



# Social Work Writing and Bureaucracy

## A Tale in Two Voices

A DISCUSSION PAPER FROM THE CENTRE FOR WELFARE REFORM

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## Summary

This essay is part of an ongoing dialogue between Michael Balkow, children's social worker and Theresa Lillis, Professor in English Language and Applied Linguistics at the Open University, about the function and nature of writing in contemporary social work.

Michael is the main architect of the essay, drawing on his practice as well as his theoretical and philosophical insights to articulate some key concerns he has about the role writing has come to play in social work.

Theresa draws on her work with the ESRC funded project *Writing in Professional Social Work Practice in a Changing Communicative Landscape* (WiSP), involving five local authorities in the UK. More information about the project is available at:

[www.writinginsocialwork.com](http://www.writinginsocialwork.com)

# I. Introduction

Michael

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There are few professions that produce so much written work, as that of social work. Why do social workers write so much, to what end and for what purpose? I think a key reason is risk: its prediction, its management, the public and political perception of risks to the vulnerable and oppressed, and the ultimate limitation of such risk when absolutely unavoidable. To talk of risk, I think it is important that we examine what it means and why our modern lives are swaddled by a so-called, and flippantly referred to 'health and safety culture'. The spectre of risk that haunts social work could be considered the Serious Case Review. These reviews tragically follow the deaths of children or vulnerable adults, making them a benchmark for retrospective learning by reflection upon failure. The Serious Case Review often gets hauled up by tabloid newspapers, judges, anxious professionals or nervous managers, to criticise social workers and in many ways illustrates Kierkegaard's assertion that life can only be understood backwards, but that it must be lived forwards (cited in Deurzen-Smith 1997). Social workers often have to 'live forwards' under considerable pressure, predicting uncertain outcomes in a relatively short space of time. The ubiquitous phrase "hindsight is a fine thing", rings in the ears of anyone who has ever made a mistake. Failure is both a portent and an opportunity to grow after the many times we stumble, only to get back up. The playwright Samuel Beckett asks us: 'Ever tried, ever failed? Try again, fail again, fail better.' (Beckett, 1996) This existential self-help quote is not without irony: failure plays a part in life, making us self-aware and gives us the humility to carry on despite hardship.

Theresa

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Your comment on failure (and I can see what you are saying about the philosophical value of failure) resonates strongly with many comments by social workers we have interviewed. Perhaps not framed explicitly as failure but a strong sense of never doing enough, never spending enough time with the people they are working with, never getting enough time to write in ways they would like to. And the notion of risk lurks all the time. Risk is most evident in what we have called 'defensive recording' where it seems social workers feel they should include everything they do, everything related to a person, a family –their lives, specific events- which is of course impossible.

This would mean living two (working) lives- the one where you do the work, the one where you record your working life. And this impossible task seems to be encoded in many policy and training documents where the idea that everything should (and can be) recorded is repeated (see Lillis, 2017). Of course one consequence of the institutional assumption that everything can be recorded is that ‘If it’s not written down it didn’t happen,’ a phrase repeated by many social workers.

A key danger in defensive recording is that the purpose of the records can get distorted- the record becomes less and less about the people social workers are working with and for. As you and I have discussed, records are important accounts for people to read at some point in their lives, to make sense of their lives. For example, a Child's Permanence Report may allow a child to understand why they were adopted and the history of their biological parents. More generally, if social workers feel constantly compelled towards defensive recording, the focus in writing can become distracted, clouded by an anxiety generated by rigid practices associated with evidencing an audit trail, which can make the writing less and less centred on the person and more oriented to the institution.

## 2. Social work theory into practice

Michael

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It could be argued that writing and social work becomes problematic even before the social worker enters the field. What kind of language and theory can be used in social work writing? There is an undeniable tradition of obfuscation in academia, in particular relation to the social sciences and social work theory. Any long suffering fan of the esoteric and excruciating prose styles of philosophers and theorists, could argue defensively that these thinkers were tackling the greatest problems of their age and their forbears, detailing their complex thoughts and ideas on the page. Notwithstanding such hardship, it becomes difficult to forgive examples such as the following:

*The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power*

Dutton, 1998

The above piece won Judith Butler first prize in the 1998 Bad Writing Contest. Butler's prose style was critiqued in a far more sophisticated manner, by fellow philosopher and feminist Martha C. Nussbaum, in her essay, 'The Professor of Parody'. Nussbaum sees the value of academic feminism, as to be entwined with action:

