

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Rose Parks, De Montfort University

YOUTH WORKERS, STUCKNESS, AND THE MYTH OF SUPERCOMPETENCE: NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO

*Anderson-Nathe, B. (2010). Abingdon: Routledge. pp.146 (pbk) £22.99
ISBN 978 0 415 99773 7*

This is one of the most relevant and gripping titles in youth work publication in recent years. The book is focussed on the American youth work profession; however, parallels are drawn with the nature of the profession in other countries, for example, the United Kingdom.

On opening the book for the first time, it could appear to be a complicated and difficult read as a result of the page layout and formatting, but this impression cannot be further from the truth! This book is gripping from the start. It is written honestly and is full of examples of incidents that youth workers are reluctant to share because it makes them feel incompetent and not 'good enough' to do their jobs. The starting point is the moment of 'not-knowing' what to do and, therefore, getting stuck in a new or even routine interaction with a young person. The 'myth of supercompetence' - that all your colleagues are better at the job than you are and better equipped to deal with unexpected circumstances - is the second key theme of this innovative, thought-provoking and reflective phenomenological analysis.

Anderson-Nathe starts his account by looking at the related theory that might be able to account for the phenomena he is trying to describe. This is a thorough examination that reveals the relevance of these theories, but also the shortcomings in explaining the full extent of the phenomena that he is trying to put on the agenda. Chapter Three goes on to explore the methodological underpinning of the phenomenological nature of the research. The issues of 'not-knowing' and supercompetence must be explored from an interpretive research perspective as the value of the subjective account is in the experience and meaning that workers attach to these moments. A bonus of this chapter is that the author includes detailed, practical advice and guidance on how to conduct phenomenological research. This allows the book to develop from a reflective account that validates and exposes youth workers' meaningful experiences to a text that can be used to develop future interpretive qualitative research. However, something that seems to be missing

from this chapter is the rationale as to why the author embarked on this type of research in the first place.

The rest of the book is divided into five themes. The first three themes relate to the lived reality of the 'not-knowing' moment experienced by youth workers. The remaining two themes relate to the reflection that youth workers undertake during the moment of 'not-knowing', but also afterwards.

Chapter Four provides the biographical details of the 12 participating narrators. It also provides a brief introduction to the main examples of 'not-knowing' that were shared in the interviews. This introduction of the narrators of the meaning-making experiences is extremely powerful in that it allows the reader 'access' to the study participants and also provides an insight into their reflections that led to the identification of the following five themes.

The 'paralyses of stuckness' is the first identified theme. Anderson-Nathe found that youth workers describe the moment of 'not-knowing' as a physically-restraining experience due to the uncertainty that they feel. This section starts with a vignette where a worker experienced this physical paralysis in a practice environment. It then identifies that 'reflection in practice' based on knowledge of interventions and previous experience is sometimes not enough to deal with a situation.

The second theme centres on the issue of power and the feelings that are experienced. It focuses on the hopelessness created when professionals try everything that they know and use all available resources, but it is still not enough to improve a situation or even makes it worse. This 'not-knowing' leads to feelings of being 'helpless, hopeless and out of control' (p.72). In situations like these, the carefully-constructed boundaries that separate the personal from the professional can be eroded in the overwhelming moment of 'not-knowing'.

The next theme reaches the crux of the impact that 'not-knowing' generates in youth workers. This theme differs from the others in that the example provided occurs in surroundings full of other professionals that the worker thinks of as more experienced! The worker feels under the spotlight and an inability to respond. At its core, this theme is about youth workers feeling fraudulent, as if everyone else would have known how to deal with a certain situation except for them. Feelings of vulnerability feature, due to the exposed and public nature in which a so-called lack of competence through 'not-knowing' was exposed. This leads to what Anderson-Nathe calls the 'myth of supercompetence'; the belief that workers (in all caring professions) should not only be competent at their jobs but supercompetent. This is what I hope practitioners, supervisors and educators will internalise. The understanding, but also acknowledgement, that this is a myth and is based on the caring professions not sharing enough examples of 'not-knowing' in order to generate feelings of confidence and proficiency in practitioners.

The book ends with a discussion of the implications of 'not-knowing' but also highlights the four insights that were gained through this study. This leaves the reader reassured

and bolstered with the knowledge that everyone experiences moments of 'stuckness' that will end, and debunks the myth of supercompetence.

