

Book review**Good Practice in Child Protection****CLAIRE TILBURY, JENNIFER OSMOND, JULIE CLARK, SANDY WILSON****(2007), Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson Education Australia. 170 pp.****ISBN 0733978665****Review by LYNDA CAMPBELL**

Good Practice in Child Protection is a large undertaking in a relatively small package (107 pp). The authors' intention is clear. 'The book covers the child protection process from early intervention to tertiary intervention, incorporating family support, investigation and intervention, and out of home care. Here we have two aims: first, to outline the fundamentals of good practice; and, second, to promote a broad view of child protection work' (p. 2). As they recognise, this entails a struggle to balance breadth and depth, a balance they have, overall, managed to strike. As one who has long taught a subject that seeks to encapsulate this range of services and practices, I appreciate the difficulty of the enterprise and the many hard decisions the authors must have made along the way, and applaud their contribution to professional education. The book should serve well as an Australian text for beginners in this field, offering material that extends beyond jurisdictional differences.

Chapter 1 establishes the policy context and an approach described as critical practice, comprising 'critical analysis', 'critical reflection' and 'critical action'. The authors return to this framework in the final chapter, which examines the organizational context of work and issues for the professional as a person, but on the whole it could perhaps have been more actively used as an integrative framework throughout the book. Nevertheless, in a field of practice that often invites emotiveness and dogmatism, there is evidence throughout that the authors have sought and presented various contrasting viewpoints, and through small reflective tasks encourage the reader to begin the process of critical analysis and decision making. This sense of the worker as critical thinker is reinforced by the attention throughout to incorporating the client's viewpoint, the pursuit of positive outcomes for children and their families, and judicious use of formal power.

From policy, we move to a quick overview of broad practice theories and then specific theories of child abuse and neglect (Chapter 2), establishing a multi-dimensional framework with an emphasis on systems/ecological practice that implicitly guide later chapters. This is followed by an excellent discussion of the kinds of outcomes and quality processes we seek for children and families (Chapter 3), in a useful chapter that provides a sense of purpose for the worker, though I would have liked to see what can be a dry argument infused with a little more of the sense of urgency and importance of life changes for children and families that is so motivating for workers. Next, the authors review risk, harm and needs (Chapter 4), in a discussion that is well informed by current debates and practices, and invites the

reader to use, with caution, the burgeoning list of risk factors that dominates the literature of this field.

How to exercise this caution is dealt with in some measure in Chapter 5, which attempts to capture assessment, case planning and intervention. The assessment and planning sections are thorough, but it was perhaps over-ambitious to attempt to cover intervention, as if it were one phenomenon, in the same chapter, and the result is not very satisfying. The 'Cooks Tour' of practice models remains brief and not well tailored to this particular field, and the review of promising programs and practices lacks a coherent sense of purpose. It is not clear how these particular examples have been selected and how they relate to the book's intention to canvass interventions from primary prevention to tertiary intervention. It is here that this reviewer finds the conflation of child protection and family services practice most problematic. While in most jurisdictions these approaches to practice are closely linked, and all child protection work requires active work with families, there are some distinct mandates and functions that each require their own practice theory. In choosing to treat them together, the authors perhaps lose the opportunity to excite the student with the very particular demands, puzzles and joys that emerge in different practice settings or phases of the intervention process.

The thoughtful chapter on out-of-home care (Chapter 6) covers practice with children, carers, and to a lesser extent parents, and its positive and respectful tone is picked up in the subsequent chapter that considers client participation and collaborative practices. All chapters are well organized, with key points at the start, useful lists where appropriate, website links, reflective exercises and extended reading lists. Several chapters have a 'special focus' section, on such issues as domestic violence, mental illness, parental substance abuse, parental or child disability, and, of a different order, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These are all core business for child and family workers, and illustrative of the complex knowledge they require, though the special focus sections do tend to stand apart from the chapters and need a little more integration.

Overall, the authors draw well on their own experiences and considerable other writings to produce a comprehensive introduction to the field. In their efforts to both present evidence, yet caution against its uncritical acceptance, they sometimes leave a beginning worker a little up in the air about what to ask, think and do, but this does seem to be a consequence of the sheer scope of the vision for the book, and is in any case an accurate reflection of this field of work, where there are indeed no pat answers. One of the many decisions about what to omit, no doubt, was the decision to make little use of case examples in the book. Some continuous use of examples might have helped the reader to integrate the wide array of material and work toward a more coherent practice approach, but if this book is to be a text accompanying teaching, or accompanying a program of induction into the workplace, as seem to be its appropriate destinations, then it is probable that such integrative examples can be better explored in those live settings. This is a vital adjunct to the book, as the serious and weighty content might blur into an endless impression of lists if the reader is not inspired to connect with the sense of purpose and the dynamic nature of the working relationship with children and their families that makes child protection and care and family services work exciting and worthwhile. The book certainly provides a useful

platform for entry to this work, and it is probably a book that will grow and be refined over several editions.

Dr Lynda Campbell is a senior lecturer in the School of Social Work, University of Melbourne.