*Feminist theory has been understood by theorists as not just fancy words on paper; theory is connected to proposals for social change. Thus feminist scholars have engaged in many concrete projects: the reform of rape law; winning attention and legal redress for the problems of domestic violence and sexual harassment; improving women's economic opportunities, working conditions, and education; winning pregnancy benefits for female workers; campaigning against the trafficking of women and girls in prostitution; working for the social and political equality of lesbians and gay men.*

Nussbaum, 2000



Nussbaum's frustration with a thinker like Butler, is that her thoughts on the page become so abstract and distanced from any sort of example grounded in reality, that it questions the purpose of these ideas – to whom – or for whom they speak. Social work theory, although gradually gaining in grounding and confidence, has always eclectically borrowed from other disciplines, and perhaps in a less than sure-footed way given social workers lack of professional confidence. For the most part, social workers lead on all instances of child abuse, yet in the court arena, we tend to get sidelined for more credible experts such as psychologists and child's guardians. Social work theory has previously come under political scrutiny. For example in 2013, Michael Gove the then Education secretary, said that many social workers were “not up to the job”, and that too many frontline social workers had been filled with “idealistic” left-wing dogma that allows people from troubled backgrounds to “make excuses” (Paton, 2013).

## Theresa

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I'm interested in the connection you are making between language/ knowledge base/epistemology and professional confidence. I hadn't thought of this in quite this way before – in terms of the academic knowledge base that social workers experience at university - but it connects for me with a question I have been asking myself about social worker professional discourse and writing. What counts as professional discourse in social work writing? This is not just a theoretical question. As part of the WiSP research, I've observed social workers drafting documents in real time and I've listened to them discuss what terms they could use legitimately, for example in one instance, they were discussing whether a judge would accept the particular terms they wanted to use as being within a social worker's expertise. It's hard to imagine other professions, such as psychologists or doctors, being so unsure of their right to use and own certain terms to analyse what they understand to be going on. Many local authority guidelines urge social workers not to use 'jargon' which of course makes sense if by 'jargon' we mean words and phrases that don't add any useful meaning to what's being written- this connects back with what I understand you to be saying about Butler. But as with any profession which is expected to demonstrate a solid knowledge-base, using what we might think of as specialist terminology- where it helps to articulate a particular aspect of experience- is surely not only valid but essential.

But this is a really contested area in social work. As you and I have discussed, a good example of the debates around the challenges for social workers using certain specialist, academically-loaded terms (in the context

of shifting understandings about what such terms mean) is an article by David Shemmings and the responses to it (Shemmings, 2018). Shemmings, an academic expert in attachment theory, wrote an article arguing that social workers should avoid using the theoretical term ‘attachment’ in court documentation, following a judge’s criticism of a social worker’s use of what was viewed as an inaccurate/incorrect use of ‘attachment’ in her report. Both his argument and the responses to it are interesting because they illustrate the conundrum social workers often experience in terms of what we might call their ‘discourse of expertise’- simply put, what words (and underpinning epistemology) can they legitimately use? This question is answered implicitly in the article in the call for social workers to report ‘what they see’ using what might be considered more neutral terms (for example the use of ‘relationship’ instead of ‘attachment’). But this call is problematic: it seems to ignore the powerful mediating effect of all language use in naming what we see and also implicitly seems to suggest social workers do not have a right to use a specialist language that is meaningful to the work they are doing. As you’ve said, in the case of child protection, for the most part, social workers lead on all instances of child abuse, they tend to get side-lined for more ‘credible experts’ and language is core to such credibility.

I’m deeply troubled by the position social workers are in- as having to work through and find some (re)solutions to some of the most complex human challenges often under considerable time and resource constraints. The WiSP project focuses on writing but inevitably puts a spotlight on the lived experience of social workers, an experience that needs to be given serious attention by politicians concerned with social justice. I think the public and politicians alike need to consider what day-to-day social work practice is like, what kind of time and effort is actually needed and the kind of resources required, particularly if professional burn-out is to be significantly reduced: here’s a brief account of one children’s social worker’s week (based on longer, detailed researcher descriptions) which foregrounds the amount of writing being done but sets this within the context of social work in general.

