

# Presentation

**Practice education in the context of agency practice models: the implications for practice education and the commodification of social work knowledge.**

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# Approaches to theory

- A specific theoretical orientation
- A particular favourite theory
- Embracing eclecticism

# Key areas I want to explore

- The development of practice knowledge in social work and the current policy context for this
- Agency practice models
- The concept of commodification of professional knowledge and practice in social work

# Key areas I want to explore

- I am largely supportive of agency practice models
- The spirit of exploration not of polemic

# Policy context

- Rethinking children's social work - Department for Education Children's Social Care Innovation Programme

*and its off-spring*

- Overview report - Department for Education Children's Social Care Innovation Programme  
April 2014

# Wider policy context

- Changes in social work education
- Development of front-line, step up routes and apprenticeships
- Social worker accreditation

# Rethinking children's social work – key questions

- How do we want our social workers and other professionals to help our most vulnerable children and families?
- What are we asking practitioners to achieve?
- And what kind of environment and practice model would best enable them to achieve this?
- Work underpinned by a particular evidence-based theory and/or set of interventions that shape the way that social workers operate, both in direct work and in their critical thinking and decision making.

# What shaped theory in the past

Legitimation and creation of knowledge

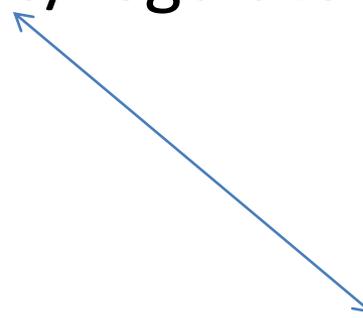
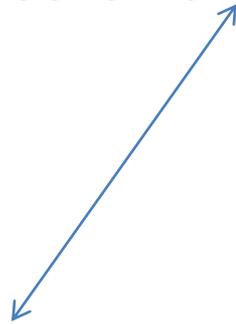
Tripartite structure

Professional bodies/regulators

Academic institutions

Social work agencies

and practitioners



# What shaped the use of theory in the past

Ideas of professional autonomy

- Individual professional autonomy and judgement vs managerialism
- Eclecticism
- Evidence and outcome
- Separation of bureaucracy and practice approach

# What shaped policy in the past

HCPC

Professional Capabilities Framework

- Non-specific
- Social work professionally defined not contextually
- Values orientated
- Concept of professionalism

# Current policy process

- More diffuse process
- Compact between government and private sector
- Transforming public services agenda

# Commodification

Marx's notion of commodity which can be sold

Applied to knowledge by Lyotard

Lyotard's commodification of knowledge

'Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major -- perhaps the major -- stake in the worldwide competition for power'

# Commodification process - knowledge

4 key elements

Privatisation - inclusive rights of control

Alienability - can be detached from the seller

Individuation - can be separated from its  
context

Valuation - given a monetary value

# The new social work knowledge

Innovations projects

- Scalability
- Fidelity
- Worker autonomy
- Prescribed approaches
- Commodification of knowledge?

.....probably not

# Wider context

- Evidence based practice
- Innovation
- Individually focused
- Technical

# **Agency practice models**

## **Scenario 1 - solution focused working**

In this scenario a student is working with a depressed bereaved parent who has recently lost their mother on whom they greatly depended. The parent is struggling to adequately care for their child. In supervision the student seems a little reluctant to embrace theoretical frameworks around the stages of grief or to think about whether there are any limits of solution focused working in this case.

# Agency practice models

## Scenario 2 – motivational interviewing

In this scenario during a 4 way meeting with a social work tutor and a work-based supervisor a discussion is going on about how to help a previously drug dependent parent whose children's school attendance has become a matter of some concern. The service user has voiced the view that there is a risk of sinking back into a drug taking lifestyle. The student suggests a range of possible cognitive-behavioural interventions around relapse prevention; mapping potential triggers and exploring cravings. The work-based supervisor is quite assertive in arguing that MI should be the first choice of intervention in this case.

# **Agency practice models**

## **Scenario 3 – systemic working**

In this scenario the student is writing the final report and seeking advice around linking theory and practice. The service user being discussed at has recently been evicted from home and been supported by the student in finding somewhere else to live. The student is reluctant to think about crisis intervention as a theoretical framework for understanding this situation and wants to apply systems theory even though crisis intervention seems a better fit.

# Final question

- What will enable practice educators to thrive in this new environment?

# Some reading on commodification

- Castre, N (2003) Commodifying what nature *Progress in Human Geography* 27,3 p273-297
- Kauppinen, I (2014) Different Meanings of Knowledge as a Commodity in Higher Education, *Critical Sociology*, vol 40(3) p393-409
- Hyland, T (2016) The erosion of right livelihood: counter-educational aspects of the commodification of mindfulness practice *Person-centred and experiential psychotherapies*, Vol15 (3) p177-189
- Lyotard, F (1984) *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press