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Beyond Procedures:
How do we stake a claim for effective Social Work practice?
3rd Annual Social Work Conference

Andrew Turnell

Social Work Professor in Practice

University of Cumbria

Thank You for the privilege of being Professor in Practice at University of Cumbria

Some Questions to Start

Why when the taxi driver or when we are at a party and we are asked what do you do? Do so many of us say we work in technology (or something else)?

Some Questions to Start

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Two questions to start

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What is unique about social work?

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Two questions to start
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In the presentations you heard today what inspired about social work?

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Two questions to start

What is unique about social work?
In the presentations you heard what inspired you today about social work?

We need to define

what good looks like . . .
(What Works Centre)

This goes back a LONG time

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Staking a Claim for Social Work: An insecure profession

ABRAHAM FLEXNER:

An Autobiography

A REVISION,
BROUGHT UP TO DATE,
OF THE AUTHOR'S *I REMEMBER*,
PUBLISHED IN 1940
INTRODUCTION BY ALLAN NEVINS

SIMON AND SCHUSTER · NEW YORK · 1960
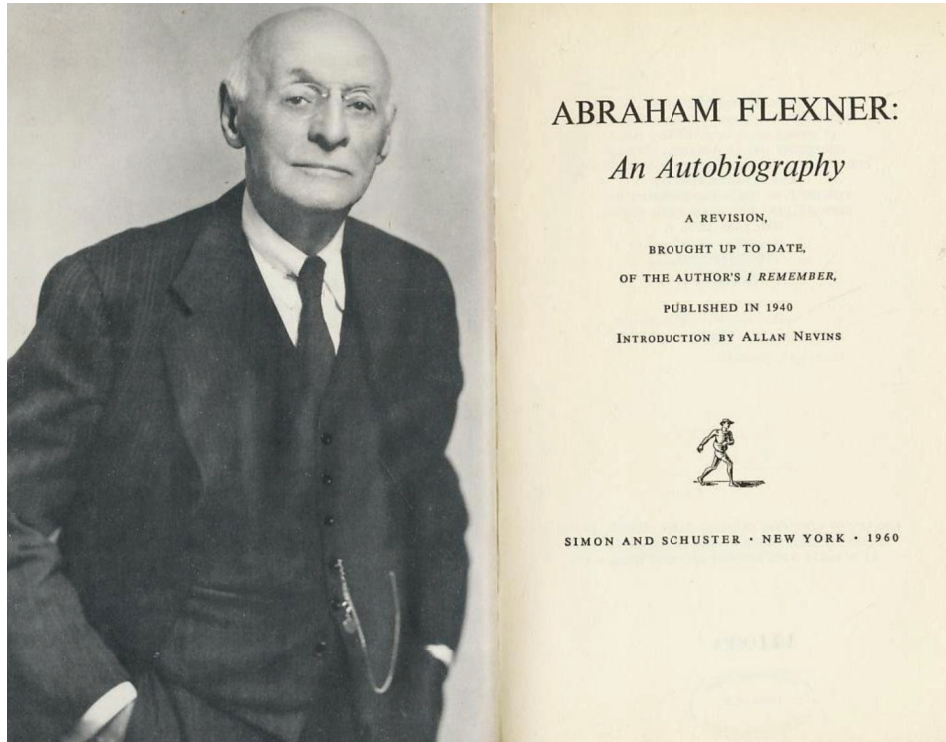
Is Social Work a profession?

In 1916 Flexner said:

Social work does not not qualify as a profession it lacks individual responsibility and educationally communicable techniques

Lacks a unique theory base

Haunted by this – try asking a social worker what theories they base their work upon

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Staking a Claim for Social Work: Some of Our founders