*Melanie worked long days centering on a number of different cases involving a wide range of writing. But one particular case and the highly consequential piece of writing- court report- that had to be completed by the end of the week loomed large, all week, as she engaged with other work. In practical terms, she managed the need for uninterrupted time on the report by working on aspects of it every day, working before and after work at home. She talked about it every day, discussing it with a co-worker, with her manager and*

*receiving hard copy comments from her manager. The pressure was rising to complete this document as the week wore on whilst also continuing with her other work. On the day before the report was due she was on duty (taking calls on all new incidents and issues) and faced a very difficult situation where a mother repeatedly stated she would kill herself if social services did not remove her 11 year old son. After 10 hours of complex interactional work, the child was taken officially under social services care: the point at which this decision was taken was the one moment where Melanie's absolute calm was pierced – 'I can't remove any more children. I just can't do this again'. Melanie ended her day by taking the child for a burger at 8 at night (he'd been wandering the streets all day) and finally finding a foster care placement at 9 at night. On Friday she went into work at 8 am, completed the report whilst working on other cases. She planned to spend time over the weekend writing a Special Guardianship Order Assessment relating to another case and catching up on case notes.*

Lillis, Leedham and Twiner (under review)

### 3. Context from practice

Michael

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A key concern about social work is the sheer volumes of writing we are expected to produce. Let me outline some context from my experience which echoes the account you just provided of Melanie. As a practicing social worker approaching four years in, I can still recall the tremulous feelings of anxiety before starting what seemed like the insurmountable task of a 15,000 word dissertation as the final part of my social work masters. However, this now seems fairly tame when compared with the kind of writing social workers have to produce, as I often like to playfully remind my colleagues, after they have just completed a 10,000 word court report – under duress to a deadline of a handful of days – that even the prolific writer Stephen King’s daily word count is only 2,000 words. I am of course providing a jovial response to a deep-rooted problem of social work. A 10,000 word report, which is often the length of an initial statement, to request an interim care order from a children and family court, would take myself (with nearly four year’s experience) at least two to three days, out of the five day deadline to complete.

Theresa

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Some findings from the WiSP project support the claims you are making about the sheer amount of writing involved so are perhaps useful to list briefly here:

- We identified 341 differently labelled text types that constitute everyday social work written discourse and practice,
- Texts we collected are of many different types and range from two-word emails, to very long, e.g. 14,000 word Child Permanence Report.
- In interviews most social workers estimated they spent more than 50% of their time on writing. Regardless of the amount estimated (between 50% and 98%) the overriding feeling was that too much time being spent on writing as compared to working directly with service users

Your emphasis on the need to re-balance is a key theme in the interviews we have carried out. And again social workers seem to be experiencing what feels like an impossible work situation. Nobody denies the importance of

recording and representing events and experience but securing a meaningful balance seems to be hugely problematic. As one social worker commented:

*I would say there is often a debate about [if/whether] you can be a good social worker in practice and you can be a good social worker on paper, but you can't be both.*

Lillis, Leedham and Twiner (in press)

## 4. Risk society and the written record

Michael

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I've already flagged up what I see as an underlying driver to much social work writing, which is that of risk. In the social work office there is often a type of culpability culture, where records are accounts of action, and the high-rising tide of paperwork is often made justifiable by accountability. Recording provides risk management and the ability to share information with people and professionals. It is a justification for action, or retrospective reflection on reactive actions. It can be the capturing of voice, the construction of story and narrative or the vindication of inaction or withdrawal of service. Managers often urge social workers – with some anxiety – to get records up to date, to “cover your back.” This terrifying warning is redolent of being stabbed in the back – or perhaps less violently expressed as being betrayed or made culpable for a systemic failure, the solutions to which are far from an individual professional's reach. As Webb points out in his discussion of social work inspections:

*'front line workers often perceive regulatory audit and inspection in negative terms. They deepen suspicion and anxiety within an already vociferous blame culture ... In line with neo-liberal practice they put the question of responsibility into the context of conquest, not the context of common values.'*

Webb, 2006 p69-70

Theresa

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Are there particular types of social work writing that you think illustrate the risk and blame culture?

Michael

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A key part of the written dimension of social work is plans. Child's plans, care plans, looked-after children's plans, placement plans and so forth. These are designed to identify work to be undertaken and by whom. Social work academics have highlighted that planning has become a veritable obsession in social work practices (Webb, 2006 p96). In relation to this, Webb further expands on Giddens' work on bureaucracy and reflexivity,

whereby organised life planning becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity (ibid, p94). When written plans become excessive, driven by timescales rather than collaboratively written with those for whom they speak, it can feel like the audience becomes a future auditor or inspector to review, when mishap, injury or even tragedy occurs.

