Emilie Whitaker

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Contact

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Year started: 2010-2011
F/T or P/T: Full-time
Supervisor(s): Professor Jon Glasby (/staff/profiles/social-policy/glasby-jon.aspx) and Professor Sue White (/staff/profiles/social-policy/white-sue.aspx)

Research topic

'Personalisation: Meaning and practice in Children's Social Care'

Qualifications:

- PG Cert Social Research Methods, University of Birmingham (2010)
- MSc Public Policy, Queen Mary, University of London (2008)
- BA Hons History and Sociology, University of Warwick (2006)

Background and professional experience

Prior to commencing my doctoral research I worked in the children and families voluntary sector as a policy lead. In this role, I worked extensively with household names in the charity sector alongside smaller VCS organisations influencing policy development and implementation. Here I led a programme of work on personalisation. As part of this, I facilitated workshops with practitioners in the children's voluntary sector on the implications of the personalisation agenda in addition to writing widely on the subject and presenting at events.

I have extensive experience in working with parliamentarians and policy makers on issues pertinent to the children's sector, spanning both the public and third sectors. I have worked in local government supporting elected members in policy development and local priority setting in children's services. I have also worked in the Department of Health policy team and for an MP.

Alongside my PhD, I am working with Governance International in developing innovative tools, training and projects for reforming public services.

Teacher/training experience

- Guest lecturer at the Queen Mary University of London, American Exchange Programme
- Trainer with Governance International on co-production
- Trainer in implementing personalised approaches in the voluntary and community sector

Research overview

The reach of personalisation is large and growing with the Government signalling their commitment to the agenda across the service spectrum. We have seen developments in health, adult social care and most recently through the SEND Green Paper - children's services. The direction of travel is clear. However, from a research perspective and as developments in children's services are still int he early stages, what personalisation actually 'is' - as a policy, a course of action and set of meanings (to organisations, practitioners and families) remains unexamined and undefined. This research seeks to describe the messages, understandings and experiences that social work practitioners and the families they work with create and live through as personalisation is implemented in children's services. It looks to create a rich description about how personalisation is understood within the context of a children's social work team and the families they are working with.

The study seeks to have the agency of practitioners as a core focus and to go further and look at how meanings are created, contested and negotiated within the everyday realities of a social care team rolling out personalisation. The three research aims are:

- To describe the organisation's messages, narratives and understandings about personalisation and how these are conveyed to staff and families.
- To explore and describe what personalisation means to individual practitioners and the families they work with the how they come to this understanding.
- To explore whether meanings about personalisation are shared between practitioners and families and to assess if and how this influences their relationship.

The research takes an ethnographic approach where I will be based within a children's social work team for 3 months as they implement personalisation. As Ethnographic studies are concerned with understanding and describing meaning in social life, the research design should enable me to reflect the complexity of 'ordinary' social activity whilst being sensitive to the local context in which it is situated.

Conference papers

Whitaker, E (2012) 'An Extra Pair of Hands' in Loeffler, E (ed), *Making Health and Social Care Personal and Local: Moving from Mass Production to Co-production*, London: LGIU

Whitaker, E (2012) 'Making Sense of Change: Sensegiving and sensemaking in the era of user choice and control', *International Conference in Interpretive Policy Analysis, University of Tilburg.*

Whitaker, E (2011) 'The role of the social worker in the personalisation story: the good, the bad and an alternative way of understanding their experience', *Public Administration Committee Conference, University of Birmingham.*

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