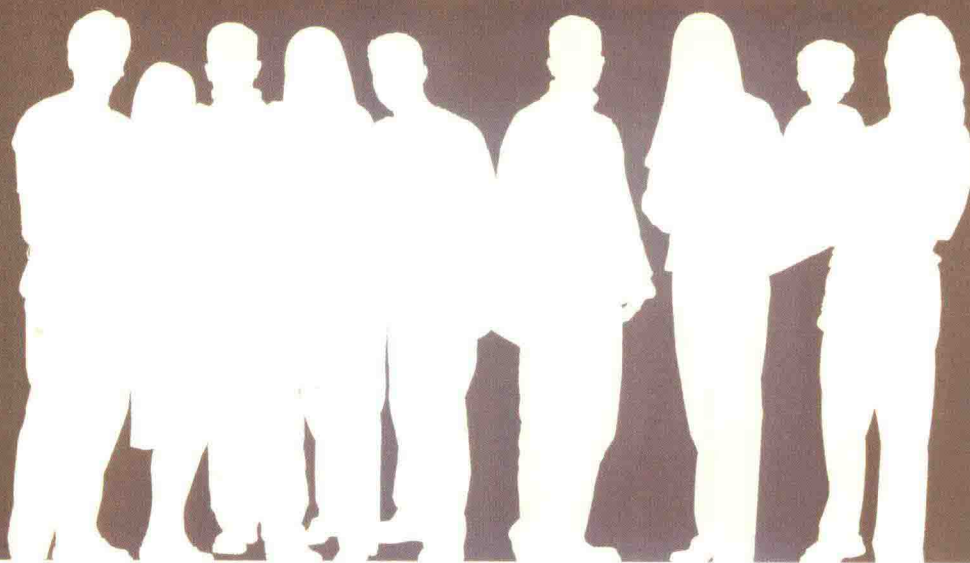



TRANSFORMING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE



2nd Edition

# New Directions in Social Work Practice

Kieron Hatton

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2nd Edition

# New Directions in Social Work Practice

Kieron Hatton



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**Series Editors:**  
Jonathan Parker and Greta Bradley



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# **New Directions in Social Work Practice**



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## *Series editors' Preface*

Since the first edition of Kieron Hatton's important book outlining many of the *New Directions* facing social work practice in the UK there have been continued changes demanded. Some of these are politically driven, of course, and represent areas ripe for critique, whilst some of the new directions being promoted are concerned with improving practice and enhancing the lives of those who use social work services. Portentously, the attacks made in changes to social work education and practice have damaged internationalisation and our capacity to learn from and contribute to global perspectives on social work.

Hatton's book is a welcome antidote to stagnation and moribund thinking in contemporary professional practice and readers will gain much from engaging with the concepts he sets out and the challenges he raises.

In a world of increasing standardisation, we can sometimes fail to critique our positions within social work, the impact of changing structures, practices and thinking. Hatton makes this explicit and challenges social work students to deepen their appreciation of the world around them and the social and political contexts inhabited by their service users.

This book re-establishes an important contribution to learning from which students, their service users and ultimately society should benefit.

Jonathan Parker

# *Acknowledgements*

Thanks to all members of the social work team at the University of Portsmouth for their support, inspiration and openness to new ideas.

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The book is dedicated to Helen, Cal and Ruari without whose support my work would be much more challenging.



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# Introduction

*If you don't risk anything, you risk more.*

Erica Jong

*I risk crossing the road because otherwise I risk standing still,*

*I risk being honest because otherwise I risk never knowing,*

*I risk being in a relationship because otherwise I risk never learning to care,*

*I risk eating chocolate because otherwise I risk missing out,*

*I risk a sense of humour because otherwise I risk going mad,*

*I risk being misunderstood because otherwise*

*I risk never being understood at all.*

Creative Writing Working Party, Social Work Inclusion Group,  
University of Portsmouth, 2006

The first edition of this book noted that 'Social work is confronting significant challenges at the beginning of the twenty-first century'. It commented on the fact that despite the development of a newer, more mature professional identity (since the introduction of the Care Standards Act 2000, the introduction of a three-year prequalifying degree programme, and the processes of regulation and accreditation through the General Social Care Council – now the Health and Care Professions Council, HCPC), social work faced challenges on a number of fronts.