### Theresa

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The development of specific technologies for writing and managing written texts, such as the ICT systems now used across all social services, has played a major role in shaping both what gets recorded and how. The effect of ICT on key recording practices has been highlighted for example by Hall et al (2010) and White et al (2010) who argue that the predesigned ICT systems orient writers towards description and away from narrative, making it difficult for even the most informed readers to grasp a holistic understanding of any particular person and their life circumstances.

I think the focus on plans and planning may in part be a result of ICT systems too. Of course we have to be careful here, technologies don't determine how we- as humans, as professionals, as workers- should use them. But it is the case that the particular affordances of specific technologies seem to lead to them being used in particular ways. So the introduction of ICT systems was heralded as a way of saving time on bureaucracy but it seems to have led (at least in part) to an emphasis on auditing practices rather than facilitating the kind of practices- including writing practices- in which social workers would like to engage. Many social workers have talked to us about 'feeding the beast'- meaning that there's a feeling that you have to literally input more and more text just because the system demands it, not because it makes professional sense to do so. The very existence of the ICT system seems to shift from being a facilitator of work -that is to serve meaningful practice and services- and instead becomes the purpose of practice- the end rather than a means.

Another example we've discussed of how templated ICT documents can unrealistically drive practice are performance spreadsheets. You gave the example from your context about asking a service manager what realistic percentage she was expecting teams to achieve in meeting all targets. She answered without irony - 100%. This makes no sense in real practice: for example, a team might have 80% of visits completed on time which is high if you also take into account the variables of lived experience, such as staff sickness, or the need for social workers to spend more time with people than workflows dictate. ICT systems enacting auditing ideologies work with the notion of a perfect flawless service without taking account of day-to day legitimate realities.

## 5. Public perception and the Serious Case Review

Michael

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With attacks on the profession often coming from an unrelenting media and savage public, it can lead social workers into an insecurity of their professional confidence. Perhaps social workers try to compensate for their lack of confidence in theory, by replacing this with voluminous amounts of paperwork in practice, to add every little piece of information about recorded harm to a child or vulnerable adult, rather than a concise analysis of how this harm will effect upon their life or development. To try to locate factors that have led social work into a writing intensive profession, it is worth drawing from Nigel Parton's work on the politics of child abuse. He points to the central positioning of child abuse and social work in the 1970s, coming to the fore in particular after the death of Maria Colwell in 1973, who was aged seven at the time of her death, at the hands of her step-father whilst under local authority supervision. The public enquiry that followed catapulted the issues of child abuse and the practices of health and welfare professionals, particularly social workers, into the centre of public, political and media attention. These public enquiries, now known as Serious Case Reviews – a retrospective analysis of practice that I mentioned earlier – are arguably one of the main driving forces behind changes to social work policy and practice (Parton, 2006 p29-32). They can also create a vicious blame culture, as seen in the wake of the death of Peter Connelly, a seventeen month old boy who died in 2007 from severe injuries inflicted whilst he was in the care of his mother, her boyfriend and a lodger in the household. Both males were found guilty of causing or allowing the death of a child – the mother having already pleaded guilty. The media's savage response to social workers involved in the case created what Parton called the 'politics of outrage' (Parton, 2014 p79). Politicians such as Iain Duncan Smith, the former Conservative Party leader, saw the case of Peter Connelly as a sign of the 'broken society'. The former Shadow Secretary for Work and Pensions, called for out of work parents to have their home lives and prospects investigated in the context of the Conservative Party plans to 'tackle underclass Britain' (Garrett, 2009 p148).

In the wake of such tragedies, it is worth paying attention to the rhetoric of politicians and to consider their motivations. Politically, if you paint social workers as left wing ideologues, culpable and responsible for tragedies



due to collusion with persons through sympathy, this can disingenuously distract from larger social problems. There is much evidence to support that austerity, a long time feature of the Conservative Party, is harmful to the most vulnerable in society and exacerbates social problems. It is far easier for politicians to scapegoat social workers as responsible for the tragedy of child deaths – less easy for them to examine larger problems, ramped up by government imposed austerity. The study by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) Think-tank found that:

*More than 130,000 deaths in the UK since 2012 could have been prevented if improvements in public health policy had not stalled as a direct result of austerity cuts.*

Helm, 2019 (online)

Social work must defend its position when under attack from politicians, who by their own actions are creating societal conditions where tragedy increasingly occurs.

