Although social care work – originally characterised as childcare – has been a recognised employment option in Ireland since the 1970s and practitioners have had an impact across a vast array of service types and client groups, the field of social care continues to present as an emerging professional area in search of a clear identity. The explanation for this lies bedded within complex understandings of status in relation to other professionals and is, paradoxically, compounded by the diverse nature and ‘multiple meanings’ (Gallagher & O’Toole, 1999) of social care work itself. While definitions vary, a profession collectively possesses a common body of knowledge contributing to a repertoire of behaviour and skills in practice that set it apart from other professions and from non-professionals. Generally there are agreed standards of practice, common pre-service training and education programmes, a clear code of ethics and a system for regulating entry. Measured against such criteria social care work is clearly a profession in practice but it is evident from many of the chapters in the two books under review that the felt experience by many in the field is one of a profession yet to be given full recognition. To some extent it could be argued that so much attention to the topic of the professionalisation of social care by those within it may be a contributing factor to the perceived problem of professional recognition and status, as the energy given to such discussion and debate takes away from the contribution that social care practitioners and researchers might make to research, policy and practice in the wider arena and to the quality of the life experiences of separate client groups.

The two books under review are presented as the first two Irish textbooks addressing this important field. In fact, *Applied Social Care: An Introduction for Irish Students* is more clearly a textbook, whilst *Social Care in Ireland: Theory, Policy and Practice* reads rather as a series of essays. In collections as extensive as these – twenty-three and twenty-four chapters respectively – it is both important and helpful for the reader, particularly the student reader, to hear a clear editorial voice. Such a voice is evident and pervasive in *Applied Social Care*. Perry Share and Niall McElwee identify their readers as those ‘thinking about becoming, or planning to be, or already … a social care practitioner’ and state unambiguously that their text ‘represents the first
integrated attempt by the educators and practitioners in the social care field in Ireland to define and describe the practice of social care’. The result is a book that shows common purpose across the chapters, each one presented with an overview and each clearly addressing the reader from the social care perspective. The editorial voice is much less evident in *Social Care in Ireland* where Tom O’Connor and Mike Murphy state that the purpose of the book is to assess ‘the different cross-disciplinary feeds into social care’ and express the hope that the book will ‘raise the awareness and consciousness of all who read it to the point where they might feel energised to address many of the problems that are highlighted in the caring professions and in society as a whole’. Unlike *Applied Social Care* the editors of *Social Care in Ireland* appear to have given limited direction to the contributors and the result is that a number of the papers are stand-alone contributions with no direct link to social care practice or policy. Nonetheless they make interesting and challenging reading.

Both books are divided into sections, with relevant chapters grouped together. However, at times the grouping leads to a situation where linked chapters are separated and this limits rather than facilitates the integrated approach sought by the editors of both texts. For this reader this was particularly evident with respect to the chapters relating to health practice and policy in *Social Care in Ireland* and those relating to professionalisation and professionalism in *Applied Social Care* where a more integrated presentation on these topics would have brought the reader through theoretical, practice and policy issues in a connected way, fulfilling the ambition of both texts to assist an integrated approach.

The topics covered in both books are similar, but care has been taken by the editors of *Social Care in Ireland* to present a somewhat different focus building on, rather than replicating, the earlier text *Applied Social Care*. This has led, in some cases, to the beginnings of a text-based discussion and debate which should generate more critical reflection within the field of social care in Ireland. In fact a challenge has already been presented to those developing and designing education programmes for students by Tom O’Connor in his own chapter on ‘Social-Care Practice: Bringing Structure and Ideology in from the Cold’ where he criticises, among others, Kevin Lalor and Judy Doyle for neglecting consideration of policy structures in their chapter in *Applied Social Care* on ‘The Social Care Practice Placement – a College Perspective’. Such disputes are to be welcomed as they are the food and drink of a vibrant academic discipline and it is to be hoped that responses to this, and other challenges posed will be forthcoming through journal articles, conference presentations and further academic publications.