Anderson-Nathe has produced an engaging and liberating text that adds to what is known about the experiences of youth workers and one, to my knowledge, that has never been discussed in this format before. This book is a welcome and fresh contribution to the field of youth work and one that I would recommend to anyone with an interest in the practice as well as management of youth work. This is a book that should be engaged with by practitioners, their supervisors, line managers and also their educators and trainers.

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MULTI-AGENCY WORKING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: CONTROL AND CARE IN CONTEMPORARY CORRECTIONAL PRACTICE

*Pycroft, A. and Gough, D. (eds.) (2010). Bristol: Polity Press. pp.261 (pbk)
£21.99 ISBN 978 1 84742 453 2*

This edited collection of sixteen essays is written by a group of academics, some of whom are practitioners as well specifically involved in delivering the professional qualification course to probation officers over the last decade.

The level of in-depth analytical discussion that the collection provides demonstrates a thorough understand of the topics, content and debates that preoccupy contemporary criminal justice in Britain. The contributors take us on an entire syllabus of the development and structure of multi-agency work. The first four chapters identify major issues, of the approach of policy-makers as simplistic notions of cause and effect. One chapter identifies major issues of how the values and ethics behind multi-agency working have shifted from cooperation and mutuality to competition and mixed market. Another that these provisions result in the service users receiving a fragmented experience. Each of the constituents' subjects of client work is addressed in a chapter: women, black and minority ethnic groups, persistent and dangerous offenders, children, victims of domestic violence, resettlement of offenders and offenders with mental health issues, substance misuse populations and youths. The final two chapters focus a little on the professionals themselves who make up these multi-agencies and explores the issues of reflective practice and the challenges towards probation work 'in an attempt to tame the beast of multi-agency working' (p.241).

The layout and format of the book is a credit to the editors, although quite voluminous in its content, each chapter systematically starts with bullet points of its aims. Some, but not all, provide an essay question and a summary of key points and/or points for further consideration, while all suggest further readings. These are all good tools for fellow lecturers and students who might use the book.

There are a small number of issues that the work raises but does not address fully. One of these relates to the theoretical debate. Although in Chapter One Pycroft ably presents 'complex theory' as an offering for the macro framework, it might also have been useful to comment on a broader spectrum of theories. For example, criminological theories like 'law and order' for an explanation of policy, 'desistance theory' in terms of objectives for the sector and resettlement as more than just a practice. Parkinson's hints to the latter in his contribution on 'Unlocking prisoners: does multi-agency work hold the key to successful resettlement of released prisoners?'. However, it needs to be addressed as a problematic that impacts on all the broad constituents of the subjects so very well covered in the collection.

The issues of the crucial nature of communications to partnership working, the multi-layers of professional practice and the empirical discursive of responsibility and

accountability are well-articulated in the chapters. However, this is from the perspective of probation workers who, while they comprise the larger share in multi-agency working, are slowly and if not inevitably being drowned out as the mainstream professionalism. The competing professionalism of either the police or local authority or the private contractor as determining profession ethos and culture are not examined. This might not be a debate that can be made here but it is certainly one that this work speaks to if not fully developed.

The very nature of the content and almost faultless arranging of the chapters is neatly interwoven. The standard of debates raised in such congruity throughout the collections makes the book a welcomed contribution to academia, policy and practice, and, indeed, theorising around criminal justice service delivery in particular and the multi-agency strategy in its specificity.

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A TREATMENT MANUAL FOR ADOLESCENTS DISPLAYING HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR: CHANGE FOR GOOD

McCrorry, E. (2011). London: Jessica Kingsley. pp. 160 + CD Rom (pbk)
£49.99 ISBN 978 1 84905 146 0

This Treatment Manual, commissioned by the NSPCC, sets out to provide an intervention programme for male adolescents, who are exhibiting harmful sexual behaviour. The programme is designed to be delivered to an individual young person rather than with a group of young people. The actual programme session plans, and worksheets for client use are contained on the accompanying CD-ROM which allows for easy duplication and use. In addition, the CD-ROM contains a 'Character Library' of fictionalised characters ranging from toddler to adult with a range of facial expressions. These characters are designed for use in a variety of ways but, principally, to explore thoughts and feelings of the characters within real or fictionalised vignettes. The Library also contains drawings of ten 'background scenes' such as a living room, bedroom, bathroom, park and playground described as 'common settings for normative adolescent behaviours and they have also been chosen as the most frequent places where adolescents displaying HSB target their victim' (p. 20). The author states that the use of these materials offers an opportunity to improve engagement with the young person who is participating in treatment.

