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Review: Social Work: A Companion to Learning: Mark Lymbery and Karen Postle (eds) SAGE Publications, London, 2007, 302pp, ISBN 978-1-4129-2002-5, £20.99 (pbk)

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indicates, critical analysis must be directed to the multiple processes which lead to and underpin people's fear of harmful behaviours directed towards them ('crime') on one hand; and on the other, we must address and question those interests and dynamics which have reified it as a problem in its own right, with its own machinery of calculation, policy and reductive interventions.

References

Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society*. London: SAGE.

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□ Social Work: A Companion to Learning

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Service users, practitioners and academics examine ethical and political dilemmas in this important contribution to social work literature. The authors focus in three sections on context, processes and practice to enable deep learning about complex issues relevant to more advanced level social work and social policy students. Key questions for the reader are raised throughout and chapter summaries and conclusions assist in reflection and analysis.

The editors aim to clarify the social worker's role within 'harsh and unforgiving environments' and to support a return to recently neglected key tenets of social work as professionals 'operate in the context of numerous initiatives that have served to constrain the scope of its activities and to fetter the discretion of its practitioners' (p. 5). Postle examines a macro level of practice, which reflects the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) definition of social work, in going beyond statutory functions. Such practice 'entails an awareness of social work's wider social and political context and a desire to effect wider change, appreciating and acknowledging inequalities

and injustices impacting on the lives of many people with whom practitioners work' (p. 264).

The impact of New Labour policies on social work is examined by Jordan who promotes the use of self as central to the concept of well-being and social relationships and states that social workers 'must be proactive in making opportunities' to change the political culture and landscape (p. 19). He challenges the distortion of concepts such as 'choice' and 'freedom' used to promote the privatization of social work services and managerialist regimes. Such developments lead Postle to comment that if 'bureaucracy is driving practice rather than complementing it . . . If it has supplanted, rather than supplemented, the tacit process of critical reflection, something is wrong and the task is not social work' (p. 259).

Payne explores partnership working in the context of inter-professionalism but an analysis of public/private partnerships, the centralization of service provision and demise of local democratic control of welfare would have been equally relevant (p. 145). Service users state that professional understanding of equality issues is essential: 'ours is not an equal society, so you are not likely to get equal partnerships' (p. 216). The importance of learning about how 'people's lifetime socio-economic position' is determined is explored by Bywaters, but (as in other chapters) there is little to clarify the way forward through radical intervention strategies. In presenting the social work process, Parker considers contradictions between current policy and the IFSW definition of social work. He explores the fact that the social work role may be used 'to control, regulate and manipulate . . . or to explore and develop with people alternative ways of being, developing and challenging' (p. 114). Parker provides a strong critique of prescriptive, procedural assessment processes, but students also need to learn how to work with service users to oppose such organizational regimes.

White and Harris contrast creative social work up until the late 1970s when social workers were 'accorded a high degree of autonomy in their work' (p. 242) with the current intensification of performance management and monitoring systems for 'aspects of service that can be measured which may not necessarily be the same as those which are the most important' (Lymbery, p. 185). This target driven approach 'serves to block innovation', 'skew priorities' and obscures actual performance in social work which is a service mainly based on a qualitative dimension (p. 185). The exercise of professional judgement is

undermined and single-agency measurements impact on effective multi-agency working. Outcomes based policies serve the needs of the state rather than the rights of the service user and provide no legal right to welfare.

Social work students will gain support through reading about developing the 'ability to respond meaningfully in relation to different and changing contexts' and being rewarded for their own thinking rather than arriving at prescribed outcomes (Fook, p. 39). They will identify with Rafferty and Steyaert's comment that 'working with computerised information systems raises technical and ethical complexities' (p. 173), and will appreciate experiential learning strategies that allow them to gain courage in the exercise of professional judgement (Eadie, p. 202). They will, however, need guidance about how to implement progressive strategies.

Shardlow stresses the 'need for global action to deal with some of the problems that social work has to address on a local level' (p. 97) but the risks and implications of such action for practitioners are not sufficiently explored. Morality, professionalism, anti-oppressive practice and power imbalances are themes throughout the book which could have been more firmly framed within the discourse of globalization and international agendas of population control and global citizenship. However, the book remains a comprehensive and challenging key text. Maybe a sequel could demonstrate (through examples of individual, group and community work) how social workers can become more powerful in challenging inequities and engaging with struggles against political, social and economic oppression.

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