In any book covering such an extensive array of topics it is bound to be the case that chapters will vary in quality, challenge and depth. Some are explicitly introductory in their style, presenting concepts with clear definitions and locating issues in a practical context whilst others cut straight to the complexity of an issue, are challenging and provocative. The danger with this approach is that it may leave some less informed, less experienced readers behind. Within many chapters aspects of research, policy and practice are all addressed to some degree but the overall contents of both books can be considered from a number of different thematic perspectives. To begin with there is extensive focus on the issue of what exactly social care is. This reflects, at least in part, the interests of the editors, explicitly identified in *Applied Social Care* where the editors Share and McElwee also co-author chapters on the topics ‘What
is Social Care?’ and ‘The Professionalisation of Social Care in Ireland’. Colm O’Doherty, one of the two authors common to both books, provides two valuable chapters reflecting on the relationship between social work, social care and social capital. Within these chapters he moves beyond questioning the professional nature of social care to accepting it and makes visible some of the points of tension that exist between social work and social care in Ireland. Possibly due to his experiences outside the state he brings an objectivity to the topic which allows it to be progressed to a point of valuable academic discussion. In his chapter ‘Integrating Social Care and Social Work: Towards a Model of Best Practice’ in *Applied Social Care*, he presents a challenge when he notes that ‘social care practice … is now a fulcrum for social action/social education, whereas social work as practiced in the Health Boards is more closely identified with case management…. As this emerging practice is formalised and institutionalised, the way is open for Health Boards to integrate creatively social care and social work’.

The difficulties in achieving integration across social care and social work are not to be underestimated and some of them are outlined by O’Doherty and also by Share and McElwee in their chapter on professionalisation, which provides more questions than answers. They are also evident, to a degree, in the chapter on the role of the community childcare worker as described by Susan McKenna-McElwee and Teresa Brown in *Applied Social Care*. The international dimension introduced in that volume gives a valuable context within which to consider some of the questions raised and illustrates the important power and influence of the socio-political context on the realisation of professional identity. Ann McWilliams, in her chapter ‘The Challenges of Working Together in Child Protection’ in *Social Care in Ireland*, confronts the thorny issue of inter-professional and inter-agency cooperation and highlights the role of training to facilitate the critical attitude shifts that will be necessary among practitioners and policy makers to move from the aspiration to the reality. It is notable that when reading chapters by authors other than those in social care, particularly in the thought provoking chapter by Peadar Kirby, ‘The Changing Role of the Irish State: From Welfare to Competition State’ (in *Social Care in Ireland*), the issue of whether or not social care is a profession simply does not arise – it is accepted as such and then challenged to act accordingly.

Bridging the issue of professionalisation, professional identity and the actual practice and professionalism of social care work is the theme of a number of chapters. In the chapter on ‘Self in Social Care’ by Grant Charles and Niall McElwee in *Applied Social Care* the idea that ‘self and relationship are inseparable in effective social care practice’ is presented and discussed. The chapter makes clear that it is an introduction to a complex topic and urges readers to look further into some of the issues raised. It then goes on to reflect on the tensions of the reality of that self/other dynamic. Such tensions can be eased by careful training and supervision, topics covered by several chapters in both books. In *Applied Social Care* these include the joint contribution of Lalor and Doyle (already mentioned) and separate chapters by Eileen O’Neill, Patrick McGarty and Danny Meenan. *Social Care in Ireland* has chapters on related topics by Patricia Kennefick (‘Aspects of Personal Development’), Ann McWilliams (‘The Challenges of Working Together in Child Protection’) and Niall Hanlon, Ann McWilliams and Siobhán Quinlan-Cooke (who jointly contribute a chapter on practice.
teaching and learning). Kennefick’s chapter connects directly with Eileen O’Neill’s chapter in *Applied Social Care* in addressing aspects of the Professional Supervision Model as useful in effective social care training and ongoing professional development. This model emphasises the actual work being done and the person doing the work and the critical link between the two. But attention to this link in training is insufficient if not made explicit within a wider socio-political and policy context – a case strongly argued by Tom O’Connor in his chapter in *Social Care in Ireland*. Sinéad Conneely’s chapter on the legal system in *Applied Social Care* gives the reader an introduction to child and family law which is a critical context within which to consider social care practice. However, the real impact of the external world on the day-to-day reality is starkly illustrated in the chapters by Peadar Kirby (on the role of the state), Elizabeth Cullen (on the benefits or otherwise of the Celtic tiger economy) and Maev-Ann Wren (on health) in *Social Care in Ireland*. Sinéad Conneely’s chapter on the legal system in *Applied Social Care* gives the reader an introduction to child and family law which is a critical context within which to consider social care practice. However, the real impact of the external world on the day-to-day reality is starkly illustrated in the chapters by Peadar Kirby (on the role of the state), Elizabeth Cullen (on the benefits or otherwise of the Celtic tiger economy) and Maev-Ann Wren (on health) in *Social Care in Ireland*. As an illustration of health inequalities Bridgit Quirke’s chapter in the same volume on the ‘reality of Travellers’ health’ is very powerful. Read in conjunction these various chapters present the reader with a glimpse of the complexities involved in the provision of high quality and effective social care work and challenge educators to consider carefully the balance in programmes between the theoretical, the political and the practical.