The treatment programme comprises 30 one-hour sessions divided into four modules, namely, Engagement (4 sessions); Relationships (9 sessions); Self-Regulation (8 sessions) and Road Map for the Future (5 sessions). The author has allowed 4 additional sessions to provide time for work not completed in the 26 formalised sessions and to provide scope for addressing individual issues brought by the young person in treatment. This provides some flexibility for therapists in seeking to tailor the programme to the needs of the individual rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. It also addresses what seems a highly probable outcome - that the material to be covered in the sessions is too great for the time allotted. However, many therapists would rather be faced with the problem of having a choice of material to use rather than being directed to cover every exercise whether relevant or not.

The theoretical models which have informed the treatment approach of the programme include cognitive-behavioural therapy, attachment theory, psychodynamic psychotherapy, mentalisation and systems theory. This sounds like a crowded agenda however the predominant model is CBT, delivered on a collaborative basis with much encouragement to identifying and building on strengths which can be used to achieve goals within a pro-social framework. The aims of the treatment intervention are broad and, perhaps, over-elaborate. They are cited as:

the treatment should aim to increase the likelihood that a young person will show sexual and non-sexual behaviours that are socially acceptable and refrain from harmful sexual behaviour; and secondly the treatment should aim to enhance psycho-social functioning, increasing the young person's

sense of optimism about the future and their current sense of well-being.
(p.47).

Not surprisingly the author suggests these aims can be reframed in language more accessible to the young person as 'to not sexually harm others and to have healthy sexual relationships as an adult; and secondly to handle problems well and feel good about myself'.

To reflect the breadth of these aims the programme is attempting to offer an intervention which 'places greater emphasis on treating underlying causes rather than simply the undesired (sexually abusive) behaviours (p. 24). The sub-title of the Manual is 'Change for Good' and the author describes the 'Change for Good' approach as one which 'aims to develop both the adolescent's positive goals for the future by enhancing their interpersonal relationship skills alongside their ability to regulate and understand their emotional experience' (p. 24). This approach reflects current good practice by seeking to replace avoidant goals by more sustainable approach goals. As a result, the programme sessions address many areas of possible difficulty for young people, whether they display harmful sexual behaviour or not. Sessions, for example, on managing conflict in relationships, developing perspective taking skills, anger management and recognising how harmful emotional states can affect decision-making are excellently designed and it is easy to imagine that they could be adapted to begin addressing these issues with a number of young people on the Youth Worker's or Therapist's casebook.

In fact, it is when viewing the session plans on the CD-ROM that the therapist will be delighted at the clarity of the format. The session plans contain the structure and aims of each session, guidance notes for the therapist, suggested areas to explore and the style in which this should be done. The worksheets provide realistic scenarios with which to engage the young person together with well-presented 'Home Project' sheets to enable the young person the opportunity to apply new learning to their own experience and situation in between formal sessions.

Unfortunately, there is no evaluation of effectiveness for this particular programme. Given the flexibility of design, and suggested implementation, such an evaluation could be difficult to structure. The Manual references some encouraging studies with positive outcomes for programmes having similar components to 'Change for Good' which gives some cause for hope. In summary, this is an excellent package. Well-informed, well-structured and designed. It provides therapists with a toolkit to address difficult and challenging behaviour and is a valuable addition to the field.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY IN PRISONS AND OTHER SECURE SETTINGS

Harvey, J. and Smedley, K. (eds.) (2010). Abingdon: Willan Publishing Ltd. pp.304 (hbk) £25 ISBN 978 1 84392 799 0

Psychological services within prisons, and to a certain extent other secure settings, have traditionally been dominated by forensic practitioners who specialise in the assessment of risk and the delivery of accredited offending behaviour treatment programmes. A consequence of this is that the relevant prison-centric psychological literature focuses heavily upon these two areas of research. Unfortunately, there has been a paucity of relevant, robust and professional literature that focuses solely on the mental health needs of prisoners and the therapeutic practitioners who are increasingly recognised as playing an important role within the carceral world.

