confidence and social workers' wellbeing. He suggests an alternative future in which social work champions a more 'humanistic' response around which other disciplines can rally.

Beresford identifies commonalities between personalisation implementation and the interest in patch-based and community social work in the 1980s. These included unrealistic expectations of the opportunity for individuals and communities to be self-reliant, a transfer of responsibility but not power, and a limited evidence base for a national policy. This comparison builds into a wide-ranging critique of both the development process and current realities of personalisation, with unfavourable comparisons made to the user-led direct payment movement. He advocates broader changes in the overall system, better implementation, and more objective use of evidence if personalisation is to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Lead essays in this range of texts are delivering part of what they promised – analyses of social work and social policy based on critical and radical perspectives. One may not agree with all of the conclusions, and could criticise their selection and interpretation of the evidence; but the arguments are well made and coherent. In many ways they read like the speeches of the proposer at a debate, and following this metaphor, they make eloquent cases for their stances. Beyond this point, however, the limitation of the overall format becomes evident. The other respondents have little space to present their arguments and therefore largely struggle to address other aspects of the topic in any depth. Some new considerations are introduced, for example the perpetuation of colonisation in mental health services (Sadd, in Weinstein) and the potential of a socialist model of social care (Whitfield, in Ferguson & Lavalette), and there are occasional words of minor dissent and variation. On the whole, though, the responses (which number between 6 or 7 per book) essentially reiterate what has already been eloquently presented in the lead essays. This is true within and between the texts, with numerous contributors across all three expressing similar concerns regarding personalisation. For the reader this reduces the interest and also leaves one (or at least this reader) wanting to hear more alternative views: or indeed have greater depth provided by fewer authors. In the conclusion to the Personalisation text Beresford states that 'there is a remarkable unanimity of view among the contributors within these covers (p.79)' – true, but this need not have been the case. At its worst this 'unanimity of view' leads to social work presenting itself as an embittered profession which assigns responsibility to everyone but itself for the woes of its own practice and the broader society. Psychiatrists are, in effect, portrayed as being part of a neo-liberal conspiracy with pharmaceutical companies, managers as exploitative dictators obsessed with timescales and targets, and the views or actions of named individuals and organisations scapegoated with no 'right to reply'. This is despite the reality that many of those individuals, professions and organisations could well agree with much of the analysis presented, and some have indeed been instrumental in trying to change practice and policy as a consequence.

In conclusion, these texts, and the lead essays in particular, are to be commended to anyone looking for a different narrative to that presented by mainstream social care policy narratives. At their best they provide an urgent and energetic call to arms for the social work profession, and underline why it still has a vital and unique role in tackling structural discriminations. They would be excellent preparation for debates in classrooms and professional development sessions, with such arenas also providing opportunity for other perspectives to be heard and for healthy challenges on both sides.

References

Ferguson, I. (2007) *Reclaiming Social Work: Challenging Neo-liberalism and Promoting Social Justice*, London: Sage.

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Critical and Radical Debates in Social Work: Ethics, Banks, S. (ed.)

Ferguson, I. & Lavalette, M. (series eds.)

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This book is a brief debate about social work ethics; it is politically committed, noting that codes of ethics are used to direct and discipline social workers, part of the controlling element of the New Public Management. Banks proposes instead that social workers have to reclaim a focus on social justice, act responsibly to confront oppressions, show moral courage and collectively resist unjust practice and policies. In pursuit of this she proposes that social workers should develop a 'situated ethics', responding to the circumstances, pressures and individuality of the people they are working with. This argument is introduced in an initial piece by Banks herself. Eight responses to her article follow, from social work academics in Japan, the USA, South Africa, Canada and the UK. Finally Banks responds to the responses. All of this in fewer than 80 pages makes it accessible to a wide audience and gives a satisfying contribution to this debate.

Or it should do. There are two significant problems with this structure. First, it is too brief and Banks doesn't have the space in particular to adequately elaborate some of her arguments. Second, of the eight responses, six do not take up the opportunity to properly debate Banks' ideas, most repeating her points and largely agreeing with her thinking. In this group I thought Cowden's assertion, based it seems on the evidence provided by a single TV programme, that CQC inspectors collude with bad practice in private care, was outrageous. Only two responses disagree with Banks to any significant extent. Paul Blackledge does so from a Marxist perspective, using arguments I cannot claim to fully understand. But like Marxians over time, he ably demonstrates how Marx's scholarship implicitly covered areas of human activity that he did not explicitly write about – social work ethics being one of them.

