

The Routledge handbook of critical social work

Stephen A. Webb (Ed.)

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In Stephen Webb's introduction to this edited book, he describes the coming together of the world's leading scholars of social work providing a "...cutting edge overview of classic and current research and future trends in critical social work." (Webb, 2019, p. xxx). His comments are not hyperbole. The text commences with an unusually personal foreword from Jan Fook. The reference book is then broken down into six parts commencing with a historical perspective and moving through the mapping, methods of engagement, various contexts such as justice, geography and politics, followed by a section on education and socialisation, with a finale focussing on future challenges. This eclectic group of professionals have each spoken to their area of expertise in a manner that is accessible, understandable and stimulating.

While I imagine that there will be few readers who would sit down on a beach and read this book cover to cover (though there will be some of us who would delight in this prospect), the discerning reader or the reader who is pushed for time, will be able to dip in and out of their chosen areas with a level of ease and delight.

As an immigrant to New Zealand, I was thrilled to observe that a number of eminent scholars had been asked to contribute. So often the texts that we receive in Aotearoa are written for other communities with a reference to New Zealand or a part on indigeneity quickly added in a tokenistic manner. Not so with this text. Erudite chapters from the writers such as

Liz Beddoe ("Contesting doxa in social work education"), Emily Keddell and Tony Stanley ("Critical debates in child protection: the production of risk in changing times") inform this text appropriately and from an Aotearoa New Zealand perspective. Although the Aotearoa indigenous voice is not apparent, there are other chapters that speak to indigeneity, such as Brent Angell ("Indigenous peoples and communities: a critical theory perspective") and Vasilios Ioakimidis with Nicos Trimikliniotis ("Imperialism, colonialism and a Marxist epistemology of critical peace"). This last chapter is one of my favourites, along with "The politics of Michel Foucault" (Paul Michael Garrett) and the editor's own chapter, "Resistance, biopolitics and radical passivity". However, as I read each chapter in more detail, I feel sure that this list of favourites will change.

With over 35 international contributors, this book could have run the risk of being a collaboration of academic egos competing for the limelight of *most critical* or *radical* writer. Instead, it is a genuine coming together of some of the best writers, influential researchers and most experienced practitioners from around the world.

From a radical practitioner's point of view, it could quite easily become the most thumbed text book on the bedside cabinet. From the position of a tertiary educator it is likely to become a well-used book with prominence on the desk. From a researcher's perspective, it is definitely going to become a book with

a number of little coloured stickies exuding from many of the chapters and pages.

However, there is a juxtaposition in having this text sitting on the desk. Firstly the cost. At around \$450, the hardback edition is out of reach for most practitioners and organisational budgets. While I am sure that Routledge would justify this with the fact that it would have taken a great deal of work to pull these authors together in this edited text, and that an e-version is more affordable at \$190 (though this edition cannot be thumbed or have stickies added), there is a much more important issue to raise for the radical social worker. That is the blatant exploitation of the authors who have written each chapter,

probably with little or no financial reward. The time, effort, expertise and knowledge required by the authors to formulate this text is both immeasurable and being capitalised upon by the publisher. At what point do we recognise that this has become abuse of academic means of production?

I write this review from the privileged position of actually having a copy of the text. Many of you reading the review will not necessarily have this opportunity. While I understand this uncomfortable hypocrisy, I am not sure what to do about it, because it is a very good read... All I can say is, if anyone wants to have a look at my copy, you know where you can reach me.

Reviewed by **Simon Lowe**, Lecturer in Social Work, University of Waikato, Tauranga