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British Journal of Social Work: Book Review

DETAILS OF THE PUBLICATION

Writing Analytical Assessments in Social Work,

Chris Dyke (2nd ed), *St Albans, Critical Publishing, 2019, pp. XII +175, ISBN 978 1 912508 32 7 (pbk), £21.99*

TEXT OF THE REVIEW

'Language is embedded within power relations which are often implicit in its usage' (Dominelli, 2002b), and the most dangerous part of oppression through language is when you don't know you're doing it (Dyke, 2019, p.71).

Starting from an important and valid question on the purpose and rationale for social work assessment, Chris Dyke focuses our attention on the audience of our written work. With the service user taking a centre stage throughout his book, he alerts us to power structures involved in the assessment process, taking account of an imposing nature of frameworks influencing and often shaping our practices. Ethics and values are skilfully weaved into each and every element of assessment writing discussed by the author, naturally forming an integral part of social work practice.

The book features a helpful collection of tools for assessment, taking account of various social work settings, with straightforward and easily digestible guides supported by practice examples. The book's structure might not be to everyone's taste as chapters are divided into much smaller chunks, including distinct, brief sections with subheadings, which might be seen as overly practical or 'bitty'. One might also criticise the 'briefness' of said subsections, or the wide mixture and variety of sources and literature used by Dyke, with somewhat unconventional references. All that, however, makes a perfect sense if we focus on the purpose of the book. The author aims at providing a versatile and accessible assessment writing skills manual, which in turn warrants variety and creativity, making its content interesting, engaging and more appealing to a wider group of readers.

Perhaps most appreciation ought to be given to the greatly relevant content of chapters 4 and 5, in which the author talks about the powerful use of language and transforming abilities of analysis. He somehow manages to spice the content up with references to an eclectic variety of sources, including Stephen King (2000), not obviously linked to social work practice, yet so helpful in articulating what in our writing matters most and why.

It is not widely accepted to use references to a philosophical debate and definition of 'bullshit' (Frankfurt (2005) cited in Dyke 2019, p. 65) in an academic text, still it does tackle the ever so common use of jargon rather accurately. It achieves another important aim – as it is hard to forget the association used by Dyke, we are more likely to confront our own choice of words in writing, steering away from jargon. Moreover, the simplicity of 'the riddle of three ants' (Dyke, 2019, p.78) opens up a discussion over the complexity and uncertainty of truth and/or false realities we come across (and at times create ourselves) in working with people. Here again, we are being patiently taken through the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of analysis that are supported by a choice of helpful tools. Importantly also, we are being given the 'why's', assisting

our ability to reflect, understand and apply this knowledge to practice. The power of bias and prejudice, stressed a number of times throughout the text, serves as an important reminder 'of our fallible humanity' (Hedley (2007) cited in Dyke 2019, p.101) applied here to shift the focus from service users, to social workers who happen to be humans after all. All this is relevant for supporting us in making sound, realistic and creative recommendations, staying mindful of the contexts we work in, while adhering to social work value base and ethics.

Shall we then consciously begin turning 'language as a tool of oppression' (Dyke, 2019, p. 70) into the most valuable tool for our profession, acknowledging its power and ability to truly affect change? My starting point will be an introduction of this publication to reading lists for social work students learning about assessment and intervention; it will certainly make a creative and ever so engaging addition to the programme.

REFERENCES:

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Aga M. Buckley

Senior Lecturer in Social Work

Kingston University