Chris Beckett's response is more interesting, and probably runs along the lines that social work's leaders – those who commission codes of ethics for instance – might pursue. Beckett, while accepting the nub of Banks' argument that social work ethics cannot be reduced to sets of universal rules, says 'we should stop constructing a composite straw man... (managerialism), made up of all the things we dislike and disapprove of'. Banks' straw man is the New Public Management (NPM); targets, contract culture, oppressive recording requirements and so on. In addition to Beckett's comment, this focus, on how neo-liberalism and NPM have comprehensively undermined good social work practice, smacks of 'Golden Age' thinking i.e. that before NPM came along everything was just fine. The New Public Management however, is much like the 'Old' Public Management, but with electronic teeth. Central governments want to control local activity, always have, but until IT allowed ministers to think they knew what was happening everywhere, their ability to direct local activity was limited to the crude cudgel of legislation. In the 1930s when many local authorities defied the Government by paying unemployed workers too 'generously', a nationally run Unemployment Assistance Board was created to manage that responsibility. Similarly in 1946 Bevan was unsure he could rely on local authorities if they kept responsibility for health, so he established the centrally run NHS. The difference now, the 'new' in NPM, is the minister's panopticon of close to real time access to local activity and performance data. In this sense I think Banks' focus on NPM threatening social work is very old news, emphasised perhaps because this book appears in the *Radical Social Work (RSW)* – inspired *Critical and Radical Debates in Social Work* series.

Banks may or may not be a natural supporter of RSW ideas, but the juxtaposition here of the proposed 'situated ethics' of care – a subtle, constantly negotiated understanding – with RSW thinking, based on solidarity between workers, service users and community representatives, is in places uneasy. For instance, Banks claims that NPM, with its emphasis on contracts, assumes and fosters 'low trust' relationships, which undermine constructive, caring relationships. Yet trades unionism, a central plank of RSW thinking, is traditionally based on tight contracts of employment with employers because 'low trust' relationships prevail.

And Banks does not square her criticism of universalist codes of ethics with the need in her 'situated ethics' for a starting point – a view of what a good society or good social work looks like. Without that her prescriptions surely lead to ethical relativism and nothing more. But this gap may be to do with the constraints of the book's format. I was also confused by Banks' requirement on the one hand for 'bringing the personal back into social work ethics' and her criticism of 'individualising social problems through a focus on individual dilemmas'. The conundrum here – about where the focus of activity should lie, on the individual or society, is age old. What is not mentioned in this book is that state-sponsored social workers (and this book considers no other) are employed, by and large, to work with individuals and families, while RSW demands that social workers engage in political activity in order to change society. Two masters then – the ideal v. the contract of employment. How can this conflict be resolved?

Banks avoids tick box answers to anything, and advises social workers to do the same, pointing out that 'ethical judgements... based on rational deduction from abstract principles are tools of the powerful'. Her necessarily brief exposition of a 'situated ethics' is authoritative, and her prescriptions make great sense – demanding as they do an emphasis on empathic solidarity, social justice, asserting the rights of service users and moral courage. Read at face value, such proposals may seem commonplace, but in the light of tight procedural requirements, even if only at slight variance with the workers' perceptions, these ideas can be a lifeline. Older people may not want to exercise their right to officially sanctioned 'choice', but may want to be 'looked after'. Which prescription does the worker follow? It is the last of Banks' proposals, to be ethically courageous, which is the strongest card in the worker's hand and has to be at the heart of any worker's deliberations about their own ethical stance.

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Moving on from Munro, Blyth, M. (ed.)

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This edited text pulls together a range of viewpoints from providers, managers, practitioners and policy leads who reflect on 'whither child protection' in the three or four years since the 2011 final Munro Report '*A Child Centred System*'. The contributors are very much leaders in their field, which lends the text a sometimes 'top down' and aspirational resonance in places, but is balanced by sufficient roughage from those contributors more routinely exposed through practice or research to the operational world. That said, there is no distinct voice from families, nor from those entrenched in the workplace and about whom there is much comment upon their virtues and vices. The text addresses key domains around regulation, multi-agency working, sector led improvement strategies, back to basics relationships, early intervention, adolescent neglect and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) information sharing, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) and learning from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), the delights of OFSTED visits, and many other topics that should appeal to an informed readership who have had to grapple with making child protection policy a safe reality.

