Book Reviews

New Directions in Social Work Practice, 2nd edn,
Kieron Hatton,

In this second edition, Kieron Hatton draws together important contemporary themes and directions of travel within social work in a creative and eloquent manner. Updated to take account of recent changes and developments, the text brings us as up to date in respect of social work in England as the closure of The College of Social Work in 2015 and also addresses the (very different) reviews of social work education published in 2014.

The style of this book, whereby chapters contain ‘stop and think’-type activities enabling readers to pause and apply learning to questions the author poses or relevant activities, is likely to appeal to students attempting to grapple with complex ideas or concepts, as with the summary of chapters provided throughout. The text seems therefore accessible to a reasonably wide audience, although the cross-referencing to the Professional Capability Framework (PCF), especially at the start of each chapter, may become dated in time with increased emphases upon other ‘competence’ or knowledge and skills frameworks. That said, the main body of each chapter is able to stand alone and the decision to also cross-reference to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Benchmarking Statement for Social Work and to the Community Development National occupational Standards is interesting and also provides readers with clear signals about the author’s stance in respect of the community/social aspect of social work being key in order to avoid more pathologising and individual-blaming narratives.

The author is clear from the outset of the book that the focus of this text is broader than the UK, or even England, as is often the case given the different regulatory processes in place within the UK. This is far from mere rhetoric, as Hatton uses numerous fascinating examples of innovative and creative approaches to particular situations throughout this text.

Hatton sets the scene for his approach early on in this book when he identifies the importance of a critical exploration of concepts too often taken for granted—including ‘creativity’—and identifies the need to ‘imagine’ and see as possible a new model of social work activity that
challenges the recent discourses around welfare and models of welfare provision. Although, for me personally, the policy section of the first chapter was not as strong as other sections of the book (perhaps because of the necessarily partial coverage and the scope to be addressed, but also because of what felt to be a lack of flow with the narrative), this is the exception in what is an otherwise excellently crafted text. Whether reading from start to finish or reading particular chapters at different times, one of the impressive aspects of this book is the inter-linking between different chapters and the return to cross-cutting themes and concepts in a way that enable to reader to be led on a fascinating, but rightly challenging, process of re-examining and critiquing matters that are too often presented or used relatively uncritically. This means, therefore, that readers are introduced to key critical theories in relation to community, power and oppression, professionalism and exclusion in an accessible and yet robust and meaningful manner. Particularly noteworthy perhaps for their particular areas of focus are Chapters 4, 6 and 7.

In Chapter 4, Hatton is one of the few UK authors to recognise and write about the significant contribution of the non-statutory sector to social work activity and to locate the debate within important policy shifts that are creating new forms of relationships between these sectors and government. He examines the potential (positive and negative) implications of the fragmented nature of much welfare provision and the increasingly marketised and regulated approach to provision that has historically been seen as innovative and less bound by procedures and bureaucracy than social work within the statutory sector. The role of the voluntary and independent sector may have even more significance perhaps under the 2014 Care Act—something that could perhaps have been acknowledged a little further.

Chapter 6 includes a careful and in-depth exploration of the relationships between professionalism, power and partnership within the context of current debates about the nature of social work and the ‘profession’. Care is taken to consider the contemporary challenges especially in contexts such as the UK, where there is concern with the professional standing of social work, and Hatton questions the extent to which increasing professionalisation comes at a cost in terms of both exclusionary practices and also lack of power sharing. It is in this chapter that the details of a social pedagogical approach are expounded in a convincing exploration of such an approach and its potential to refocus social work upon relationships and especially the notion of the ‘common third’ (p. 135) to strengthen direct work.

The international focus of Chapter 7 follows easily on from the discussion of social pedagogy in Chapter 6. Here, context-specific differences in respect of social work are recognised whilst also identifying shared concerns such as poverty, racism, exclusion and marginalisation. Hatton provides detailed and fascinating summaries of projects focused upon
the experiences of travellers within Ireland and the UK and the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

In Hatton's final chapter, original organising themes are revisited and a new model for social work. Whilst, as with any two-dimensional model, this may initially appear a little less dynamic than the explanations that accompany it, the model seems to summarise neatly the key approaches taken within this text and highlights how:

... sets of relationships—international, inter-professional and inclusion and professionalism, participation and partnership—are based upon a conception of power that is multi-faceted and which not only seeks to understand how power operates and influences social workers and those who use services, but also how power can be used to challenge inequality and disadvantage and promote more equitable social relationships (pp. 174–5).

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doi: 10.1093/bsw/bcw126
Advance Access publication September 24, 2016

Social Work with Children and Families, 4th edn,
Maureen O’Loughlan and Steve O’Loughlan (eds),

As part of the publisher’s Transforming Social Work Practice series, this 200-page book, now in its fourth edition, is aimed at social work students. It seeks to provide a comprehensive guide to the complex area of social work with children and families with an emphasis on mapping its content to the professional capabilities framework (PCF) and making links between theory and practice. To that end and as a basic overview, the book is successful, breaking content down into eight chapters which consider issues relating to values, legislation, early support, safeguarding, direct work, life story work, disability and substitute care. Authors and contributors have a collective background in social work consultancy, academia and practice. The language and tone of the book are very accessible, with exercises and points for reflection embedded throughout as well as PCF mapping guidance. For the student, this therefore provides a very palatable overview and quick reference guide. It would