## Theresa

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Yes and these larger issues connect with what I would refer to as ‘defensive recording’ whereby there’s an imperative (both at an institutional and individual level) to record everything - in case something is potentially relevant and this leads to anxiety about not missing any detail. As one social worker stated:

*If someone were to look at one of my cases I would like to think that there is everything [in case notes], not to say you can’t make mistakes—. You don’t want to miss anything—what you don’t want to do is miss things.*

Lillis, 2017

It also links for me with the issue about what counts as description and analysis and indeed what kind of discourse social workers are expected (or allowed) to use. Description and analysis are often talked about as if the difference were absolutely clear but as we’ve already discussed, careful description is what social workers are often expected to produce- and careful description always involves analysis, even if this is implied rather than made explicit. In the context of a blame culture, a particular kind of description seems to be going on- lots of details which evidence a social worker’s interaction with a service user at the expense of what we might think of as motivated or analytical description which reflects a professional expertise and authority.

## 6. David Graeber and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy

Michael

I have found the book by David Graeber *The Utopia of Rules. On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (2015) really useful in capturing the kind of bureaucratization that I think we experience in everyday social work. He discusses total bureaucratization as:

*This process - the gradual fusion of public and private power into a single entity, rife with rules and regulations whose ultimate purpose is to extract wealth in the form of profit ... It fills our days with paperwork. Application forms get longer and more elaborate’.*

Graeber, 2015:17

This seems to apply particularly well to social work writing, which also has a similar role in that we as social workers extract then scrutinise information from service users – from their private lives, and place them onto the more public pages of assessments or court papers. One father I worked with told me he felt it was dangerous to talk to a certain professional, as she had written unfavourably about him in a report. She was of course doing her job, but in that moment he felt the full force of the printed word, with its potential to alter the course of his family life. Graeber also draws from French philosopher Michel Foucault:

*Foucault was more subversive ... in his work on asylums, clinics, prisons, and the rest, absolutely every aspect of human life – health, sexuality, work, morality, our very conceptions of truth - became nothing in and of themselves, but merely products of one or another form of professional or administrative discourse ... for Foucault, all forms of knowledge became forms of power, shaping our minds and bodies through largely administrative means.*

Graeber, 2015: 55

Graeber’s critique of bureaucracy comes from the political left, following certain anarchistic traditions. He argues that there is a secret joy to rules, drawing on work which shows that children, when playing imaginary games, spend as much time arguing about the rules than playing the actual game (2015:192). Therefore rules give the space and parameters to allow for creativity. However, he follows that a society where everyone plays by the rules is merely a Utopian fantasy. Graeber sees bureaucracy, in the political-

economic context as the means for a tiny percentage of the population to extract the wealth from the rest, where arbitrary power distills itself through 'regulations that choke existence' (2015: 205). On the smaller scale of social work practice, it is often argued that you cannot do social work – create and establish relationships with adults, children, families and professionals, if you spend endless days filling in forms and writing reports about them. Social work with its bureaucracy of assessments, plans, reports and tick boxes can detract and stifle the creativity of social work, which is continually constructed and reconstructed by social workers involvements with service users.

### Theresa

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There is a strong tradition of researching the ways in which written documents powerfully mediate people's lives. This includes for example research on the way written documents are used in applications for people seeking refugee status- and the problematic ways in which oral accounts (often in several languages) get transformed into written accounts (in one standard version of a language) offering particular (often incorrect) versions of people's lives (for example, Blommaert, 2008). The written document holds a particular legitimacy that is attributed to the written (rather than the spoken) word in Western societies. And ideologies about what a good written document should look (and sound) like are typically quite rigid. And social work is no different. An example arising in our work specifically about young people seeking refugee status centred on a debate between a social worker and a manager about how best to represent in written English the young person's account- given that the account itself was originally spoken in an Arabic dialect and translated into English and that the account was patchy and (not surprisingly) confusing.

Representation is of course very complex. The father you mention raises many important issues about producing a written record illustrating that this is not a straightforward task. Typically social work documents are written in a formal voice and with a presumed distant, although specific kind of addressee- a manager, a judge etc. Service users in WiSP have argued that all documents should be explicitly addressed to them and that this would change both the content and form of what is being expressed. This is in fact happening in some areas- one social worker talked of how in her authority children's social workers were writing all their documents 'to' the child which immediately helped reclaim the written space from one as involving no immediately obvious author or addressee (what we can call the administrative function) to one involving actual participants engaging in human encounter (a dialogic function).