Mark Gurrey and Eleanor Brazil are first with a distillation of their hard-won leadership spurs about key attributes of what a 'good' child protection organisation looks like. Despite the somewhat folksy style (where we learn to 'walk the talk' of change management, while doing so with 'confident humility') we garner their insights into what makes for thoughtful leadership and successful protection systems. Based upon their experience and uncluttered by references to evidence the chapter bristles with a kind of exhortatory 'we've done it, why can't you?' optimism, and gets the book off to a brisk start. However, few silver linings follow in the chapter

by Ray Jones, who begins with a brief history of the catalytic effects of public enquiries into child deaths that have powered so much occupational change and reputational damage. This is followed by Jones' trenchant critique of SCRs as a mechanism for assigning accountabilities and thereby a new elaboration of the blame instinct from government and media. The current phase of privatisation in England's child protection also comes in for some firm handling, and a re-assertion that good child protection needs to emanate from public enterprise, cooperation and decision visibility. The whole chapter is a cautionary tale from a much experienced professional voice: but this is not the only chapter to look long at England and little beyond in searching for ideas and solutions.

The anxieties shared by Jones find no obvious place in the upbeat chapter by Chris Wright, Chief Executive of Catch 22, an agency that works with families near or on the edge of care proceedings. Here, the sunlit uplands of voluntary sector verve are sharply on display. Citing its success in working with troubled families in the Wirral we learn of a 91% reduction in domestic violence, 83% reduction in anti-social behaviour, 67% reduction in drug and alcohol problems and 83% improvement in children's behaviour and attendance at school. These numbers are baldly stated with no accompanying evidence of attribution. While it would be unwarranted to impute more 'puff' than proof to the extraordinary successes claimed (what the interventions were, the criteria for success, how measured, whether change was sustained etc., etc., we don't know), we nonetheless get a sense of energy and innovation by an ambitious and challenging third sector body. We also get a sort of sub-text that such innovators are often hobbled by an unappreciative local authority *lumpen salariat*, in the shape of commissioners who know not whereof they commission, and resort to restrictive rules and penny pinching to frustrate the visionaries in the voluntaries. No doubt there could be some truth in this reviewer's caricature, but this remains a very useful chapter that reminds us that no one has a monopoly on what 'good' family support services look like.

Chapter four, by leading social work research academics (Sue White, Kate Morris, Brid Featherstone, Marian Brandon and June Thoburn) rehearses the twin dangers of thoughtless obeisance towards defensive proceduralism and the grail of the RCT as the panaceas for risk and uncertainty in child protection. Instead the plea is for a return to relational work and to supportive early intervention. While a now familiar refrain it nonetheless provides a salutary reminder of how much social work has departed from the optimistic ambitions of the Seebomh era for a family-oriented community based service; and the argument is well made about how much it needs to change back again.

Jenny Clifton's chapter provides a cogent and research-driven argument on listening to children. It offers valuable insights into the emotionally complex nature of harmful relationships between the abused and abuser(s) (parents, peers, friends, and strangers). The conflicted feelings involved and ways of getting children talking about these are charted through the voices of young people who describe critical moments that assisted disclosure. Key features of a child-centred approach are outlined and conclude a valuable synthesis of data, concepts and practice.

The neglect of adolescent neglect comes to the fore in Leslie Hicks' Chapter six. It offers an illuminating overview of organisational, conceptual, cultural and policy challenges in identifying and ameliorating this complex phenomenon. While an intervention framework is usefully outlined at a general level, the chapter tends to focus on obstacles and the need for more research. There seems to be little if any casting about in other jurisdictions for examples of what might have been tried and found to work. Similarly, Chapter seven, by Jenny Pearce, on child sexual exploitation, does a good job on setting out the complexity of the problem and explores the subjectivities of the abused young person, notably the confounding issues of apparent complicity or consent. In exploring such themes with older young people the author suggests we consider using the LAP (Learning Action Partnership). The LAP is based upon trust-building exchanges over time where respect for one another's identity and agency are the foundation for identifying ways out of an abusive experience. This method may be valuable but

