BOOK REVIEW

Everyday Community Practice: Principles and Practice

Increasingly, there is an argument for the context-specificity of our everyday activities as being essential for strong and sustainable practice with communities. Texts about community practice are plentiful and tend to be prescriptive of a specific framework being unpacked. These cookie-cutter frameworks are easy enough to envision a project's beginning, middle, and end. However, the ins and outs of the steps or decisions required for adaption in context are often unclear and more difficult for our everyday practice. At last, authors Howard and Rawsthorne have delivered a text that successfully takes its readers through the nitty-gritty, everyday negotiations of being a community practitioner – regardless of framework choice. This book highlights the contexts in which the ideas, skills, approaches, questions and actions of carrying out everyday practice are located. The reader is prompted to work toward applying an anti-oppressive lens through which, the authors argue, work with communities should be critically examined, and it is hard to disagree. This particular approach to community practice is promoted by the authors as a means to mitigate challenges and restore damages resulting from an increasingly neoliberal environment; an environment serving to further marginalise the necessity of working with communities in human-centred professions such as social work. Despite the authors positioning of the book within an Australian context, insights into the 'how' of working with communities can be negotiated, as well as the underlying messages about the need for anti-oppressive practice in human-centred professions, transcend national boundaries achieving applicability to practitioners working for, and alongside, communities from Oceania to Africa.

The authors have mastered the craft of writing for the everyday community worker – making the text useful for practitioners, academics, students, community champions and leaders alike. Their tone is inviting, somewhat personal, and incites curiosity. The clever chapter and section titles (favourites being '*Listening, loitering and learning*', '*Taking care of ourselves*' and '*The duck's feet: Planning and other matters*') are illustrative of elements experienced in practice rather than heavily conceptualised terminologies. This gives a reader the sense of being there – envisioning moments they might have experienced in their own practice – or alternatively, how it might feel to *have* the experience that is being described.

This work recontextualises historically prominent theoretical concepts in community development and development education into contemporary everyday practice. Whilst the authors argue that they deliberately did not attempt to structure this as a theoretical book, the stories and examples of practice shared throughout make complex theoretical concepts tangible. These concepts are rooted in work from those who have, at different times, been responsible for shifting how we think about working for, and within, communities such Freire et al. (2004), Foucault (1980), Bourdieu (1980), and Ledwith (2016).

Reflexivity is a difficult skill to teach to those practising with communities. However, interacting with the practitioner and student reflections presented across the chapters, sparked several creative ideas to foster understanding around what constitutes reflexive practice. Wearing a lecturer hat, it is easy to imagine having students analyse the reflections in, for example, Chapter two, around the individualised nature of community development and the tendency for community development to be at the margins of social work practice. Such an activity could support students in, figuratively, stepping into the realities of practice and envision what they might encounter in their future work. Examples of practice provided in the text would be invaluable to students where opportunities to engage with communities during study are limited due to the structure of degree programmes or within constrained resources. As a teaching resource, the guiding questions for each chapter serve to focus the reader on its key messages while providing a useful structure to incorporate content into lectures, making this book an ideal teaching tool.

Early on, the authors remind the reader that, whilst challenging in the current political climate, people working with communities must actively 'see' the community in all that they do: one of the core messages carried throughout the book. In doing so, the community is held at the centre of their practice in spite of funding demands and agendas of political or institutional partners – a topical issue given the current competitive funding environment. Throughout the text, the authors sell the imperative to acknowledge that, as people working with communities, we are often non-knowers while also cautioning to avoid relying on the notion that we can make it up as we go. As a tricky space to navigate, the authors emphasise the need to embrace that, at times, one will move between not knowing and put on the professional hat to own a specific expertise. We are reminded that community practitioners all start somewhere, but the element of balance is pervasive as an amateur or an expert. Whether it is the courage to push the envelope against maintaining patience for the process, learner against expert, or silence against probing – the art of balancing is a constant that the practitioner must carry throughout the duration of their work. Threaded within the pages is the metaphor of community rhythm where the idea of balance resurfaces as the authors discuss different ways in which community practitioners must learn when to lead, and when to follow.

For those currently facing challenges in the field, skip straight to Chapter nine. The authors speak of the 'art of ending and renewal' which is a pivotal process to engage in all community projects, but rarely espoused in the literature. As a major contribution of this work, this chapter provides community practitioners a promising foundation on which to begin sharing experiences of, and activities that define, processes of ending and renewal across diverse projects. Practitioners will be encouraged to reflect on the different ways

they pause, breathe, and take stock of all that has been accomplished, or where they can make adjustments.

Readers will be thoroughly excited to read a text that so purely and passionately elucidates the complexities of everyday practice with communities through straightforward examples and reflections that make navigating the practice space manageable. It is a good gateway book for the novice community worker to shift from toe-dipping to eventually jumping into a deeper exploration of anti-oppressive practice. For the more experienced practitioner, the contents will either be reaffirming of the importance to engage relationally with communities thereby generating deep bonds of connectivity – or will challenge the practitioner to evaluate if the work they currently do is really achieving all that it can. This is an important text in a critical period of history where political leanings privilege outcomes for individuals over communities.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1980). *The logic of practice*. Standford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings.* New York, NY: Pantheon.

Freire, P., & Freire, A. M. A. (2004). *EPZ pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, UK: Continuum.

Ledwith, M. (2016). *Community development in action: Putting Freire into practice*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Dr Laura A. Chubb

Lecturer, University of Auckland, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Auckland, New Zealand.