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*What Works? Evidence Based Policy and Practice in Public Services.* Huw T.O. Davies, Sandra M. Nutley and Peter C. Smith (Eds.).

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in the future, governments will adopt policies that will truly enable human beings, families and communities to attain the high standards of living the market has provided for some but not for others.

Huw T.O. Davies, Sandra M. Nutley and Peter C. Smith (Eds.). *What Works? Evidence Based Policy and Practice in Public Services*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2001. \$81.00 hardcover, \$32.50 papercover.

The growing interest in evidence based practice in social work is being accompanied by a similar interest in using substantive research evidence to inform social policy making. Although social workers have for many years emphasized the role of professional opinion, values and emotional responses in social work practice, many now believe that decisions effecting clients should be based on scientific research findings. As proponents of evidence based practice point out, this is increasingly the case in medicine and other professional fields. Although this proposition would not appear to be particularly original or contentious, advocates of the evidence based approach contend that much professional practice is still based on opinion, beliefs, tradition and anecdote. This is certainly the case in social policy where policy making has long been shaped by ideological predispositions. Indeed, because of its ideological character, it is almost inevitably that the many complex decisions policy makers reach on issues affecting human welfare should reflect their values and beliefs and those of their constituents.

However, as this interesting and informative book reveal, scientific evidence can be used to inform social policy decisions and, in this way, make social service programs more effective. The book is compiled by three British academics and its chapters deal with diverse aspects of public policy in Britain. Nevertheless, its central argument is relevant to policy makers in other countries as well and the examples and case studies provided in the different chapters should be of wider interest. The book begins with a general overview of the meaning and history of evidence based policy making and successive chapters focus on the application of these ideas in different policy fields such as health care, education, social welfare, housing and urban development. Another five chapters are concerned with methodological issues showing how

research methods and planning technologies can be employed to generate the evidence on which sound policy making can be based. The book concludes with an assessment of how evidence based policy making will evolve in the future and hopefully play a more significant role in decision making.

This is a useful book which should be widely read and prescribed in social policy classes. Students will appreciate the book's jargon free approach and explication of a straightforward message. Although the message is a positive one, this does not mean that the editors and authors are sanguine about the prospects that research evidence will now actually determine policy decisions. They point out that despite the Blair government's pragmatic insistence that "what matters is what works," Labour Party leaders still fall back on ideological preferences when making social policy decisions. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties involved, the current emphasis on evidence based policy making is an important one which may reinvigorate previous efforts to transcend ideology, personal preference and tradition in formulating and implementing policies designed to enhance human welfare.

Linda Trinh Vo and Rick Bonus (Eds.), *Contemporary Asian Communities: Intersections and Divergences*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. \$69.00 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

Much of the social science literature focusing on ethnic minorities in the United States has been concerned with the cultural dimensions of ethnic life suggesting that unique cultural characteristics can be associated with different groups. The purpose of much of this literature has been to document and describe the attitudes, beliefs, values and other cultural characteristics of these different groups and to examine the social problems and challenges they face. This is particularly true of introductory textbooks in social work which have sought to expose students to the cultures of different ethnic groups in the hope that they may be more sensitive to culture realities when they encounter members of these groups in practice settings.

The editors of this interesting and readable volume contend that this approach is of limited value in seeking to understand the complex realities of culture in contemporary American society. Based on the papers presented at a conference held in California in 1998, the book provides a far more nuanced account of the many