clearly it is not intended to tackle the scale and recalcitrant nature of CSE; and we get no sense of a bigger system approach (e.g. involving: the *Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre* (CEOP), cross-jurisdiction arrests, the police, courts, schools, street-based workers, drug and mental health services, community leaders, training, attitude-changing and so forth) that needs to be jointly promoted. Again, if this pernicious problem has been tackled with any success beyond the UK we get no glimpse of this. This comment may be unfair given the limited space allowed for an average chapter in an average length edited text: but who knows what exciting work may be underway elsewhere, and some glance abroad would have been welcome.

The next chapter, by former policeman Charlie Hedges at CEOP, provides a wide-ranging account of organisational and policy developments regarding missing and runaway children. There is no dutiful plodding here, but a well paced and plain speaking overview of the complex architecture of agencies and professionals and the progress they've made, as well as pointing to gaps in knowledge and interventions. Important reading for anyone unfamiliar with this field. The final contributors – Michael Preston-Shoot and Martin Pratt – provide an extensive reprise of what is known about LSCB effectiveness, particularly in regard to leadership, governance, learning and prevention. This is not particularly comforting, given the many defects detected in a forensic search of recent research and inspections, coupled with the authors' direct experience. We get a thorough treatment that perhaps dwells overly on the DNA of problems rather than what works well, but the expert analysis exudes insight and it is required reading.

The concluding piece, by the editor Maggie Blyth, rightly notes the improvements that have been made as well as challenges ahead to secure the Munro legacy. Edited texts are often an uneven feast and this is no different; but there is enough fresh protein overall to make it a nourishing and recommended read for busy people.

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Changing Children's Services: Working and Learning Together, Foley, P. & Rixon, A. (eds.), 2nd edition

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Social work trainees are busy people and they need to get to grips quickly with key issues and critical thinking – this they can do through this updated edited text on children's services that is aimed largely at new entrants and their trainers. Six extended chapters focus on the world of work and the text is broken up frequently by 'Practice Boxes' and 'Thinking Points' – and commendably, evidence is drawn from across the UK and beyond. We get off smartly with an overview of the many tributaries of organisational and policy change that have shaped contemporary UK children's services. This chapter sets out the virtues of an interdisciplinary approach and captures much of the complexity of multi-agency practice. The next chapter, by Bill Stone and Pam Foley, pursues related themes around integrated working and the key drivers, issues and skills needed. An ecological approach illustrates well the different levels and concepts of working across boundaries. This is a chapter rich in examples of what seems to make for success – students reading this might well be forgiven for thinking they are entering a career where they can actually do some real good, via social work values, and commitment to a child-centred practice where inter-professional differences must not impede winning the bigger prize – how refreshing!

Stephen Leverett's chapter on parenting addresses that most contested of realms: who or what is a parent, and what does 'good' look like. The parenting roles of state, families, mothers, fathers and kin come up for scrutiny here, as do intervening factors such as gender, environment and poverty. The chapter then takes a more sociological gaze towards aspects of

capital (social, economic, cultural) that bear upon a child's upbringing. This is a reflective and demanding chapter that returns often to everyday dilemmas around problem definition and intervention in parenting, and should prove stimulating and accessible to early career readers.

Chapter four, by Nick Frost, engages with the disarmingly simple theme of what makes a difference in inter-agency working. Examples of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are offered to argue the case that effective joint working is feasible and when linked to supportive early intervention can be a powerful force for prevention. The chapter focuses in detail on what helps to dissolve unhelpful boundaries and status issues, and seems for the most part unblushingly upbeat about the joys of joint working. The topic is not much 'troubled' by a more sceptical and critical theory about what works or not – perhaps that is best left to a later time when the reader as occupational neophyte has been round the block a few times, and is ready to understand better the doubts and disputes over the claimed virtues of working together.

Working together requires learning together, and Andy Rixon in Chapter five starts with a reprise of landmark reports and inquiries from across the UK that implicate insufficient training as part of some failures and good inter-professional training as the remedy and a prerequisite of quality services. But what is to be learnt and how? The chapter quickly gets to grips with the contested matter of what counts as appropriate knowledge. Similarly, we get a useful tour of proven technologies of transmission that include engaging with service users, particularly children. An outline of reflective practice and the learning organisation completes an extended and easily digested introduction to matters of shared learning.