## 7. Final Thoughts

Michael

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I've been reflecting quite theoretically on the underlying premises of contemporary social work. I do find it helpful to draw on philosophers and critical theorists to try and articulate key aspects of busy, complicated everyday social work practice. To guide us away from the sometimes difficult and dense theoretical considerations, I will now express the extremes: I have seen fellow colleagues in tears, on the cusp of breaking down, due in part to the gravity of situations – the removing of children from their biological parents, which is tough enough – yet when you have to justify this to a court via the means of paperwork which may easily exceed 15,000 words, it is easy to see why for social workers, to borrow from William Butler Yeats: “things fall apart.” The endless duplicating swathes of paperwork and exacting actuarial performance and compliance statistics, can feel miles away as a vulnerable person discloses abuse, or a parent minimises their lifestyle choices, denying it has any effect upon their children. I have written elsewhere about social works links to philosophy:

*Simon Critchley argues that philosophy begins with an experience of disappointment that is both religious and political ... questioning how justice can ever be effective in a violently unjust world.*

Balkow, 2017

I draw this essay to an end with the same sentiments: that of the dangers of too much writing gathering a distance between the social worker and the service user, burying their voice under a pile of paperwork, as we spend less time with them, and more time justifying our actions.

## 8. Conclusion

The authors of this paper believe that the volume of writing produced by social workers needs to be urgently addressed. From the research conducted, and the personal and professional accounts contained herein, social work writing is problematic not least because it can contribute to worker burn-out and overall lack of professional confidence.

Social work practice and social work writing, are both connected and distant at the same time. They require different sets of skills and experience, and both should be subject to continued review and professional development. Social Work England as a new and independent regulatory body, has the opportunity to review social work writing and give consideration to including it in their new professional standards. Local authorities are in the position to be able to conduct in-house reviews of social work documentation with the overall aim of reducing 'paperwork'. They employ a workforce with an expansive knowledge and experience base. Their social workers will have varied backgrounds and a diverse set of skills and experience. Also, on their doorstep are service user groups, who should be a central part of these reviews. Their views can form the basis of focus groups, with the aim of ensuring social work writing does not detract from practice, drawing social workers away from fieldwork, to overlaid systems of documentation. These reviews need not be outsourced or commissioned, but rather completed in the confines of local authorities' own expert professional network.

### Recommendations

1. Local authorities to conduct in-house reviews of social work written recording led by social workers with the primary goal of reducing time spent writing.
2. Social Work England to focus specifically on written recording as part of its responsibility to develop professional and educational standards for social workers and to include the following considerations:
  - The centrality of writing across a range of purposes and contexts should be explicitly mentioned in the standards to underline the importance of writing as professional practice.
  - Writing should be explicitly mentioned as a key area of ongoing professional development and responsibility.
  - Writing should be acknowledged as being broader than 'case recording' and 'report writing' in order to recognise written communication as a core and complex element of professional practice.

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**Michael Balkow** has worked as a children's social worker for close to four years and currently works for the children with disabilities team in Sheffield. He publishes essays on social work at the Centre for Welfare Reform, with interests including transgender children, ethics, dignity in dying and the bureaucratic barriers to person-centred and relationship based social work.

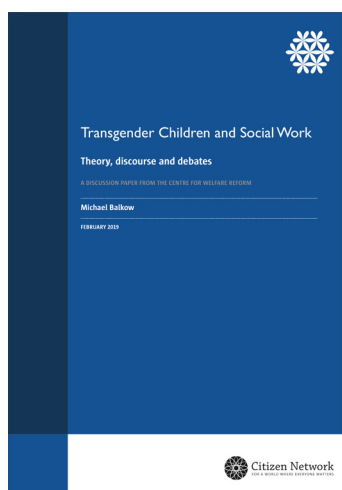
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Theresa draws on analysis and findings from this study to engage in dialogue with Michael and the key points he raises (the study uses tools from ethnography, qualitative discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to explore the nature and significance of writing in professional practice and the ways in which writing is situated within social workers' everyday working lives. Core datasets include interviews with 71 social workers, 10 weeks of researcher observations, 483 days of social worker writing activity logs, and the collection of 4,608 written texts).

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