The editors of, and contributors to, this volume have done a remarkable job in putting together such an accessible volume that explores many of the issues surrounding the mental health problems of people held in secure settings and the scale and range of problems inherent to addressing their needs. Though in places the book is necessarily technical, it succeeds where some other psychologically themed tomes fail in that it does not alienate the lay reader. As such, the book is suitable for anyone, professional or otherwise, who has an interest in prisons and mental health services.

Though not explicit the book is divided into two broad sections. The first section, which encompasses chapters 2-6, contextualises the book by detailing the historical scarcity of mental health focused services in prisons, the changing nature of mental health services in prison, the policy changes that have occurred in order to attempt to address these issues and the various forms of therapeutic practice (such as Cognitive Analytic Therapy and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) that are common to prison work. The second section (chapters 7-10) broadens the scope of the book and focuses upon the specific issues of therapy provision within prisons and other secure settings. This discussion involves an exploration of the sometimes delicate or fraught issues involved with working with traumatised prisoners, women prisoners / detainees and black and minority ethnic prisoners as well as the role and work of therapeutic communities. Finally, chapter 11 explores therapy in the context of the more traditional realm of offending behaviour courses.

Though extremely coherent and well-constructed there is a sense that the book is somewhat limited in its scope. This is, I suspect, partly due to it being something of an introductory volume and thus the editors had the thorny issue of deciding which of the fundamental issues to include for inspection and which to exclude. However, despite this sense of focal limitation, there are a number of interrelated thematic concerns that run throughout the book and which are supported by all the contributing authors. These are fundamentally the acknowledgement of: how the specialised environment of the prison / secure unit can affect the delivery of services and the need for practitioners / therapists to be aware of these issues and barriers and tailor their approaches accordingly; the need for

therapists to be aware of, not only the power imbalance that is inherent in the therapeutic relationship, but also that which the prisoner is confronted by in the wider context of the prison and how this can affect the therapist / prisoner / prison trust nexus.

All of the chapters in this volume are of an exceptionally high standard being thoroughly researched and argued. There are however, a number of stand out chapters which any reader will find invaluable. One such is that by Mills and Kendall which gives a succinct but yet thorough overview of the policy changes that have affected mental healthcare in prisons in England and Wales, the advent of Mental Health In-Reach Teams and the limitations, barriers and benefits that MHIRT's are confronted with or represent. The evolution of these teams and the matrices of authoritative relationships in which they operate is obviously a complex and convoluted tale, yet they manage to unravel this Gordian knot in a clear, precise and easily digestible manner.

Another is by Rogers and Law which focuses on the varying forms of trauma found in forensic populations as well as the particular problems raised by working with traumatised prisoners, especially young prisoners, whilst they remain in custody. They also note and discuss the need for a 'systemic' and collaborative approach to this form of therapy highlighting, through the use of a case example, the importance of working with both the individual in question and the prison itself. What is of special note in this chapter is their discussion on the ethical implications of conducting this form of therapy in prisons and other secure / closed settings.

A further example is that of Lowe and Pearson who discuss the provision of therapy for BME prisoners and the importance in understanding, and safeguarding against, stereotyped thinking. They note that, perhaps, one of the main challenges in working with BME prisoners is undergoing the necessary process of self / professional development in order to understand, or acknowledge, the racialised assumptions and practices that can exist within forensic settings. Though challenging, they argue that this process, and the awareness that arises from it, is essential in order to facilitate the relationships of trust which the therapeutic process needs. Another important issue that they raise is a wider lack of understanding of how exposure to long-term racial abuse can affect mental health and subsequent therapy.

There is one aspect that is missing from this volume which would have been welcome and that is the voice of the prisoners / patients themselves. Any future book would have to include a chapter in which those who are subject to these interventions and therapies are able to detail the manner in which they experience the changes in policy, the MHIRT's and the other issues discussed above. However, despite this absence, this is a thoroughly well-researched, written and edited book that is fascinating, stimulating and informative. A good addition to the shelf of any person interested in either prisons or mental health practice.