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life

Action indeed is the sole medium of the the expression of ethics

Jane Addams

Twenty Year~ With Autobiographical Notes

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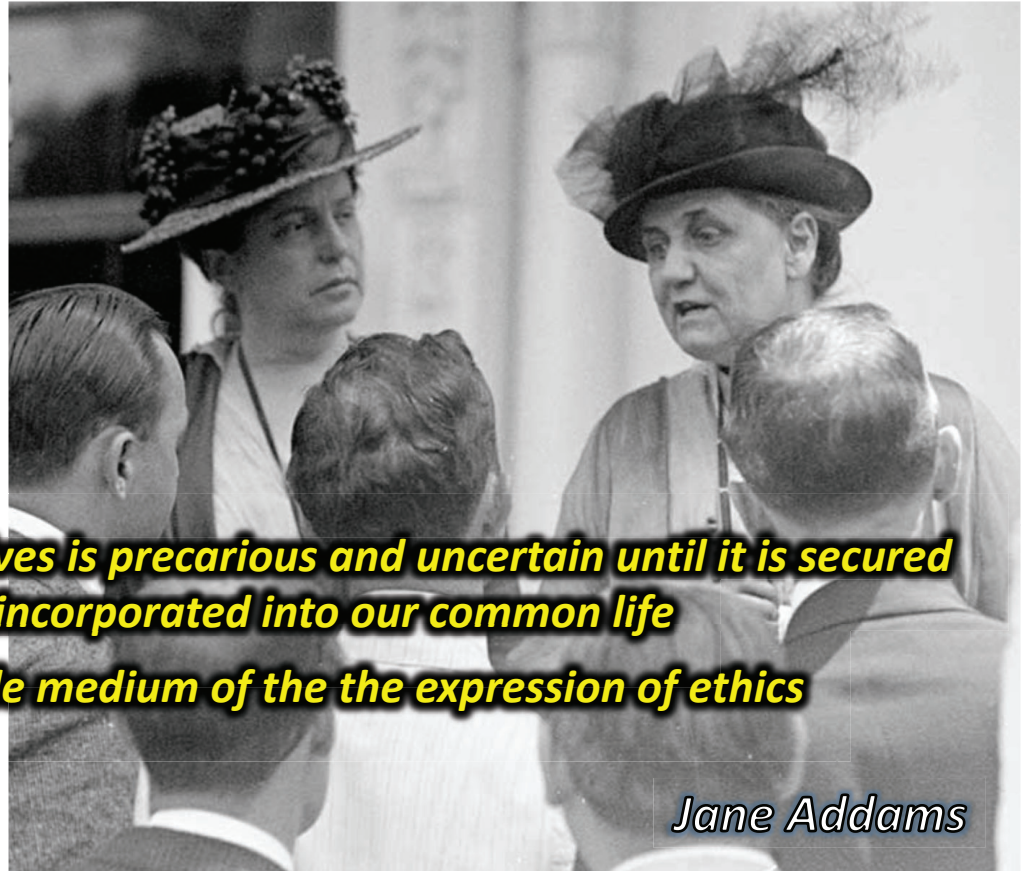
Staking a Claim for Social Work: Our founders

Coroline Chisholm

"If the government be really desirous of seeing a well-conducted community spring up in these colonies, the social wants of the people must be considered"

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Staking a Claim for Social Work: Vulnerable profession

Vulnerable – 'Hollowed out' (Parton)

Co-opted into proceeduralisation

Shop out assessments

Agents of social change becomes agents of social control

Theory – practice gap (Steve and Haley's experience)

'Serial importer of ideas' (Goldstein)

'Most social work theory has all the pleasure of chewing on cardboard' (Marsh)

'While practice is bird in flight theory is so often a dead parrot at the bottom of a cage' (Murphy)

Wherein lies our hope?

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Staking a Claim for Social Work: Vulnerable profession

Ann Weick (2002) suggests that the social work profession has **two voices** – the second, usual voice is the 'big' voice, the solid, expert, acceptable voice. This is the voice social workers are most called on to use – it is the voice of professional discourse, of assessments, reports, treatment plans, the voice that is seen to be most acceptable professionally, institutionally and academically.

Ann Weick

University of Cumbria

Staking a Claim for Social Work: Vulnerable profession

The **first voice** by contrast is quiet and mostly hidden; it expresses the human, lived and primary experience of social work practice. Weick suggests *'social work has been unable to give voice to its work'* and that a *'chasm of silence surrounds what social workers do and experience on a daily basis'*. Weick likens this to the 'centuries of public silence' that have accrued around womens' knowledges and womens' care-giving and writes that *'women in general and social workers in particular have difficulty believing what they do is important'*

Ann Weick

University of
Cumbria

Staking a Claim for Social Work: Vulnerable profession

Wherein lies our hope?

The best of us are convicted, people of action and compassion not overly worried about professional identity

Conviction about what we are doing . . . We import ideas and methods to defend our action

Struggle between the humanists and the empiricists

All this in a time when human care, connection and community are devalued/given no productive value

We are seek to justify our work or action within dominant cultural norms, social paradigms and social theories

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Staking a Claim for Social Work: Vulnerable profession

Could it be a little simpler that that?

We are people of action how do we defend and stake a claim for it?

Theory at its simplest is 'sense making'

The meaning and sense we make of action

This is an uncertain business –we are always working in social, cultural and organisational places and spaces of differing, divergent and contested views

Can we disentangle ourselves from the dominant paradigm desire for the definitive answer, the truth and celebrate our ability to navigate difference?

Beware the person who knows the truth their mind if like a tiny shard of ice

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In general conversation, people readily understand the idea of 'risk and reward' and any business person worth their salt knows that to succeed they must take risks. The key issue when dealing with uncertainty in any human endeavour is to bring intelligence that measures up to the risk of adverse consequences that is being addressed. This is the only way humans can maximise the likelihood of reward in the face of uncertainty. Unfortunately, in the anxious environment of child protection our field has allowed the concept of risk to become problem saturated, thereby debasing the professional imagination, analytical and emotional intelligence we can bring to the high stakes complexity of child abuse risk-reward decision making. In this paper, we seek to reclaim the concept of risk from the solely negative slant our field has ascribed it, proposing instead a more balanced and comprehensive approach to navigating child maltreatment risk.

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Some years ago, one of us was leading a case consultation on a complex child protection case within an English authority when the team manager stated *'we returned the child to the mother who was in a new relationship. It was a risk, but we had to do something, the boy's second placement had broken down, we had good supports around the mother and the mother had been drug free for six months. We weren't quite sure about the new man in her life but after we interviewed him with mum and his own mother we decided to go ahead'.*

As the manager paused, her clearly agitated Director of Children's Services stated, 'I want to make one thing crystal clear, we never, **never,** take risks with the safety and well-being of children!' The silence in the room was deafening.

While we understand completely why child protection professionals at all levels, the governments that run them, and the media and public when they become aware of child abuse matters, all want to believe that child protection practice can be risk free and guarantee the safety of children, the idea that this can be so is a naïve and dangerous fantasy.

In reality, there is no such thing as a risk free intervention in children's services whether a vulnerable child is removed, returned or remains with his or her family. Child protection practice involves uncertainty both about what *is* happening and what *might* happen. Therefore, calculating risk involves probabilities, not certainties, and the anxiety this can produce has to be managed.

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Life always involves uncertainty and risk. All of us enter relationships, start businesses, have children, and pursue adventures knowing that nothing is certain. Hopefully, in all these endeavors we do our best to make wise decisions based on good information. However, everything we do as human beings can always turn sour or end badly; that's life. Somehow in children's services this commonsense insight can be erased under the pressure of an adverse outcome to a vulnerable child.

With the stakes so high where the worst outcome in child protection work can be tragic and the public reaction punitive, we argue that it is imperative that culture and thinking about uncertainty and risk in the child protection field needs to be marked by maturity and a willingness to be realistic about our ability to predict the future. Many commentators have observed that the culture in child protection around risk is defensive and blaming While this commentary is important, most analysis has primarily been focused on the problem. There is little written about the solution or antidote to defensiveness.

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What is unique about social work?

Social work – working the social

Fran Crawford

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Staking a Claim for Social Work

Interpretive anthropology/social theory

'Local knowledges' (insider knowledges)

'Lived experience'

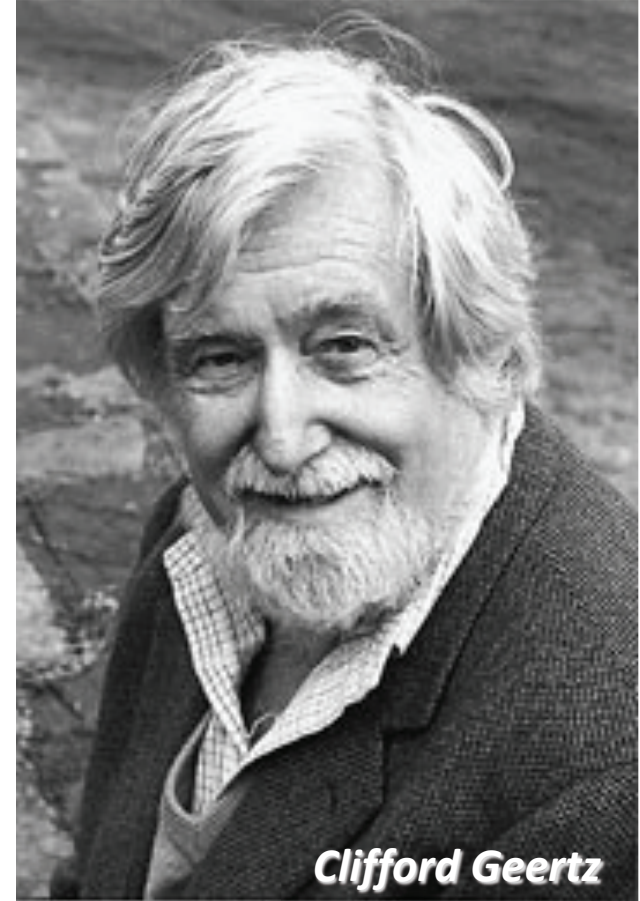'Researching with the natives'

The answer to our most general questions – why? how? what? whither? – to the degree that they have answers, are to be found in the fine detail of lived life. ('Available Light' 2000)

Researching with practitioners – making sense of what they do with them – bringing meaning to action.

'The problem is you just can't get at what the buggers do'

Clifford Geertz

Staking a Claim for Social Work

The tension between local and expert knowledges:

'Confinement to experience-near (local knowledge) concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant (expert knowledge) ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon' (1983, p. 57).

The challenge of staking a claim for social work practice is a challenge of staking a claim for lived experience and local knowledge

Clifford Geertz

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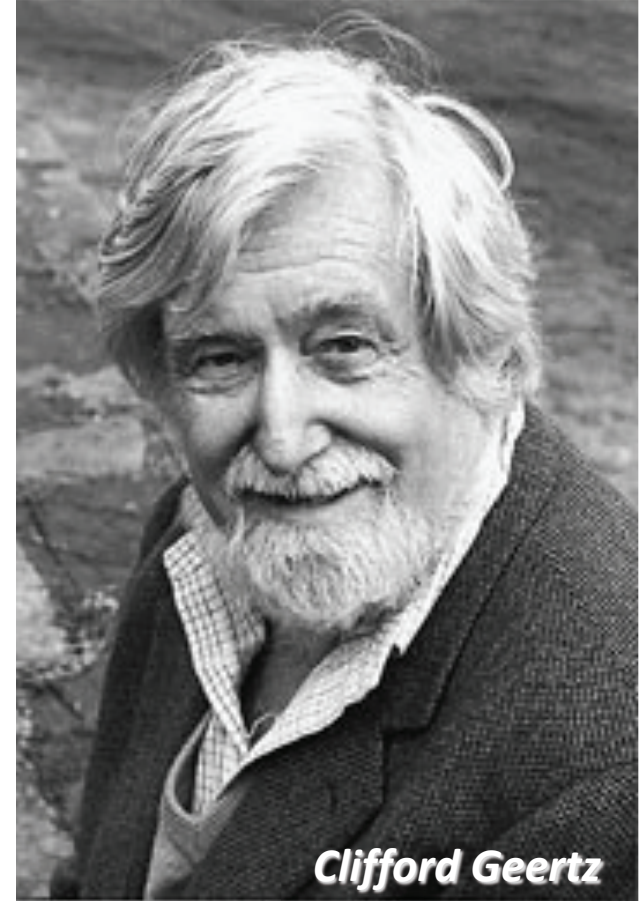
Staking a Claim for Social Work

We have theoretical challenges, we have epistimological challenges and we have ontological challenges in this – we're vulnerable on every front.

The vulnerability of social work is long standing

The crisis of social work is a crisis of vision

An ontological crisis

We literally need to have greater confidence in our lived experience and the knowledges that creates . . .

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Staking a Claim for Social Work

What do we normally research and focus on in practice?

What are you going to do if some one wants to research your perceived failures?

Could we for a change research self defined good practice?

How hard is this for us

Who is the arbiter of whether this is good practice?

Research practitioner defined good practice, connected with the experience of the service recipient and published (theory is essentially whats on the record)

Researching with practitioners – staking a claim for our work with the natives building upwards and outwards from daily experience . . .

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In 1994 Ken Loach made a film called 'Ladybird Ladybird' about a mother who had four children removed from her and three subsequent removed at birth.

This is a recurring child protection story who might have answers about how to do this differently?

Ladybird Ladybird 🔞

Ken Loach's devastating, important film documents the personal and social battles a woman must go through in order to continue caring for her children.

Staking a Claim for Social Work

Andrew Turnell*
Independent Child Protection
Consultant
Burswood, Australia

Sharon Elliott
Viv Hogg
Gateshead Social Services UK

Compassionate, Safe and Rigorous Child Protection Practice with Biological Parents of Adopted Children

'Does this trend obscure the rights of relinquishing parents?'

There is a worldwide trend towards re-energizing the use of adoption as a tool of child protection, primarily designed to ensure that children do not languish in care. This paper poses the question: does this trend obscure the rights of relinquishing parents? By inquiring into a specific case, and reflecting on the themes surrounding this practice, the authors suggest that rigorous practice, which attends to the permanency needs of the child, is possible while simultaneously being responsive to the human rights of the biological parents. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

KEY WORDS: adoption policy; risk assessment; partnership; child protection

Adoption as an Instrument of Child Protection Practice

Historically, adoption has been utilized in all English-speaking developed countries as a long-term solution to situations where parents were deemed unable to properly care for their children. Beginning in the 1970s, space opened up for questioning the efficacy of adoption practices within the child protection discourse, with the result that many countries moved away from using adoption as an instrument of child protection. The reasons for this were various, but certainly included:

'In the 1970s, space opened up for questioning the efficacy of adoption practices'

- Activism on the part of indigenous peoples, challenging the colonizing impacts of child welfare practices (Department of Social Welfare, 1986; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)

Ladybird Ladybird 🔞

Ken Loach's devastating, important film documents the personal and social battles a woman must go through in order to continue caring for her children.

Soft is Hardest: Leading for Learning in Child Protection Services Following a Child Fatality

Andrew Turnell
*Resolutions Consultancy
Victoria Park, Western
Australia*

Eileen Munro
London School of Economics

Terry Murphy
*Department for Child
Protection
Government of Western
Australia, Perth*

The way in which a child protection agency responds to a child fatality always has a strong influence on subsequent practice. Very often, organizational responses and child death reviews are punitive and escalate an already anxious and defensive organizational culture. This paper outlines an alternative approach that not only helps staff to manage their emotional responses but also encourages and prioritizes a learning culture within the organization throughout the crisis and in the longer term.

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IHI Leadership Alliance | Care better than we've ever seen, health better than we've ever known, cost we can all afford… for every person, every time.

New Rules for Radical Redesign in Health Care

Change the balance of power: Co-produce health and wellbeing in partnership with patients, families, and communities.

Cultivate and mobilise the pride and joy of the workforce

...what's the matter?

Promote wellbeing: Focus on outcomes that matter the most to people, appreciating that their health...

Create joy in work: Cultivate and mobilize the pride and joy of the health care workforce.

Make it easy: Continually reduce waste and all non-value-added requirements and activities for patients, families, and clinicians.

Move knowledge, not people: Exploit all helpful capacities of modern digital care and continually substitute better alternatives for visits and institutional stays. Meet people where they are, literally.

Collaborate and cooperate: Recognize that the health care system is embedded in a network that extends beyond traditional walls. Eliminate silos and tear down self-protective institutional or professional boundaries that impede flow and responsiveness.

Assume abundance: Use all the assets that can help to optimize the social, economic, and physical environment, especially those brought by patients, families, and communities.

Return the money: Return the money from health care savings to other public and private purposes.

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Two questions to start
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What might be the challenge if you were to describe a piece of social work you have done that you feel proud of in front of others?

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Two questions to finish

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What might be the impact on your sense of professional confidence and and identity if you were led through a process with service recipients to create and publish a story of your work together?

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Staking a Claim for Social Work: Song from Under the Floorboards

Change comes from the periphery . . .

This is a song from under the floorboards
this is a song from where the wall it is cracked
by force of habit I am an insect
I must confess I'm proud as hell about that . . .
(Howard Devoto, 1979)

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The world will change when we can imagine it differently and like artists do the work of creating new social forms . . .

MC Richards

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