

Book Reviews

In Care and After: a Positive Perspective

Chase, E., Simon, A. & Jackson, S. (eds.)

London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 202,

ISBN: 9-78-0-415-35253-6, £22.99 (pbk.)

This book reports on a series of studies, carried out by researchers from the Thomas Coram Institute at the Institute of Education, University of London, into aspects of the experience of children and young people 'in care'. After a period during which we were asked to call them 'looked after children', this now appears once again to be the accepted term.

After an introductory chapter by the editors, the book provides an historical overview of care provision for children in the UK, an exploration into what we know and don't know about outcomes for children who have been in care. Then follow chapters on the costs and benefits of educating children in care, the experience of care leavers who go on to higher education and the experience of early parenthood among care leavers. The book goes on to look at private fostering, comparisons between the British and Continental European use of residential care for children, advocacy for children, the involvement of children in research and some concluding comments by the editors. The obvious omission (which the editors acknowledge) is a chapter on *public* fostering which in the UK is the main form in which public care provision for children is delivered - in contrast to the situation in Denmark and Germany (Chapter Eight). Nevertheless this is a wide-ranging and thought-provoking book which will be useful for anyone with an interest in what happens to children in public care.

I was less happy, however, with a few sweeping statements such as:

[The Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2001] represented a radical shift in social

policy, contrasting starkly with previous policies which envisaged that young people at the age of 16 could simply go forth and survive on their own. (Chapter One [by Chase *et al.*], p.4)

Sadly, being expected to go forth and survive on their own at 16 has, indeed, been part of the experience of many children leaving care but, to suggest that this was a matter of *policy* until 2001, is incorrect. Guidance issued in 1991 to accompany the 1989 Children Act, for instance, stated that:

It is of vital importance that young people are properly prepared [for leaving care] and are given access to support afterwards. (Department of Health, 1991, p.97)

The authors might object that this guidance was not effective in practice, but how can they be sure that the same will not be true of the new legislation? We should be wary of falling into a kind of politician's rhetoric in which past initiatives are dismissed as failures, but new initiatives are hailed uncritically as if they will necessarily do exactly what they claim. Elsewhere, the opposite error is made of assuming that legislative changes in the past necessarily resulted in changes on the ground. For example, in Chapter Two, Jackson refers approvingly to the change of emphasis in the 1989 Children Act in the direction of reducing coercion: "Court action was in future to be a last resort" (p.19). In reality, the number of care orders made annually in England and Wales increased threefold over the period 1992-2004.

The rigour of the argument is also sometimes weakened by a limited selection of the issues and factors in play. For example, in the interesting international study of residential care by Petrie and Simon (Chapter 8), I would have liked more

discussion of the different ways that residential units are used in the UK, where they tend to be seen as a 'bridge' towards fostering, independence or return home, rather than as homes in their own right. This might help to explain the more 'short-term' approach of UK residential workers as compared to their continental colleagues, an approach which these authors seem to assume is necessarily due to the relative lack of training of UK staff in the continental pedagogical model. Maybe they adopt a short-term approach because their involvement is indeed short-term? I wondered also why the authors did not discuss the existence in the UK of special schools which children attend as boarders, and where a more pedagogical approach might well be evident. I felt that without these complexities being teased out the comparison was a little less useful than it might have been.

The book as a whole is certainly effective at highlighting some of the ways in which our care system (or rather our society as a whole) fails children in care. For example, the chapter on higher education (by Ajayi & Quigley) described heartbreaking instances of high-achieving care leavers having funding and accommodation withdrawn at really crucial moments in their education. The book also achieves its aim of pointing out deficiencies in the system without being negative about children in care themselves, whose own words are frequently cited in these pages. It also avoids the other easy error of scapegoating the people who work in the system. It is a useful contribution to the literature.

Reference:

Department of Health (1991) *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Vol. 4: Residential Care*, London: HMSO.

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Collaborative Social Work Practice
Quinney, A.

Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd, 2006, pp.153, ISBN: 9781844450145, £15 (pbk.)

This text is designed to help student social workers to gain knowledge about working in partnership with other professions. It is very much an introductory text aimed at students in their first year of study and recognises that students undertaking other health and social care courses will be able to gain insights into the new requirements demanded of social workers through reading it. This book focuses on collaboration with other professionals rather than collaboration with service users and carers, but the needs and perspectives of service users and carers remain an important focus throughout.

In keeping with the other titles in the *Transforming Social Work Practice* series this book is very accessible and user friendly. The book is simply but authoritatively written. Prefacing each chapter with a statement of the relevant National Occupational Standards and Academic Standards helps students to become familiar with the content of these. It uses case studies, research summaries and activity points to aid reflection and to encourage an active approach to learning on the part of the reader. It is practice orientated and offers the reader guidance on further reading at the end of each chapter.

Chapters One and Two set the foundations for the remainder of the book with Chapters Three to Seven looking at the roles, responsibilities and value bases of other significant professionals. Chapter One explores key terms and definitions of collaboration and then sets out the policy and service delivery context of collaboration by identifying significant policy and legislative milestones. It looks back to the Beveridge Report of 1942 and more recently to the Laming Report (2003), New Labour's Modernisation Agenda and reform of the NHS through the NHS Plan. This is really

helpful for the novice social worker who needs to understand the ‘signposts’ that have guided partnership developments and the new organisations created to regulate services, staff and training.