The final Chapter six, by Nick Frost, looks at key characteristics and causes of change in the workplace. The external challenges of audit and inspection are explored as is the impact of the voice of service users, particularly the expectations surrounding participation by children and young people in the way children's services operate. The importance of clear governance and an open culture able to accept criticism is much affirmed in a post-Savile risk-averse climate. Overall, the chapter offers useful descriptions of what a good inter-agency setting looks like in the context of frequent change. Finally, there is some brief comment on the general nature of change in modern workplaces. Overall the book is a worthy successor to the 2008 edition, perhaps overly loyal in places where the literature has a dated feel and reads more 'then' than now. If, like me, you are not a fan of 'boxes' which tell you what you have just read, or must learn, or must think further about – the implication being of reader as doofus – then you will have to get over that to enjoy what is, in essence, a valuable introduction to organisational complexity in the workplace that moreover doesn't lose sight of children, childhood and parenting. It is essential reading for social work trainees and others new to the changing world of children's services. It even dwells in some detail on what can be learned from far-flung places like Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – a welcome and prominent feature, and all too rare in much literature in this field, which narrows its ambit to the policy borders set by DfE or DH. Much recommended.

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The Story of Baby P: Setting the Record Straight, Jones, R.*Bristol: Policy Press, 2014*

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It would be remarkable if any adult living in Britain in November 2008 and subsequently did not know the story of Baby P and the circumstances of his tragic death. Such was the saturation of his sad story in all forms of the nation's media, and most particularly in the tabloid press, that his blond curls and blue eyes staring up at the camera became instantly recognisable and remain an enduring image. However, because of the approach taken by the media, most British adults would also describe how Baby Peter (as he later became known, once Peter's full name was revealed) was let down by the social workers who were intended to protect him. Ray Jones' assertive text seeks to redress the balance: to acknowledge the problems experienced within Haringey, the local authority with responsibility for Peter's protection, but also in an impassioned way to recognise the multi-agency responsibilities and accountabilities, which appear to have been lost sight of in the fierce scapegoating by the media and others of the social work staff, their managers and director.

Peter Connelly died of multiple injuries, neglect and malnutrition; and three people, his mother Tracey Connelly, her partner Steven Barker and his brother Jason Owen, were convicted of causing or allowing his death. Ray Jones examines in detail the information known about Peter's short life, deliberately drawing only on published texts to inform his analysis. From the perspective of appraising policy, this is a useful strategy as it calls on the same evidence (albeit in some instances heavily redacted) which would be available to policy makers and analysts in considering whether any individual malpractice or systemic failure (or perhaps a combination of the two) contributed to Peter's death. A later documentary, the powerful BBC programme screened on 27th October 2014 '*Baby P: The Untold Story*' drew also on personal testimony of many key individuals involved, such as the former Haringey Director of Children's Services Sharon Shoesmith and Peter's social worker Maria Ward, whose primary evidence gives another compelling element to Peter's story and the aftermath of his death. Ray Jones was also a consultant for this documentary, and in combination with his book it prompts deep thought about the positioning of blame.

'*The Story of Baby P: Setting the Record Straight*' is structured to guide the reader through the narrative of Peter Connelly's life, and his death; and then, in a similar manner, to the media frenzy itself, through a whirlwind of whipped-up public opinion, political intervention and press persecution. It carefully examines the information and evidence used by the independent authorities involved in assessing what had happened to Peter, but also in considering the efficacy of the local authority and partner agencies. Jones raises questions about the multiple revisions of OFSTED reports, and questions the process of serious case reviews as an effective learning tool and agent for improved practice.