Theoretical issues addressed in these texts cross a number of disciplines. Áine de Róiste, the second author to be represented in both books, offers a rich and clear introduction to attachment theory in *Applied Social Care* and to a systems perspective on working with families in *Social Care in Ireland*. Both are written with the student of social care in mind and offer sufficient detail to allow the reader evaluate the usefulness of the theoretical perspectives to direct practice in context. This link is explicitly made within the attachment chapter where a case study is presented to allow the reader apply the information. Both attachment and working with families form a central element of Gay Graham’s chapter in *Social Care in Ireland* on ‘Social-care Work with Families in Crisis: Attachment Strategies and Effective Care-giving through Life-space Opportunities’. Jacqueline O’Toole’s chapter on ‘Gender, Sexuality and Social Care’ in *Applied Social Care* is clearly located within the explicit context of a feminist sociological framework and raises issues of power and gender balance within social care practice and policy. These issues are also addressed by Orla O’Connor and Claire Dunne in their chapter ‘Valuing Unpaid Care Work’ in *Social Care in Ireland*. To some extent the impact of each of these chapters is enhanced by the presence of both (and this is true of other chapters across the two books) and those considering these texts for use with students would do well to consider using them as a pair.

Tom Dennehy’s chapter on Winnicott in *Social Care in Ireland* provides an unconventional look at the work of the paediatrician and psychoanalyst, located within a contemporary frame by reference to the current popular novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*; and Damien Cussen’s chapter on ethics and social care in *Applied Social Care* takes a wide ranging look at applying principles from a complex issue to everyday practice. It was in reading this chapter in particular that the absence of chapter-specific referencing in the *Applied Social Care* textbook began to become an issue. While a large reference section is provided at the end of the book it does not facilitate the kind of links between individual themed chapters and the additional reading opportunities that one expects in a textbook. By contrast Kennefick’s chapter ‘Phenomenology: A
Short Note on a Fundamental Concept’ in *Social Care in Ireland* guides the reader to readings that expand on the chapter as well as providing specific references. For a student this approach will be more helpful.

To make social care work real to the reader it is important for students to have access to topics about the day to day reality of practice with different client groups. Working in residential childcare is explored by John Byrne and John McHugh in *Applied Social Care*. The authors provide a historical context for the development of residential childcare and introduce aspects of the day to day work. Also in that volume, a chapter on aftercare by Rose Doolan illustrates the fine balance between supporting those leaving residential childcare and facilitating independence. She interrogates the concept of aftercare and offers some interesting alternatives. Two relatively new areas for social care work are explored in the chapter by Mike Murphy, Lena O’Rourke and Eleanor O’Leary on ‘Alzheimer’s Disease: Sufferers, Care-givers and Resources’ in *Social Care in Ireland* and that by Celesta McCann James on ‘Ethnicity and Social Care: An Irish Dilemma’ in *Applied Social Care*. Both these chapters open areas of debate that need a great deal more attention. The contribution of physical exercise as an intervention to improve overall health and well-being is described by Elaine Dennehy in a chapter in *Social Care in Ireland* while, in the same book, the use of drama with people with disability is explored in Evelyn Grant’s ‘Behind the Scenes at Beam Me Up!’. This chapter reports on a project developed as part of Cork’s year as Cultural Capital of Europe and is a positive example of the issues discussed by Eithne Fitzgerald in a later chapter in *Social Care in Ireland* which sets out to answer the question ‘How Far have People with Disabilities Achieved Equality?’. Both books provide chapters on working in different situations and it is evident that there are a number of common issues across all settings and contexts. For instance, the importance of respectful practice with all client groups is, as one might expect, a common theme. It is addressed not as an aspiration but supported with examples of how to achieve this kind of best practice, with illustrations from practice and supported by well-argued cases.

