



December 2002

Balancing Family-Centered Services and Child Well-Being: Exploring Issues in Policy, Practice, Theory, and Research. Elaine Walton, Patricia Sandau-Beckler and Marc Mannes (Eds.). Reviewed by Sherrill J. Clark.

Sherrill J. Clark
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Clark, Sherrill J. (2002) "*Balancing Family-Centered Services and Child Well-Being: Exploring Issues in Policy, Practice, Theory, and Research.* Elaine Walton, Patricia Sandau-Beckler and Marc Mannes (Eds.). Reviewed by Sherrill J. Clark.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 4 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol29/iss4/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



data. Despite the scholarly nature of the book, it is accessible to the lay reader and has much to offer teachers and students in varied disciplines, including sociology, social welfare, political science, history, ethnic studies, education, cross cultural studies, and psychology. Most importantly, *Preserving Privilege* offers California and the rest of the nation a sense of vision and direction.

Devon Brooks

University of Southern California

Elaine Walton, Patricia Sandau-Beckler and Marc Mannes (Eds.), *Balancing Family-Centered Services and Child Well-Being: Exploring Issues in Policy, Practice, Theory, and Research*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. \$49.50 hardcover, \$29.50 papercover

The Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) has three primary goals: child safety, permanence and well being. Currently, the Children's Bureau has requested ASFA outcome evaluations from the states which are focused primarily on the first two goals, safety and permanence, while for the most part deferring on child well-being. In fifteen essays by well respected authors in this field, this book deftly ties child well-being and strength-based, family-centered services together.

In the first essay, Peter Pecora presents a typology, brief history, overview of current program implementation, and evaluation challenges of family centered practice. He cautions evaluators to be rigorous in specifying the service model used, and in providing supervision and consultation in order to insure fidelity to the service model. He urges that evaluations based on experimental designs while the service model is still evolving, be avoided. Next John Ronnau notes how complex and challenging the issues of boundaries, confidentiality, and values are in family-centered services. He cautions against "vague principles that take on specific meaning and generate controversy only [emphasis added] as policies and programs flesh them out." Rowena Fong covers cultural competency in family-centered services including assessments using culturally competent, strength based practice.

Elaine Walton discusses several conceptual frameworks for family-centered services which are derived from family systems

theory. She tries to integrate the theories pointing out that there is not just one family-centered framework, but many. However, it would be helpful to know which ones work under which circumstances and with whom. Patricia Sandau-Beckler writes about family-centered assessment and goal setting. Her essay describes an array of family and risk assessment support tools. She brings to the readers attention the special challenges of in-home observation and treatment with the non-voluntary client, using the collaborative team approach.

In the next section of essays, one of four which describe a specific treatment approach to family centered services, Marc Mannes provides a piece on the integration of child well-being and family centered services. The research-based developmental assets framework is presented with ideas for its application to individual children and whole communities. The other essays are by Lisa Merkel-Holguin and Kimberly Ribich on family group conferencing and by Colleen Halliday-Boykins and Scott Henggler on multisystemic therapy. Elizabeth Tracy provides readers with a comparative analysis of several home-based family centered policies and interventions using excellent case examples.

Gary Anderson discusses formal and informal kinship care. In doing so he challenges current policy to develop "permanency options and related financial and social support" by separating kinship foster care supports from the foster care system. He also reports on an understudied phenomenon, siblings raising siblings. In her essay, Ramona Denby raises two key issues in the delivery and evaluation of family centered services. The first is whether imminent risk (for out of home placement) is the appropriate criterion for evaluation of the efficacy of family centered services. The second issue is that of the overrepresentation of children of color in out of home care and the implication that there is unequal access to family preservation services for families of color.

The essay by Apple, et al. is a collaboratively written essay about going beyond lip service to communities in developing natural helpers. In this chapter, the strengths of professionals are seen in training and mentoring neighborhood partners. The authors' stance is that society overrelies on professionals to do the helping when what they should be doing is teaching others how

to provide for and support each other. Berry, Bussey and Cash's essay addresses evaluation in a dynamic environment: assessing change when nothing is constant. The authors argue that since placement is a distal outcome (from the service provided) and a rare event, prevention may not be the best measure of efficacious family-centered services.

The final two essays offer refreshingly and pointedly one-sided critiques on current policy and research on family centered programs. Mannes' piece which is entitled, "Reclaiming a Family-centered Services Reform Agenda," argues that focusing the child welfare system on child saving/safety makes it a residual function, instead of one that supports families. Kristine Nelson's contribution is a cautionary essay on how policymakers use research. This puts a realistic and sobering conclusion to the book. She notes that what we do in the way of policy setting and research has unintended consequences which may be so bureaucratic that neither workers nor families feel empowered.

The book's strength is that it presents many voices, including consumers, but therein may also lie a weakness: the lack of section divisions and editorial commentary does not help the reader organize these many points of view. Although the editors note in the introduction that it was not their intent to comprehensively cover the "multiple conflicting perspectives on family-oriented efforts" it would have helped to group like essays together and provide some commentary at the beginning of each section in order to guide the reader. It would have also helped to specify for whom this book has been written.

The book challenges the usual notions of the choice and equity of provision of services, direction of research and evaluation, and implementation of policy. The authors present strong arguments for why home should be the primary setting of intervention. The also suggest that teaching clients how to be colleagues should be the primary role of social work. Experimental design may not reveal the truth about what works in family centered services. To paraphrase Amitai Etzioni, frequent measurement of some things, limits the service, research, and policy focus on things that are not measured. These essays present opportunities for students, practitioners, and policymakers to apply critical thinking

skills while learning about the connection between child well-being and family-centered services.

Sherrill J. Clark

University of California, Berkeley

Nigel Thomas, *Children, Family and the State: Decision-making and Child Participation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001. \$65 hardcover.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all countries except Somalia and the USA, states:

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express these views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

This right to participation is potentially the most radical and complicated element in the Convention. The other rights—to life, to a name and nationality, to protection from abuse and neglect, for instance—engender some cultural conflict and debate about their precise meaning, but there is a high level of agreement on their validity. The right to express an opinion, however, is both hotly contested and poses immense problems in how it is to be implemented. It challenges many cultures' beliefs about the role of children within a family and the authority of parents. United States' opposition to the Convention has been forcefully expressed by Senator Jesse Helms who takes particular exception to Article 12: 'Will the US be censured because a parent did not leave it to a child to choose which school to attend? Will the US be censured because a parent did not allow a child to decide whether to accompany the family to church?' (Congressional Record, 14 June, 1995).

This book, therefore, is very timely, the range of its material reflecting the enormity of the issue. At the heart of the book is an account of an empirical study of children in public care but it begins by reviewing children's place in society from a number of perspectives: sociological theories of childhood, psychological