National policy, legislation and social work practice have always been inextricably interlinked, but the influence of the media in orchestrating political knee-jerk reactions and subsequent direct interference with local government decisions has probably never been more animated or forceful than with the Baby P coverage. Jones describes the direct intervention by Ed Balls (then Secretary of State for Children) leading to the immediate dismissal of the Director of Haringey's Children's Services, Sharon Shoesmith, which was unprecedented. He comments on the campaign led by 'The Sun' newspaper being a graphic illustration of the emerging powerful combination of published and social media. The book highlights the immediate personal impact of the death of this young child, but also the impact of press hounding – effectively ending some professional careers. It also illustrates how, at the time of the huge press interest, Jones found himself a lonely voice as he commented in the media contemporaneously on the unfolding events. However, his first-hand experience of having been asked to share his views publicly amid the general tone of persecution lends gravitas to this book. Ray Jones was one of the few prepared to risk the wrath of the press, and to seek to inject balance into appraising the situation.

The involvement of politicians in condemning the work of social workers is not new; reviews and radical reform of social care policy and legislation is unfortunately prompted too frequently by the death of a child. Victoria Climbié was an obvious example, a child whose tragic death, like Peter's, occurred earlier, also within the boundaries of Haringey local authority. Ray Jones steers his readers to understand how, in Peter Connelly's case, the broader political involvement was different, with rapid political reaction rather than considered policy change. He explores the issue that in this case, many senior national politicians appeared to act (and to speak publicly) on the basis of inaccurate and inadequate information. For example, in opposition David Cameron referred to Tracey Connelly as being seventeen years old (when she was twenty eight at the time) and questioned rhetorically "Where were the professionals?" This was in contrast to the comments of the co-author of a serious case review into Peter's death who noted that the serious case review prompted 'nothing in particular to give pause for thought' amongst other serious case reviews.

Ray Jones also questions whether Ed Balls (then Minister for Children) as an individual was unduly influenced by the media clamour following Peter's case reaching the press; an influence which in turn rippled through Parliament and local government, seemingly prompting extreme knee-jerk reactions such as his dismissal of Director Sharon Shoemith. Whilst questioning the roles of professionals is a valid exercise (and is indeed a component of any serious case review enquiry) Jones highlights the damaging systemic effect of the media and political storm along with the intensely personal impact on professionals involved. Jones reminds us that '*Good child protection services require competence, care and commitment. They also require confidence, continuity and stability*' (p.110). In my view, Jones deals well with the ripple effect of the damage created by the media frenzy following Peter's death, damage which is still being felt today, with local authorities working to stabilise and create continuity for and in their workforces.

Largely the book is well written, with arguments flowing logically and the questions posed receiving thorough and robust examination. Ray Jones' professional social care background is readily apparent throughout this text, not only by demonstrating knowledge and expertise as he evaluates the actions of the social work team, but also, at times somewhat testily, in his defence of the local authority and his criticism of the passive absolving of responsibility he observes by the other leading agencies including health and the Metropolitan Police.

Within this context then, it is difficult to understand why Jones repeatedly refers to Jason Owen (older brother of Steven Barker, Tracey Connelly's partner) as having a young girlfriend (with whom it appears he lived in Tracey Connelly's house). The 'girlfriend' was fifteen at the time (a child) and Jason Owen was approximately 36 (an adult), with three of his own children living with him. The exploitative nature of this child/adult relationship is not considered in Jones' book. It is not clear from the evidence supplied in the book whether the local authority knew at the time about Steven Barker and Jason Owen being part of the household, but in my view it is regrettable that Ray Jones does not, with hindsight, highlight the arrival of Owen's fifteen year old 'girlfriend' as yet another vulnerable child in the household, alongside Peter, his siblings and Owen's own three children.

Overall the book is thoughtful and thought provoking (although possibly rather hurried in the final chapters and, by comparison to the early chapters, perhaps scaled back in analysis). It prompts social work professionals to re-validate the principles upon which their profession is based and will help to counterbalance the current bombardment of advice aimed at social workers regarding 'how to stay out of the press'.

Despite these specific reservations, this book is a riveting 'must read' for any professional working in Children's Services, and also for those working in partner agencies (who, on this occasion, managed to escape the limelight). However, perhaps the groups who most need to reflect on Jones' analysis and findings are the press and politicians.

From the world of policy and guidance '*Working Together 2013*' describes how agencies must

work together to protect children. Jones' work serves as a reminder to workers in all those agencies that increased progress could be made in better protecting children if agencies not only work together but also stand together when things go wrong. His final comment is for politicians, challenging them to stand up to bullying from the press and not to be sucked into bullying: but rather to recognise the courageous and difficult work undertaken every day by children's social workers.