Among those highlighted were:

- The increased emphasis on partnership working which could often seem to leave social work as the junior partner in relationships with big spending professions such as health and education.
- The workforce below social work qualification level was still poorly qualified and new types of worker were being put forward as potential rivals or alternatives to social work.
- Service users and carers were articulating their own agendas in ways which questioned the right of professionals, including social workers, to make decisions about people's lives without full consideration of the voice of these previously ignored or marginalised groups.
- The book sought to examine these challenges and posed a set of alternative scenarios for social work which aimed to cement its place in welfare provision in ways which were accountable, democratic and innovative. (Hatton, 2008)

The book was organised around three key themes:

- **Inclusion** – If social work is to make a real impact on the lives of those people who are marginalised and excluded it needs to develop a frame of reference which values, hears and works in partnerships with the people who are experts in social work, those who use social work services.
- **Inter-professionalism** – Too often inter-professionalism is seen as an unequal relationship in which the most powerful partner – statutory as against voluntary organisations, health or education as against social work – sets the agenda and structures the way services are developed and delivered. This book suggests a different way in which these partnerships can be framed which enhances the role of social work.
- **Internationalism** – It sometimes appears as if social work sees itself as solely a national activity which is impermeable to international or global influence. This view is being increasingly challenged and if social work is to continue to demonstrate its relevance it needs to listen to and learn from practitioners and theorists in other countries.

Central to these themes was the idea of innovation. It noted:

*If social work is going to grasp the opportunities available to it, it needs to be innovative, creative and critical. New forms of practice are emerging which encompass these emerging themes. However, they are often imperfectly developed, unevenly practised and poorly theorised. This book seeks to explore the dilemmas around these issues, and to suggest, drawing on UK and European examples, ways in which they can be incorporated into new forms of welfare practice.*

(Hatton, 2008)

The notion of creativity was, and remains, central to this reconfigured social work agenda. The poem which opens this chapter resulted from the collaboration of service users/carers from the Social Work Inclusion Group (SWIG) at the University of Portsmouth with UK and international students in the development of a creative workshop to explore issues of identity, difference and diversity. The decision to use creativity to enhance this process was the result of SWIG members' frustrations with traditional methods of collaboration and a desire to show that they had the capacity and ability to explore complex issues around their experience without having their views mediated by professionals. The poem powerfully reflected a major concern of service users and carers that current social work practice had become risk averse. This was despite the views expressed in policy developments such as Valuing people; Independence, wellbeing and choice; and Our health, our care, our say (see Chapters 1 and 5). The safety-first practice of much current social work, reinforced by a managerialist focus on outcomes rather than the social work task (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996) made the achievement of such risk enhancing practice even less likely to occur.

The possibilities for a new creative agenda to frame social work practice was a key theme within the book. At the heart of this was, and still remains, a belief that social work and other forms of welfare practice, need to be critical, reflective and utilise an intellectual understanding of the contribution the social sciences can make to an improvement in the theory and practice of social work.

The task therefore becomes one of utilising the possibilities that exist to recognise uncertainty and embrace it as a means of understanding the complexity of the social work task. As Lymbery notes, 'the application of ... creativity will be linked to a number of factors: the level of complexity of the work, the degree of familiarity of the practitioner with the type of work, and so on' (2003, p109). He suggests that in particular creativity is likely to be embraced more by higher-level practitioners, especially at post-qualifying level. He suggested that it is in the areas of assessment and evaluation that the potential for creativity is most likely to be found.

Although we can welcome this attempt to reintroduce creativity into UK social work, the analysis of Lymbery and others suffers from an over-concern with the national context. As noted earlier, social work needs to embrace the lessons of practice in other countries. The work of Cameron, McQuail and Petrie (2007) points to the potential of integrating a European tradition – social pedagogy – into the UK. Other writers have sought to demonstrate how a more radical perspective can contribute to new forms of practice (Lavalette and Ferguson, 2007; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Hatton, 2013, 2015). A central element of these practices concerns the use of creativity to build relationships between professionals and the people they work with. Creativity in this context can therefore be seen as part of a process of collaboration and empowerment (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

The author has suggested elsewhere that social pedagogy may provide a link to these notions of creativity (Hatton, 2013). The use of creativity should be part of a strategy to improve services.