Phil Mortell, in his chapter ‘Charged and Convicted: The Problem of Elder Abuse in Ireland’ in *Social Care in Ireland* exposes this largely hidden form of abuse, identifying the dearth of hard information and suggesting a way to address the issue across the differing settings of home, institution and society in general. Abuse of a different sort is addressed by Grant Charles, Niall McElwee and Susan McKenna-McElwee in their chapter on ‘Working with Victims of Violence and Abuse’ in *Applied Social Care* and by Georgina Burke in ‘Violence against Social-Care Staff’, a case study of the HSE mid-west area in *Social Care in Ireland*. Both these chapters offer practical suggestions for training and policy. Carmel Gallagher in her chapter ‘Social Care Work and the Older Person’ in *Applied Social Care* challenges us to consider our imaging of older people and considers how perception can influence practice. This issue of perception is addressed by two other contributions to *Applied Social Care* – Karen Finnerty’s ‘Social Care and Disability’ and Ashling Jackson’s ‘Ask the Experts: Travellers in Ireland and Issues for Social Care’. Engaging directly with client groups is similarly the theme of Cormac Forkan’s chapter in the same volume on ‘Enabling Young People through Consultation’, which reports on the results of a youth project set in Dublin. The importance of the voice of children and young people is also considered by Ann McWilliams in *Social Care in Ireland* in a chapter entitled ‘Seen But
Not Heard’, which discusses how children are represented in Irish courts. This chapter picks up on another common thread throughout these chapters – that of rhetoric and reality. McWilliams outlines the many written commitments to giving children a voice, both in the courts and elsewhere, but cautions that this is of limited value when not supported by resources and a well planned framework of implementation and evaluation. Significantly, despite a number of references to the importance of the voice of children and young people in matters impacting on them directly, neither book offers a critical evaluation of the wider issue of children’s rights and the implications for practice and policy.

Rhetoric and reality form the context for Ciaran McCullagh’s excellent review of juvenile justice and the apparent shift from detention to restorative justice; a challenging look at a concept that has gained a great deal of general support. Also in Social Care in Ireland, the stark reality of homelessness in a land of plenty is well drawn by Peter McVerry in a chapter on the failure of housing policy which acts as a harsh case study to accompany the Kirby chapter on the changing role of the state. Kirby outlines a number of contradictions in contemporary Irish society similar to that highlighted by McVerry and provides a wealth of evidence to support the contention that the Irish state ‘cloaks its lack of commitment to adequate social provision and a more equitable society behind a fog of benign rhetoric while pursuing actions that fail to address glaring social problems and may even contribute to making them worse’. This disheartening view is one that can be picked up across many of the chapters in both these texts and the challenge issued by Kirby to civil society, and social care practitioners in particular, that we take a more active role in contesting and exposing the state’s actions is one that should be heeded.

Together, these books mark an important development in social care practice, policy and research. As the first textbooks in the field they contain, necessarily, a wide variety of material which is somewhat unwieldy for the reader; yet despite some referencing errors, the editors are to be congratulated in bringing an element of cohesion to the topics. As the basis for guiding students through the complexity of social care they offer a valuable resource. In themselves significant contributions to scholarship in this field, they also suggest a multitude of opportunities for future research, explorations and academic publications.

Reference

Biographical Note
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