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Debates in Personalisation, Needham, C. & Glasby, J.

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Self-directed Support – Personalisation, Choice and Control, Pearson, C., Ridley, J. & Hunter, S.

Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2014

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As we all know, personal budgets, given as direct payments, are the preferred means by which the Government would like local authority adult social care departments to deliver social care. Putting financial control in the hands of people with social care needs is the best way of empowering them, enabling them to participate in wider society as independent, self-directing citizens. And so successful has the introduction of personal budgets and direct payments been in social care in England that the Government is introducing personal budgets in the NHS.

There's evidence to support all this, of course. In social care there has been consistently positive support reported from surveys conducted by In Control (Poll *et al.*, 2006; Hatton *et al.*, 2008; Hatton & Waters, 2011), the not-for-profit organisation that probably did more than any other to promote the cause of self-directed support and to ensure the Government paid attention. The IBSEN evaluation (Glendinning *et al.*, 2008) found that apart from older people, budget users achieved good outcomes. And another DH funded study of a pilot of personal budgets in the NHS amongst people with long-term health conditions found that people with a budget did better than those without (Forder *et al.*, 2012).

And yet, and yet. We also know that older people are by far the largest group of users of adult social care, and despite a lot of exhortation, guidance and support from the Department of Health and others, the evidence continues to suggest personal budgets don't work as well for many older people as for members of other groups. (Lloyd, 2010; Woolham & Benton, 2012; Woolham *et al.*, 2015). Then there have also been some vituperative but amusing comments from Ben Goldacre, and others on the quality of the personal health budgets evaluation (<https://storify.com/bengoldacre/why-won-t-nhs-england-do-an-rct-on-this-5bn-yr-int>). If that weren't enough, respected figures such as Peter Beresford, a long-term and very effective advocate of direct payments, and Simon Duffy, arguably the intellectual driving force behind self-directed support, have distanced themselves from the Government's policies – the former by a country mile or two, the latter perhaps by more of a short walk. In local authority adult social care departments, criticism of government policies has been muted, as there is, at senior levels at least, widespread support, but controversy still exists in academic and policy communities, with advocates and opponents of personal budgets and direct payments queuing up from time to time (sometimes even in this journal) to give one another a bit of a going over. This debate has been respectful, but it is also clear that seven years after the DH Transformation Grant, there is far from a settled consensus about the value and significance of personal budgets and direct payments.

Into this arena of controversy two more books have recently been published: *Debates in Personalisation*, edited by Catherine Needham and Jon Glasby, and *Self-directed Support – Personalisation, Choice and Control* by Charlotte Pearson, Julie Ridley and Susan Hunter. That neither book offers remarkable new insights should not really be a surprise, as the topic has preoccupied many researchers, policy analysts and others over the last few years. However, each, in rather different ways, has some interesting things to say.

Debates in Personalisation is a remarkably generous and even-handed book. The editors acknowledge their own differences of opinion. Jon Glasby has been a not uncritical supporter of personal budgets and direct payments, whilst Catherine Needham has in more recent writing been more sceptical. However, they are scrupulously fair to their contributors – and with arguably one or two exceptions, the book represents quite well the wide spectrum of opinion in research and policy communities about personalisation and personal budgets. It's logically structured into five parts – beginning with an overview and introduction. In this section, largely written by the editors, there's a good description of the main issues; and though I might disagree with some of their claims (for example, though it may be true that (p.18) 'almost all formal evaluation data has indicated that people who receive direct payments receive better outcomes', this glosses over the – to say the least – very variable quality of a lot of these studies and data sources) it is a useful introduction to important issues and controversies.

The main sections of the book – parts two to four – deal respectively with personalisation challenges, frontline perspectives, and personal health budgets. Contributors include Lucy Series on the obscurities of Resource Allocation Systems, Jill Manthorpe on Safeguarding and Risk (referring to a current major research project), and Liz Lloyd, who describes how personalisation policies are written predominantly with younger adults in mind, reflecting an impoverished perception of need in old age at odds with the ideals of personalisation. Further tensions are reported by Wendy Mitchell and Jenni Brooks in relation to carers; and a major challenge for authorities in relation to self-funders is described by Melanie Henwood. The three contributions on the workforce and employment issues reflect what is described as a two-tier system – for those able to manage, or have gold standard support; and a second rate service for others. Another group of contributions is on the incipient Personal Health Budget programme and its ongoing evaluation.

