



Researching Social Work: Reflections on a Contested Profession

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Key questions

- What is social work's role?
- And leading on from this, how might we, as social work practitioners and educators, do it better, for the benefit of those who use our services?



3 strands of research activity

- Social work history
- Education & learning
- Social work practice



National Vigilance Association

- Legal campaigning
- International work
- Local activities



International Federation of Social Work definition

- 'Social work is a profession which promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.'



The job of social work...

- ... does not fall into a sequence of acts that can be categorised, enumerated or unpacked for those outside to see and appreciate. Instead work is the learned skill of juggling competing demands and responding to unwelcome emergencies...Social work is ... essentially the varied practices of workers who largely regulate their own daily efforts' (Pithouse 1987: 47)



Michael Foucault (1984)

- 'not everything is bad, but everything is dangerous'.



Education and learning

- How do students learn?
- What are the barriers to learning?
- What things do we need to put in place to overcome these barriers so that learning can occur?



Paulo Freire (1968)

- 'Conscientization' - the focus becomes critically examining the political and social contradictions at the heart of people's lives, and then taking action to confront these.



Chris Jones (2002)

- '... whether the client is old or young, able-bodied or with a special need, an offender, a single parent, an abused child or partner, black or white, clients are most likely to be poor and most likely to be drawn from those sections of the population which enjoy the least status, security and power.'



Social work practice

- The Client Speaks (1970)
- Verdicts on Social Work (1982)
- Listening to Children: Children & young people affected by parental HIV (2002)
- Voices from the Inside (2007)

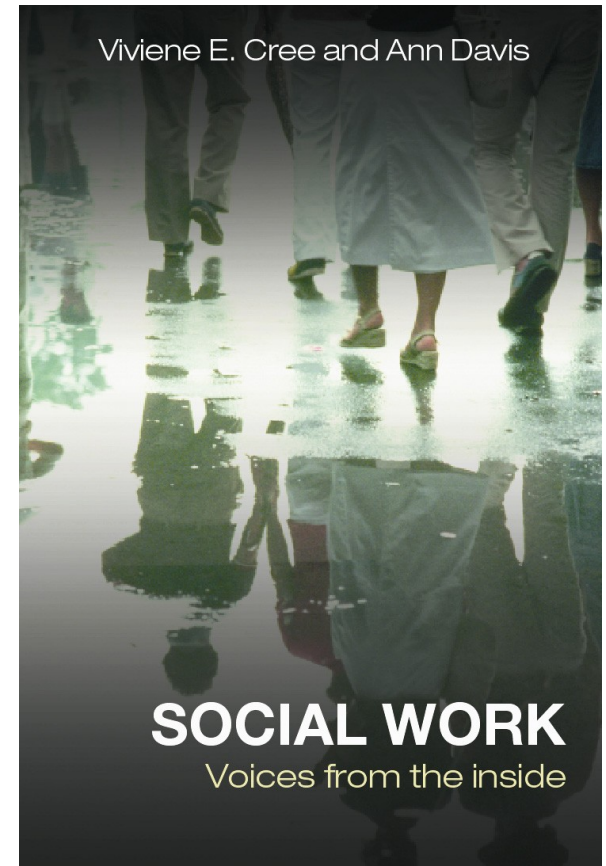


Listening to Children: children affected by parental HIV

- What is the impact of living with a parent with HIV on children and young people?
- What social supports do these children and young people draw upon?
- What perceptions do they have of services they use and what (if anything) had made a positive difference in their lives?

Social Work: Voices from the Inside

- 59 interviews
- Service users, carers and practitioners
- Across the UK
- Across different agency contexts and service user groups





Good social work is

- Responsive
- About building relationships
- Person centred
- About support which is both emotional and practical
- Holistic
- About balancing rights, risk and protection
- Knowledgeable and evidence-based
- There for the long term



Conclusions

- Stan Cohen (1988) - 'stay unfinished' !
- Social work is a process of negotiation and education – of ourselves and others.
- It's in the relationship that real social work lies.



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