

Whether social pedagogy has actually taken root in the UK as a theoretical model and a practice paradigm remains unanswered by the book, as does the question of whether the UK context would actually require its own version of social pedagogy and what its distinguishing features would be. But Hatton is aware, from his own experience, that there is still a lot of work to be done and his book has made a stimulating, at times provocative, contribution to this project.

## Reference

Bhabha, H. K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge.

**Walter Lorenz**

*Free University of Bozen, Bolzano, Italy*

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## **Communicating with Children and Their Families: Responding to Need and Protection,**

Liz Davies and Evelyn Kerrigan Lebloch,

*Berkshire, Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, 2013, pp. 211, ISBN 978-033524418-8 (pb), £21.99*

Communication in social work has always been regarded as a basic skill, just as human relationships were seen as the medium for interactions that led to change and improvement in the lives of users of services. This is therefore a timely book because it seeks to reassert such skills by placing them within the very challenging environments many of us work within. The book is grounded in the context of neo-liberal social policy and is therefore highly political in its challenge to orthodoxy.

The authors skilfully and successfully weave recognisable scenarios that offer detailed analysis based on up-to-date practice and excellent policy review. They achieve this through the use of five practice examples which will be familiar to many of us: the first centres on *engagement* and concerns a teenager being groomed by a remote adult online; the second—*negotiation*—involves an obese child whose situation is discussed between involved agencies; the third surrounds *investigation* using a scenario similar to that of Peter Connelly; the fourth the *use of power* against the background of an unaccompanied sixteen-year-old Afghan asylum seeker; and finally *persistence*, which revolves around the resource-driven incorrect categorisation of a disabled child. All of this focuses in detail on the day-to-day communications between workers, children, parents and colleagues that can determine whether interventions will result in barriers, further issues or success. The authors do not shy away from controversy and wade into debates over such matters as professional dangerousness, family support versus child protection, assessment versus investigation, and unhelpful changes in child protection practice in England and Wales.

The *negotiation* scenario includes two alternative ‘strategy’ meetings involving professionals from various agencies. I cringed through uncomfortable recognition when I read the one that starts late with no apology, descends quickly into conflict and only reaches any kind of conclusion when parties leave early! The alternative demonstrated how good chairing and acknowledgement of issues can lead down a much better road in terms of working together towards a plan that will help this excluded child and those trying to help him and his mother. This scenario, as with the others, is set against the reality of policy, legislation and learning from serious case reviews (in this case, the strategy meetings held to discuss Victoria Climbié). This reminder of the consequences of good, indifferent and poor communication occurs throughout the book: such material acts as a refresher on matters we should all be familiar with—it is a real strength.

I was also impressed with the signposting to other literature. Some authors litter their work with references without emphasising those that will effectively supplement the text and should be followed up. Books that do this properly naturally lead the reader to other works and this is the case here. In the *negotiation* scenario referred to above, the authors identify material on emotional intelligence that is useful and thought-provoking. In the *use of power* scenario in Chapter 4, reference is made to writings that discuss power as well as issues for asylum seekers, in more detail. This process is helped by the chapter endings providing reflective questions and lists of further resources.

The general themes of the book resonate with progressive radical practice in children and family work discussed by others (Rogowski, 2013; Turbett, 2014), and demonstrate that this remains possible despite all the prescriptions and problems of managerially driven practice. The authors correctly identify most service users as oppressed by society and the systems within which social workers operate. They point out the bravery of those who have mounted particular challenge (such as Margaret Humphreys), but at the same time show that we can all act with principle if we are true to the social justice values that made us want to do this job in the first place. As the authors’ state: ‘The day-to-day dilemmas faced by social workers who feel constrained by resource-led decisions... must be addressed through competent and sensitive use of communication skills to achieve... an often hard-won outcome’ (p. 5). This is a book about good social work in the real world that is therefore to be recommended.

## References

- Rogowski, S. (2013) *Critical Social Work with Children and Families: Theory, Context and Practice*, Bristol, Policy Press.  
 Turbett, C. (2014) *Doing Radical Social Work*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

**Colin Turbett**

*Children and Family Team Manager, North Ayrshire Council, Scotland*  
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