The final section, of responses and conclusions, offers, amongst other things, interesting and personal accounts, by Simon Duffy and Peter Beresford, of the evolution of their thinking. (A few years ago I attended a conference at which Simon Duffy spoke. It was an engaging and thoughtful presentation and I thought at the time that the Government would probably steal his clothes. And so it seems to have proved – as readers will find if they read his chapter 'After Personalisation'). Though differences in opinion between Duffy and Beresford remain, both have a shared experience of being feted then frozen out by the Department of Health. Duffy suggests it was probably inevitable that 'we would end up with the expensive mess that personalisation has become' (p.178). In their own conclusion Glasby and Needham remind us of another thing we all know: that the resource glass might not only be judged half-full or half-empty, but that it might be judged twice as big as it needs to be.

Many of the contributions are essentially based on arguments expressed by the authors in other publications. However, these are not always readily accessible to busy, but interested social work students, practitioners and managers with restricted time and library facilities. These are the groups likely to find this book of most interest – so it offers a very valuable contribution by bringing together these very different perspectives in a single, readable volume.

Self-directed Support – Personalisation, Choice and Control also offers a summary of the history of self-directed support (SDS) and the policy directives that have shaped its development. It also draws on findings from an evaluation of three SDS sites in Scotland. Although the book has relevance to a wider constituency, parts of it are likely to be of particular interest to practitioners, managers and policy makers in that country. Demographic and cultural

differences mean that those responsible for implementing SDS and personal budgets will need to address some very specific challenges which are less apparent in England. For example, low population densities may make it even harder for local, responsive, sustainable social care markets to develop. There is also a rather stronger tradition of collectivism – at least in central Scotland – which sits uneasily alongside the privatised, choice-based, individualised forms of service provision that are becoming the norm in England. All of this suggests a stronger role for the public sector in relation to personalisation and personal budgets than in England. Importantly, too, Scotland is a few years behind in developing personal budgets. There are therefore opportunities to learn from mistakes made in England. Many of these are identified and described in this book.

A notable strength of this fairly slender volume is the care with which the authors summarise the key issues. This also means, however, that the prose could be a bit livelier in places, and though Pearson *et al.* summarise some of the key literature thoroughly, in places they seem reluctant to pass their own judgement on it – leaving the text a bit too descriptive in places. And though they draw on empirical data collected from three sites, this evidence – some of which might be of particular interest to readers south of the border – seems rather overwhelmed by summaries of the work of others presented alongside these findings.

An interesting difference from Needham and Glasby's book is reflections by Pearson and colleagues on personalisation strategies in Europe, where personal budgets and direct payment policies have been curtailed, postponed or cancelled post-austerity. By contrast, in England, the roll-out of personal budgets has continued. The authors also draw attention to an interesting paper by West (2013), describing how, in the face of swingeing budget cuts, a large English City Council continued to implement its personalisation scheme, arguing both for its transformational character (and described as being between 'managerial domination and fantasy'); and they refer to Ferguson's critique of the ideology of personalisation (2007). Both papers are highly critical of personalisation, and though Ferguson's work is mentioned in passing in Needham and Glasby's book, West's paper is apparently overlooked (possibly because it was published fairly recently).

Neither book – probably wisely – tries too hard to synthesise contrasting perspectives or formulate advice or guidance for policy makers or practitioners. However, whereas Needham and Glasby offer a fair and balanced summary of their contributors' work, Pearson *et al.* sometimes fail to rise above the general and the ordinary. For example, statements such as 'Recognition of the uncertainty in new roles for social work and other frontline staff... must be reflected in substantive training and development programmes...' and 'Experience to date suggests that the 'transformational' shift in power relationships is proving to be a challenge' (p.80) seem rather underwhelming and disappointing given the thoughtful and useful scholarship evident in earlier chapters.

None of the criticisms in this review, though, should deter the interested reader from getting hold of these two books. In different ways, both make valuable contributions to what are arguably the most important debates happening in UK adult social care at the present time. Go on, buy or borrow them, and see what you think.

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