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WORKING WITH OFFENDERS: A GUIDE TO CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

White, R. and Graham, H. (2010). Abingdon: Willan Publishing. pp.366 (pbk) £24.99 ISBN 978-1-84392-793-8

This book is a welcome addition to the literature which seeks to assist in developing an understanding of offending behaviour and how practitioners might work within the myriad of available approaches in order to address such behaviour in practice. At first glance, it is difficult to imagine how a single text could cover the amount of ground promised by the cover comments, and indeed the book has some limitations. However, on closer inspection, the book brings together a range of theoretical and practical discussions, and illustrates some of these with practice-based examples, in a way which has not been undertaken before, the result of which is relatively successful, and certainly makes for interesting and thought-provoking reading.

As has been stated, this book attempts to cover an enormous amount of ground and, at the outset, hints at what a tall order this is, acknowledging that it 'cherry picks' practice-based examples which are used to illustrate the issues discussed throughout. The nature of the 'tall order' becomes apparent immediately, given that the book aspires to bring together three key elements: 1) knowledge from the range of different agencies and specialisms working with offenders as well as the settings in which they work; 2) accessibility to practitioners; and 3) knowledge from a range of different jurisdictions throughout the world. In order to accomplish these goals, the book is divided into ten chapters which, given the length of the text, inevitably focus to varying degrees, on one of the elements.

The first chapter, entitled 'Setting the scene' contextualises what follows by providing some useful comparative material regarding the rising rates of imprisonment throughout the world and gives a flavour of some of the roles and settings in which work with offenders takes place. This chapter also focusses somewhat on the social context of offending and the social disadvantages that underpin offending behaviour (key amongst these being low socio-economic status). The chapter, therefore, makes clear that working with offenders provides society with a significant challenge and the following chapters make explicit some of these challenges. What the chapter does not do is to provide a rationale for the following chapters, the choice of discussion topic for each chapter, and why they are addressed in the order that they are – thus it is up to the reader to work out whether there is an intrinsic logic to the way in which the book develops as it does.

In summary, the following chapters proceed as follows: chapter two provides an introduction to offender rehabilitation by way of discussing four current models of rehabilitation, ending with restorative approaches, and argues that this demonstrates a shift towards what is termed 'therapeutic justice'. It could be claimed that such a shift may be more perceptible in certain jurisdictions, but this point is not addressed. Chapter three discusses the dynamics of working within prison and community settings and its first-hand accounts of such work are enlightening and would no doubt be very useful to

individuals thinking of entering prison work. Chapter four outlines what are broadly termed 'case-management skills' within the integrated Offender Management Model and covers topics as diverse as the nature of advocacy and the importance of good record-keeping. Chapter five discusses tools and interventions, as well as some discussion of the evidence-base for such interventions, but the distinction between broad approaches and interventions / tools is somewhat unclear. Chapter six looks at the worker-offender relationship and, in doing so, focusses on the notion of respect. Chapter seven looks at the possible range of complex needs that those working with offenders may encounter, from panic attacks to severe mental health issues. Chapter eight discusses 'Difficult work; managing risk, violence and crisis' and moves from working with violent offenders, through offender crises, to professional stress and burnout. Chapter nine deals with working with other agencies to provide services to offenders and the inherent difficulties of such work. Chapter ten discusses the process of reintegration and the centrality of the worker to such a process.

Each of the chapters in the book is informative and discursive and the examples presented are all useful. The discussion questions from a useful aid for learning and there is helpful signposting of further reading. However, a key difficulty with the book is that each of the chapters could have formed the basis of a book itself. This difficulty seems to be as a result of the sheer ambition of the book, which was always going to be difficult to meet. This means that each chapter, whilst very full, necessarily deals with some issues in less depth than perhaps one would like. Having said that, the authors explicitly set out to provide a 'useful and useable introduction to this type of work' (White and Graham, 2010: 1) and they have certainly succeeded in giving a flavour of how dynamic the world of working with offenders is, and how very challenging it can be. On one hand, it is tempting to state that this book attempts an impossible task at which it could only ever partially succeed. On the other hand, it delves unashamedly into an enormous and complex area and comes up providing an eminently readable and accessible discussion of work with offenders. There is relatively little jargon and, in some ways, it could be described as 'a whistle-stop tour' of working with offenders in a wide variety of settings and jurisdictions. As somebody with a background in practice, who now teaches those training to be probation officers, I found this book to be eminently informative, accessible and believe it will add to any practitioner's knowledge base.

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