

## Article

# Book Review Child and Family Assessment in Social Work Practice 2nd Edition

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used throughout the book and helps bring to life the practical activities and examples through skills, methods and case studies. These three chapters share much in common with the approach taken by Harry Ferguson in trying to convey the realities of practice (Ferguson, 2011). There is a chapter focused particularly upon 'a child rights-based approach', which uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guiding framework for practice, principles and audit. The discussion of this global convention with specific reference to individual high-profile child deaths over the decades in the UK is particularly affecting and well worth a read.

The temptation for buyers of books with a 'how to' approach is the implicit promise that they will actually help improve practice. These two books go a long way towards delivering on that promise and can both be recommended for the clarity and accessibility of their writing and the depth of practice experience and scholarship supporting the arguments. However, from a social work practitioner development perspective, I suspect that the traditional 'book' is an inherently limited means of improving the complex practice skills demanded by relationship building and meaningful communication. Of far greater value would be a series of multi-media opportunities for learning through observing and modelling upon skilled practitioners in action in different contexts, with different ages of children and young people within actual practice scenarios. Nonetheless, until such resources are widely available, both books have much to offer and go about their tasks in different and complementary approaches to their subject.

## Reference

Ferguson, H. (2011) *Child Protection Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

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### **Child and Family Assessment in Social Work Practice, 2nd edn,**

Sally Holland,

*London, Sage Publications, 2011, pp. 8 + 226, ISBN 978-1-84920-522-1 (pb), £22.99*

*Child and Family Assessment in Social Work Practice* provides the reader with insightful discussions and practice suggestions related to its subject. There is a useful emphasis on issues related to risk management, specific detailed case studies together with practice points and pause-for-thought activities, which make this a helpful resource for students, practitioners and social work educators. Throughout the book, the author draws on research evidence to support different approaches to assessment and, in particular, an examination of the

balance required in assessment work to ensure that children and young people are active participants in the process. As Sally Holland acknowledges, whilst the inclusion of children in assessment practice is required, recent research (p. 98) suggests that children often play a limited role, and their views are under-represented.

The book is helpfully divided into three sections. In the first section, 'What is assessment?', Holland provides a detailed background using relevant research and theory, together with instructive discussions related to the requirement for analytical approaches to assessment work. She discusses, for example, the ethical basis that informs assessment practice and provides a good exploration of both practical issues and decision-making processes and influences. This section also reiterates the importance of reflective evaluation that is central to assessment practice.

In the second section, 'People in assessments', Holland examines the ways in which relationships are developed and maintained in assessment work; in so doing, she draws on studies of current practice updated from the 2004 edition. Chapter Four discusses the implications of the time pressures that impact upon assessment work, whilst Chapter Five deals with assessment relationships and illustrates the importance of 'soft skills' in developing relationships with those who are being assessed. In Chapter Six, Holland examines various ways in which children's involvement in assessment can be tackled through effective planning and, of course, engagement and partnership with children, young people and their families from the outset. This is a very timely analysis, given the recommendations made in the *Munro Review* (DfE, 2011).

The final section of the book examines the way in which assessment process and practices can be likened to qualitative research processes. Holland emphasises the importance of analytical and rigorous thinking in gathering data and information to inform assessments. Effective use is made of the findings and reflection on the author's Coastal Cities study drawing on interview extracts to highlight points about how social workers often feel challenged by the pressures they are under to deliver good-quality assessment, when time and other resources are lacking.

I would have liked to have seen a little more emphasis on cultural differences and the assessment of parenting in the book and, whilst Holland makes some excellent observations, again drawing on research findings about the interpretation of parenting behaviour, there was an emphasis on Western approaches to assessment. To be fair, Holland concedes that social work practitioners must be attuned and open in this respect, but, in my view, this could have been developed further. Holland implores students to undertake a 'cultural review' and, as such, implies a sophisticated level of cultural orientation that beginning and trainee social workers may have yet to develop. Nevertheless, this is an instructive and helpful contribution to the field of assessment practice with children young people and their families, and one that practice educators will find very helpful to use with student social workers. Holland writes in a clear, direct

and engaging way. The range of reflective activities included in the book provide useful materials for classroom-based discussions with student social workers, and for the growing range of practitioners who are involved in assessment work with children, young people and their families.

## Reference

Department for Education (DfE) (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A Child-Centred System*. London, DfE, available online at [www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875\\_DfE\\_Munro\\_Report\\_TAGGED.pdf](http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875_DfE_Munro_Report_TAGGED.pdf).

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### **Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping,**

Edward R. Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman,

*New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. xvii + 449, ISBN 978-0-19-537279-3 (hb), £30.00*

I was once participating in a workshop on spirituality at a national social work conference that became quite heated at one point. An experienced social work educator present attempted to cool the atmosphere by saying ‘Well, we all create our own spirituality in our own way’. A voice from the back of the room replied ‘Don’t you go assuming that I have to have “spirituality”’. That second voice came back to me when reading this book because Canda and Furman, for all their openness and accessibility, do most certainly assume that the reader will have a spirituality: ‘Every social worker is involved in a spiritual journey, in his or her own private life, as well as in the course of professional work. This book is about that journey, that compassion’ (p. 16).

Any readers who might be made uncomfortable by the claiming of compassion as a spiritual concept should probably avoid this review and this book. For any reader who can go along with such thinking, this book offers rich rewards.

Spirituality has, in recent years, moved away from the periphery and into the centre of social work education and practice. Some credit for this must go to Canda and Furman, most notably for the first edition of this book, published in 1999. It was, at the time, a godsend to social work academics seeking to incorporate spirituality into their teaching—not that the authors themselves would have used such theologically loaded language. Indeed, one of the clear strengths of that first book was the sensitivity with which it handled a multiplicity of spiritualities. It was therefore an accurately titled book, with the concept of diversity certainly to the fore. The predominant qualities of the first book were its