This book therefore seeks to develop a definition of creativity which encompasses both the desire to improve current practice and new forms of practice. Creativity in this definition can therefore be seen to have four central elements to it:

- To modify existing ways of doing things to make them more relevant to people providing and experiencing services.
- To challenge current ways of doing things and in particular to expose the limitations of forms of practice that focus on outcomes and which neglect relationships as an integral part of practice.
- To develop new ways of doing things that build on the best elements of current practice but which also draw on European traditions of social education and social pedagogy (Hatton, 2013).
- To promote the use of the 'creative imagination' (Vygotsky, 2004) to envision new forms of activity that replace and challenge the more conservative discourses which often seem to frame welfare priorities.

## The contemporary context

Six years on from the first edition of this book, *where does this leave social work?* Undoubtedly contemporary social work faces a significant number of challenges from central government, the direct providers of social work services and those who use those services. The context within which social work is practised has changed significantly since the first edition of this book was published in 2008. The second Laming report (into the death of Peter Connelly) and the subsequent work of the Social Work Task Force, Social Work Reform Board and The College of Social Work have sought to (re)professionalise social work and provide it with a coherent professional identity. At the same time the Hackney model and the Reclaiming Social Work agendas have aimed to reconfigure the way social work is delivered and the Munro Report has emphasised the importance of looking at social work practice (particularly around child protection) and reaffirming the importance of direct work with people using social work services through an emphasis on relationship work rather than proceduralism and managerialism. A number of these developments were predicted in the first edition, which argued for social work to take a new direction which was 'innovative, creative and critical' (Hatton, 2008, p2). Central to such an approach, the author argued, was a framework for social work which 'examined the way debates around inclusion, inter-professionalism and internationalism are key to the future direction of social work' (p143).

The second edition of this book will examine how far such an explanatory framework can take us in understanding the theoretical and practical challenges we face as we approach a post election period where there may well be changes of emphasis in welfare provision. They are likely to occur within a similar neo-liberal paradigm that provided the context for the first edition and which continued to frame developments after 2010. The initial Task Force report came out in May 2009 and was closely followed by the Interim report in July 2009, which said:

*When people are made vulnerable – by poverty, bereavement, addiction, isolation, mental distress, disability, neglect, abuse or other circumstances – what happens next matters hugely...good social workers can and do make a huge difference in these difficult situations. They are needed now as much, if not more than before.*

(Social Work Task Force, 2009, p10)

Prior to the publication of the final report there were widespread concerns that the agenda was being driven by large statutory employers who were laying the blame for the difficulties that social workers were experiencing, not at the management practices and lack of resources being devoted to front-line practice but at the lack of preparation for practice evident in social work education programmes. At this time the author questioned this approach and suggested that there were a significant number of silences and omissions in the employer and government discourses around these issues (Hatton, 2009). These included:

- Questions around the way we *perform* social work. We need to be aware of the control and regulatory functions of what we do. But also need to be aware of

the need to engage with creativity so that we enhance the wellbeing and potential of the people we work with (see discussion of social pedagogy, Hatton, 2013).

- An overall *silence on notions of power* as reflected in the minimal attention given to users/carers role in social work education or practice within these discourses.
- The question of whether the changes suggested, especially the focus on the enhanced professional status of social work as a profession, disempower people who use those services (Tew, 2006).
- Noticeably the proposals were silent about *hierarchical power relationships* in organisations. This raised the question of whether this new professional identity will enable social workers to exercise control over their work, or is managerialism so entrenched that this will not happen?

These questions remained current throughout the subsequent abolition of the General Social Care Council and its replacement by the Health and Care Professions Council and the establishment, and subsequent closure, of The College of Social Work. The latter was envisioned as an attempt not only to confirm the identity of social work as a profession, but also to provide a voice for social work and those who use social work services. However, a number of these issues remain central to current practice and will be revisited throughout the book and addressed specifically in the Conclusion.

