

Book review

McNeill, F., Raynor, P. and Trotter, C. (eds) (2010)
Offender Supervision: new directions in theory, research and practice.
Cullompton: Willan.

In this exciting, ambitious and significant new book the authors bring together a wide range of contributions from eminent researchers, practitioners and academics on the subject of contemporary developments in offender supervision. The springboard for this new collection of essays is the CREDOS network (Collaboration of Researchers for the Effective Supervision of Offenders) founded in 2007 to encourage and to co-ordinate new research into offender supervision with an international and multi-methodological character. As the Editors who are amongst the founding members of CREDOS write,

‘new impetus seemed to us to be necessary to allow the effectiveness agenda to develop beyond its historical emphasis on the principles of effective programmes.’ (1)

CREDOS, they explain, is committed to ‘methodological pluralism’, ‘collaborative and comparative research’, ‘exploring issues of diversity amongst offenders’ and ‘working to engage offenders and their families in the research process’ (3). Since many of the contributors to this book were present at the founding conference it is no surprise that their work reflects these commitments. (The Editors acknowledge the predominance of Anglophone contributions to the book and, looking towards future collections of work, intend to widen the range of jurisdictions represented).

This book echoes those which followed the ‘What Works?’ conferences of the 1990s (McGuire 1995), communicating the excitement and commitment of practitioners and researchers in similar ways. The theoretical essays and research studies represented here also build on and react to the successes of ‘What Works?’ and the RNR (Risk, Need, Responsivity) model of offender supervision which has been pre-eminent in many counties in recent years. However, they also reflect a new sense of reclaimed ownership after the effects of the adoption and abandonment of the criminal justice research agenda by national governments in some jurisdictions and, as indicated above, they draw on a wider theoretical and ethical base. As McNeill writes as part of the email conversation which led to the formation of CREDOS,

‘It seemed to me that we needed to think a bit harder about the moral qualities of organisations, of practitioners and of interventions, since I think that there is pretty strong evidence that offenders (like everyone else) assess and respond to certain moral qualities of those that have authority over them.’ (6).

Following McNeill, Raynor and Trotter’s introduction, the body of the book is split into six sections. The first of these, which the Editors advise should be read prior to exploring the subsequent chapters, is made up of three essays each introducing the key theoretical paradigms on which offender supervision is currently founded; RNR, the Good Lives Model (GLM) and

Desistance Theory. This section maps out the territory of offender supervision and the various points of departure for new developments. It is followed by a second section in which three contemporary studies of practitioner training and behaviour are presented. It is encouraging to note the focus in these studies on how interventions are delivered and on ‘who works and how?’, given the lessons learnt through the implementation of RNR interventions about the importance of the quality of relationship and communication in effective practice.

A third section looks more broadly at recent studies seeking to identify potential improvements in practice. The focus of these studies varies from risk management, the administrative arrangements best suited to supporting effective practice and structured one-to-one interventions to the involvement of the judiciary in therapeutic practice with offenders. In its variety, this section illustrates the way in which the whole book challenges the comparative narrowness of evaluative studies of RNR interventions, valuable as those studies are (and as the book illustrates). The fourth section adds a new dimension to the rediscovered freedom and range of studies in offender supervision by examining the role of families, local communities, volunteers and faith-based organisations in work with offenders. This section draws particularly on notions of desistance and reflects (in a way characteristic of the book as a whole) the commitment of the Editors to international research in that the four contributions are based on work undertaken in the USA, the Netherlands, Australia and Canada. (Studies undertaken in eleven jurisdictions are included in the collection overall).

The fifth part, dealing with the issue of compliance, supports a neglected area of practice by reference to research studies and to a theoretical discussion which reaches beyond the world of criminal justice to find the theoretical resources necessary to enrich our understanding. The sixth and final part continues the trajectory of the book which moves from more specific practice concerns towards the broader context in which practice is situated. The two initial chapters consider organisational supports and impediments to effective practice and the contribution of government respectively. Equally fascinating subsequent chapters take as their subject, practitioners views of enforcement, risk management and rehabilitation; a discourse analysis of changes in Pre-sentence Reports over time; lessons from oral histories of supervision of offenders in the 1960s and the relationship between offender supervision and electronic monitoring.

This is an enormously rich and rewarding book which addresses a wide range of aspects of offender supervision and it is possible to mention only a few themes here. However, one of its major achievements is to contain the tensions and synergies between the RNR, GLM and Desistance-focused approaches and to provide a forum for dialogue between them. For example, moving from the characteristically trenchant and even prescriptive feel of Andrews and Bonta’s RNR chapter, the contrast in moral and normative tone with Ward’s on the GLM is stark. The differences between deficit and strengths based models and between those in which the offender is variously constructed as object and subject have been the focus of much attention and the relationship between diverse approaches to the supervision of offenders have more often been characterised as competitive. In this book the approaches are brought together and a dialogue is established across ontological, theoretical, methodological and practice divides. If it is too early to speak of the ‘marriage’ between approaches which Maruna, Immerglieu (2004:12) proposed, then at least the ‘truce’ they suggested is achieved and perhaps also an engagement.

Following on from this point, Durrance, Hosking and Thorburn’s chapter on structured one-to-one supervision illustrates the theoretical cross-fertilisation espoused by the CREDOS project. The model of supervision developed draws consciously on both the RNR and GLM models whilst also incorporating recent developments in Attachment Theory. It also addresses directly the question of how supervision practices should vary in response to diversity, in this case creating a programme

for male as well as female offenders. This theoretical openness is to be found in many other chapters including Vogelvang and van Alphen's which draws on Family Therapy and Robinson and McNeill's which makes use of Braithwaite's work on compliance with (and resistance to) taxation laws.

The inclusiveness of the book is also illustrated by the presence of offenders' voices in the work of Trotter (Chapter 14) This and the area of working with diversity are both aspects of the book which might usefully be expanded in future volumes. It is inclusive too of families, communities and volunteers (chapters 12 - 15) and, by contrast with the practice of some office and screen-based practice styles, O'Connor and Bogue in their chapter go so far as to assert that, 'our job is to partner with the community.' (311)

Students of offender supervision, academics, practitioners and researchers will all find this a hugely stimulating and encouraging book. It succeeds in rallying the endeavour of offender supervision despite punitive and managerial excesses, revises and builds on the ground already hard won in recent years and points out new collaborative and international ways forwards. As McNeill argues, reflecting on the history of offender supervision, 'the moral quality and the authenticity of the practitioner's performance seem to lie at the heart of the matter' (506). It is the moral quality and authenticity of the book, appearing as it also does at an important moment for offender supervision, which make the book indispensable.

References

- Maruna, S. and Immarigeon, R. (eds) (2004) *After Crime and Punishment: pathways to offender reintegration*. Cullompton: Willan.
- McGuire, J. (ed) (1995) *What Works: Reducing Reoffending. Guidelines from Research and Practice*. Chichester: Wiley.

Keith Davies

Principal Lecturer, School of Social Work, Kingston University, UK.

E-mail: K.Davies@sgul.kingston.ac.uk