



# Book Reviews

## ***Responding to children: child welfare practice***

by Chris Goddard and Robert Carew

Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1993

**I**t is somewhat unusual to begin a book review with a discussion of the last twenty pages, but this chapter, 'Toward change' is the story behind the story. It provides an interesting contemporary example of social action, a strategy emerging from direct practice experiences with children and families and disquiet about inadequate service provision. This chapter is significant because it highlights the major themes of the book: the inter-relationship between personal and political, the complexity of practice itself, and the importance of critical practice. The case study, the story behind the action in this chapter is recommended reading for all social workers and students who still believe that social change is, or should be, the business of social work.

*Responding to Children* is a book combining social work theory with child and family welfare practice. It provides a general introduction to the field of child welfare, taking account of the theoretical foundations of social work and simultaneously addressing the complexities and ambiguities found in the field. With these particular objectives, the authors provide a history of child welfare in Australia, with illustrations dealing with the removal of Aboriginal children and exploring the impact of poverty on the welfare of children. The book provides a detailed discussion of child welfare practice, including foundation knowledge and values, the helping process and communication with children. A wide range of practice issues are also discussed, including foster care and adoption, children in hospital, children and divorce, children and disabilities, institutional care and protection, a detailed examination of child protection and a case study of social change.

Goddard and Carew set themselves an ambitious task. They wanted to

write a text for social work students focusing on children under the age of ten years, and simultaneously provide an introduction to the complexities and contradictions in this field of practice. The rationale for dealing with under-tens is not entirely clear, except that children in this age group have particular needs and incomplete capacities, thus making special demands on child welfare practice.

Whilst the book covers a wide range of child welfare issues, this focus on the under-ten population excludes juvenile justice, offending behaviour, adolescent parenting and guardianship children. Perhaps sequels to this book will be responding to adolescents and parents. Also some other aspects of child welfare are not covered in detail. For example, although the authors draw attention to broad social and economic problems associated with a multi-cultural society, little space is given to the knowledge and skills required to work effectively with diverse cultural groups or with particular issues that arise in actual practice, such as the fostering of Aboriginal children with Aboriginal families or inter-racial adoption.

The strength of this book lies in the integration of knowledge, skills and values underpinning social work practice. *Responding to children* draws attention to the practical and theoretical nature of social work knowledge with special attention given to child development theory, practice values, ethical principles, children's rights, social work methods and foundation skills. Whilst the authors capture integration of theory and practice, their discussion about the helping process and social work methods is dated. The richness, diversity and practical work practice is not fully explained or explored. For example, the skills and procedures in practice are described as recording assessment, case conferences, court appearances and supervision. Where is their

discussion of intake and investigation, complex case management processes and monitoring of children and care-givers? Discussion on communication with children covers non-verbal communication, representational systems, the purpose of interviewing, but ignores the common sense practical activities necessary to work effectively with children.

This book describes child welfare, providing a connection between classroom theory and the practice world. It is a useful book for students wanting to pull together university subjects and make sense of social work theory and its links to the field of practice. Students commencing placements in child and family welfare settings may find this text a helpful bridge between the world of theory and the practice arena. More advanced students or practitioners looking for further understanding of child welfare practice, practice examples or a 'how to do' may be disappointed.

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