Chapter Two aims to prepare the student for collaboration, firstly, by outlining the legal framework for developing integrated services and formalised co-operation with local partners that have resulted from the Green Papers *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) and *Independence, Well-being and Choice* (DH, 2005). The author subsequently draws on the work of Barrett and Keeping (2005) which identifies a whole range of factors which can help or hinder collaborative social work practice. These include: knowledge of professional roles, willing participation, confidence, open and honest communication, trust and mutual respect, power, conflict, support and commitment at a senior level, professional culture, uncertainty, envy and defences against anxiety. These factors have a very significant effect on whether a partnership is successful. I would have liked the author to have devoted a little more time to a discussion or a reflective exercise to encourage students to consider how these factors might be managed to best effect. Whilst this book primarily focuses on knowledge it is vital for students to begin to appreciate the skills of collaboration that they will need to develop.

In Chapters Three to Seven, the author looks at other professions and their context in turn (Youth Work and Connexions, Health, Education, Housing and Neighbourhood, and the Justice context). This is to outline their organisational frameworks, highlight historical and landmark developments for that profession, and discuss what those professionals do in practice. The author identifies where other professional codes of ethics and values diverge from those of social work and explains the potential impact this may have. In each chapter pitfalls and inequalities are raised and dealt

with succinctly enabling the reader to quickly understand what the issues of concern are and how these may impede successful collaboration. She provides a wide range of resources, books, journals and websites that a student can follow up when they need to know more.

There is nothing wholly new in this book nor is it deeply philosophical in the way that it addresses issues. What it does offer is the knowledge, in a short and easy to read volume, to enable students quickly to gain a basic understanding of the policy and legislative frameworks that are likely to impinge on collaboration with allied professionals. Part of its strength is that it feels authoritative and up to date. The author will need to revise it regularly so that it remains so. This will enable it to act as a really useful resource and reference guide for students in health and social care.

Reference:

Barrett, G. & Keeping, C. (2005) ‘The Processes Required for Effective Interprofessional Working’ in Barrett, G., Sellman, D. & Thomas, J. (eds.) *Interprofessional Working in Health and Social Care*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp.18-32

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Social Work Practice: Assessment, Planning, Intervention and Review (2nd edition)

Parker, J. & Bradley, G.
Exeter: Learning Matters, 2007, pp.147,
ISBN: 1-903300-85-1, £14.00 (pbk.)

This is a useful book for student social workers and those entering the profession. Its contents relate directly to government guidelines for training in terms of key roles and competencies, whilst also promoting reflective practice within a context of policy change and social justice. This is significant because, as the authors observe, the ascendancy of the evidence-based approach

can invite a tendency towards ‘tick box’ case management, which, given the complexities of social work with vulnerable and socially marginalised individuals, can be reductive.

The book is structured around five aspects of assessment, which for me, as a newly qualified social worker felt pretty familiar: context, assessment tools, planning, intervention and review. Chapter One considers various definitions of assessment, suggesting that the concept is itself problematic, and outlines different approaches, such as task-centred, on-going or time-specific assessments. Case studies are introduced to illustrate the application of different assessment approaches and their strengths and weaknesses. Chapter Two again introduces familiar material with the use of genograms, ecomaps and other assessment tools. The third chapter covers care planning, with an emphasis on community care, which I found frustrating perhaps because I work in child protection and am still struggling to get to grips with the specific challenges of multi-agency care plans and case management rather than direct work and the conflict between care and control with children and families. I felt these issues could have been given more attention within the book, even as an introductory text.

I found Chapter Four the most interesting in its introduction to the theoretical underpinning for social work interventions, and agree with the authors that too much vagueness about theoretical knowledge can lead to an abandonment of theory in favour of pragmatics and a tendency to allow personal preferences to guide the work. The chapter on review and evaluation of practice was straightforward, but again with a sensitive discussion of why review matters.

Overall I thought this was a good introduction to social work assessment. It is inevitably limited by being an introduction and cannot cover all of the issues, but I liked

the way the authors consistently drew the reader’s attention to the complexity of the debates, rather than falling back on simplistic directives about how to achieve certain outcomes. That being said, as I have already mentioned I would have liked some further discussion of multi-agency working, and perhaps more on the service user perspective, especially in terms of human rights. For example, there was no mention of Family Group Meetings, which are becoming a significant intervention where I work, and are proving beneficial for empowering service users and providing a counterbalance to the agency’s bureaucratic agenda. The use of case studies was helpful in that they traced the unfolding of service users’ stories, rather than simply presenting a brief cameo to illustrate a point. However, having just completed my post-qualifying year, on looking back over my own training I would have liked a greater sense of the demands of a full case-load; exploring the detail of one case at a time is informative, but the challenge is to do that for umpteen cases simultaneously, and I have not yet read an introductory text which prepares student social workers for that. Nevertheless, this book is a helpful addition to the student’s library, and also provides good sign-posting for additional reading.

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