## Post Reform Board reviews of social work education and practice

The first published review of social work education after the establishment of The College of Social Work was commissioned by Michael Gove and undertaken by Martin Narey (2014). Perhaps not surprisingly, given this Minister's hostility to public services, Narey's report was highly critical of social work education's focus on *non-discriminatory practice* at the expense of the practicalities of the social work task. He alleged, without research evidence to back this up and mainly on the basis of unattributed sources, that:

*Anti oppressive practice in academic social work is closely linked to concepts of empowerment and working in partnership. While a number of social work academics reject them, these are not extreme notions at the fringes of academic social work. One newly qualified social worker from a well-regarded University told me that the concentration in her course on non-oppressive practice was at the expense of understanding practicalities about the job.*

(Narey, 2014, p11)

This book rejects Narey's analysis of contemporary social work and is written within a tradition which recognises that those people using social work services have faced significant discrimination and oppression and that our task is to challenge such marginalisation and promote positive outcomes for the people with whom we work



(Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Dominelli, 2010; Jones and Novak, 2014). This is not the same as seeing people as victims, as Narey suggests, rather it is about seeing people with capacity and agency to bring about change. The analysis in the report was underdeveloped and contained a largely inaccurate account of social work's commitment to social justice. However, given that it was commissioned by a Coalition minister who has also spoken of privatising child protection services (see later in this chapter) it serves as a useful reminder as to why we as a profession need, in conjunction with those using social work services, to organise and develop theoretically consistent and rigorous analyses of where we are going. It is intended that this book will contribute to that debate.

The only caveat in Narey's analysis is when he suggests that:

*Nobody – certainly not me – believes that when someone graduates with a social work degree they should be the finished product, battle ready for a job of extraordinary challenge. But there are too many employers and too many new social workers and students who think that standards are not always what they should be.*

(2014, p 25)

Given the significant reforms that social work education has undergone recently, and the lack of evidence in Narey's report to support such a statement, this is an extraordinary conclusion.

A more nuanced and balanced account is provided by the work of Croisedale-Appleby. The Care and Support Minister within the Coalition government, Norman Lamb, asked the independent Chair of Skills for Care to undertake a review of social work education, including looking at issues regarding the question of genericism versus specialism within qualifying programmes. Lamb said:

*I want to be reassured that social work education produces high quality practitioners and that the government's £100m investment is producing the high quality social workers that our society deserves and needs.*

(Croisedale-Appleby, 2014, p15)

Croisedale-Appleby concluded that the generic option provided the best starting point for qualifying social workers and that specialisation became more significant after qualification when practitioners were developing their expertise. Significantly, given the focus of this book, he commented on the importance of inclusion and internationalism in our current and future approaches to social work. He commented positively on the involvement of service users and carers in social work education, which he suggested

*compares very favourably with that of the clinical professions, and should be given much greater recognition. It is worthy of note that the HCPC has accorded due recognition to this good practice and has enhanced its regulatory requirements to this effect.*

(p42)

He is similarly positive about the importance of learning from other countries and argues that:

*As social work is an international profession, any moves made to develop or change social work education educational practices should be required to identify and take account of the differences of such moves in relation to the direction of educational practice internationally, and in particular to that being followed in the devolved nations of the UK.*

(p82)

One of the significant elements of his analysis is, however, the way he correctly identifies the intellectual component of good social work, referring to the need to have both *theory informing practice* and *practice informing theory*. He suggests that social work education needs to 'be expressed in a new way' in which we see social workers through a three-part prism:

- **The social worker as practitioner** – who can show resilience under pressure, good communication and risk assessment skills.
- **The social worker as a professional** – who can apply appropriate ethical principles, engage in reflective practice, work with a wide variety of disadvantaged groups, provide a safeguard and, in line with the third core principle articulated within this book, 'learn to work effectively with and contribute other professions and disciplines' (p15).
- **The social worker a social scientist** – this is a welcome corrective to other commentators such as Narey who have sought to play down the intellectual traditions of social workers with a form of ant-intellectualism (Cowden and Singh, 2009). Croisedale-Appleby places a particular importance on evidence collection and research (p15).

A further challenge to the academic provision of social work education is provided by the range of fast-track programmes for 'high achieving undergraduates' wishing to enter social work such as Frontline, Step up to Social Work (both to train graduates to work in children's services) and Think Ahead (mental health practitioners). There is some concern within the social work community that such programmes devalue experiential learning and the recruitment of mature students, and that they appear to be based on a misunderstanding of the importance of intellectual learning as part of social work education. In this sense they appear to be more in tune with Narey's rather than Croisedale-Appleby's analysis with the implications mentioned above.

The work of the new Chief Social Workers suggests a further set of challenges. The Department for Education (2014) issued a document outlining the *Knowledge and Skills for Child and Family Social Work*, which was launched by Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler in late July 2014. If they wish to be awarded approved child and family practitioner status the child and family social worker will, it is suggested, be able to: