
Chris Nyland
d’activités en montrant simplement mais efficacement le caractère multiforme de ces démarches à travers quatre catégories-types. Cet ouvrage pourra tout aussi bien être une référence utile pour les universitaires que pour les partenaires sociaux intéressés à documenter leurs réflexions sur les compétences situées et les thématiques connexes aux démarches compétences : transfert, instrumentalisation, reconnaissance et évaluation.

Pour conclure, cet ouvrage mérite qu’on s’y intéresse, d’abord pour situer nos propres compétences par rapport à des cas vécus, mais aussi pour rendre compte du sens que l’on donne aux compétences, à la place grandissante de leur instrumentalisation et de la formalisation par rapport aux situations rapportées, vécues et documentées qui montrent, en fait, l’importance des dimensions non formelles et informelles.

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Valuing Care Work: Comparative Perspectives

Care work is a broad concept that covers all tasks that involve care activities undertaken in the service of others whether this is done for pay or without remuneration. In recent years this work has become a topic that has attracted a growing body of academic analysis and the editors and 25 contributors to this work are to be applauded for adding to this effort. Valuing Care Work is a readable text which spans a broad range of topics related to both paid and unpaid caring. Benoit and Hallgrimsdóttir bring together a body of contributors from Canada, Finland and Iceland to examine care work which they present in a text that offers insightful commentary that on occasion is truly excellent. The range of topics addressed is impressive and in the case of this reader certainly aroused interest. Topics explored include comparative analysis across social and spatial contexts, paid care work in formal organizations and in intimate and community settings, unpaid care work in intimate settings and economic organizations, and policy implications with all contributions being situated in an environment conditioned by neo-liberalism. The highlight of the text is Phillips, Casey and Leischner’s chapter that discusses workers who are employed in non-profit organizations that care for the needs of sex workers. This contribution is a stand-out for the way in which it clarifies the stressors and concerns of the workers studied and recognizes that these workers can and do provide important care but remain human beings who are torn and compromised by the situation in which they work.

The overarching argument and purpose of the editors is to show that “the more welfare states base their social policies on the principle of caring, the closer they come to championing gender equality in all sectors of society, one where men’s involvement in caring work is championed, where there is equal balance between paid and unpaid work for both women and men, with both sharing opportunities and responsibilities” (p. 10). This is an objective that is to be applauded and the text makes a contribution that may encourage some readers to make greater effort to carry this goal forward. But while the text is successful in challenging the assumption that care work is straightforward sadly the value of the contribution made by the work is somewhat undermined by a failure to adequately specify what care work entails and by a perspective that values women’s care work but, devalues the caring labour undertaken by men.

When explaining what constitutes care work the editors suggest that most of the activities embraced by this notion “are in some way or other connected with the
social reproduction of human beings on a
daily and generational basis” (p. 3). The
contributors all appear to share this broad
understanding but unfortunately this
concept is not developed in a manner that
accords it the specificity required to explain
why the populace and indeed the contribu-
tors themselves appear to accept that child
care workers and nurses are care workers
but university teachers and surgeons are not.
This would be a crucial area of further
research as there is a growing suggestion
that approaches to work like child care is
impacting on care workers themselves and
increasing gender discrimination in the
workforce generally. This text, that seeks to
value care work missed an added opportu-
nity here. In brief, by assuming that high
status occupations that help people to
develop their capabilities is not care work
a chance is missed to enhance the value of
caring work in popular imagination.

The volume would also have been
enriched had Benoit and Hallgrimsdóttir
provided more discussion to theories that
situate care work in the market. This would
have assisted in giving added coherence to
often excellent discussion as their contribu-
tors came to grips with these theories.
Reviewing the relevant literature, England has
highlighted five major perspectives that have
been advanced to explain how the market
addresses care work these being; devaluation
theory, public good theory, prisoner of love
time, commodification of emotion theory,
and “love and money” theory. This body of
literature deserves a pronounced place in any
text that seeks to understand how care work
is valued but unfortunately this has not been
done it this text.

Finally, and possibly reflecting that I
may have a vested interest because I am
a father, I would have liked the text to
accord more attention to the need to value
the care work of men. This is done by very
few of the contributions. This omission is
not made explicit in the titles of the chap-
ters but becomes immediately apparent
within individual chapters. An example
is the chapter titled "Spinning the Family
Web: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
in Canada." This title suggests grandmo-
thers and grandfathers’ contribution will be
discussed but in fact grandparent is equated
with grandmother. This is a feminized, not
a feminist reading, and becomes seriously
unacceptable when the chapter on Aborigi-
nal carers all but ignores race and depicts
these workers as essentially women.

Some of these criticisms may appear
unwarranted but this is such an important
area of research and still only coming into
proper recognition that it is important to
respect and acknowledge the complexities
that historically surround the position of
carer and in the current world these have
become increasingly difficult. I enjoyed
reading this book, commend it to others
who are interested in care work and feel
it makes an important contribution to any
discussion about this topic.

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L’activité des clients : un travail ?
coordonné par Sophie Bernard, Marie-Anne
Dujarier et Guillaume Tiffon, collection
Sciences de la société, n° 82, Toulouse :
Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2011, 210 p.,

Ce numéro thématique de la revue Sciences
de la société porte sur l’activité réalisée
par les clients à différents moments de la
production des biens et des services. L’ori-
iginalité de ces contributions est d’interroger
l’hypothèse voulant que les fournisseurs
instaureraient une division des tâches dans
laquelle les clients sont mis au travail. Hypo-
thèse relativement originale dans ce domaine
d’études mais assez reconnue dans le champ
des études du marketing, où la notion du
client comme quasi employé et surveillant
est discutée depuis plusieurs années. Ce
phénomène émergent constituerait, selon
les coordonnateurs du numéro, une caracté-
ristique du capitalisme contemporain ou,