Article

Shift Recording in Residential Child Care: Purposes, Issues and Implications for Policy and Practice

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Abstract

The ways in which information about children in residential child care is recorded and stored raises important implications for service-users, professionals and organizations but is an area of social welfare practise that is under-theorized. Whilst interest in social work recording has been evident in the recent ‘turn to language’ and ‘electronic turn’, such interest has not extended to residential child care. This study investigates a routine aspect of daily recording in residential units, shift reports. It draws on the findings of a small-scale study conducted, predominantly, in one local authority in Scotland to begin to explore and critique the purposes and implications of shift recording. The findings and ensuing discussion raise important epistemological, ethical and practical concerns for policy and practise and, at a wider level, contribute to debates concerning the surveillance of looked after children and young people and the nature of care as it is conceived in public discourse. Recommendations are made in relation to policy and practise on recording in residential child care, including a discussion on pedagogical documentation and directions for future research.

Introduction

This article concerns shift recording in residential child care settings, a subject that is at present almost wholly untheorized. Shift recording is the completion of a written record by residential child care workers at the end of every shift pertaining to each resident young person.¹ In addition to charting children’s activities and behavior, this may include observations about their mood, personal hygiene and presentation. Recording generates ambivalent feelings amongst social services professionals (O’Rourke 2010). At times perceived as ‘boring’ or taking time away from ‘real work’ with young people (Comben and Lishman 1995; Prince 1996), it also assumes other functions. Recording may be employed as a defense against anxiety in the belief that having something recorded protects against risks inherent in the work (c.f. Smith 2009: 95). It may also serve as a mechanism by which workers distance themselves from particular challenges of childcare; practicing ‘childcare with gloves on’ (Horwath 2000).

Despite policy according it an important role in underpinning good practise (Social Work Inspection Agency 2010), interest in recording has mainly focused on bureaucratic rather than theoretical concerns (O’Rourke 2010; Tice 1998). It is viewed as a technical task rather than one having important implications for social work service-users, professionals and organizations. Social work’s ‘turn to language’ (Hall and White 2005) and ‘electronic turn’ (Garrett 2005) have explored some of these implications in relation to

¹ ‘Child’ and ‘young person’ will be used interchangeably.

the wider profession. The increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to record and share personal information under the rubric of child protection has extended surveillance into service-users' lives, with implications for their civil liberties (Wrennall 2010).

This article summarizes findings from a small-scale research project carried out in Scotland in 2011. Through interviews with residential care workers it investigated what workers believed to be the purposes of such recording and what they thought were the implications of it for themselves, children and their organizations. The findings contribute to an increased understanding of the surveillance of children and young people in residential child care and suggests this has implications for the construction of service-user identities and the conceptualization of care within public discourse.

Legislation and Policy

In Scotland, recording is underpinned by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Volume 2 of its *Guidance* (Scottish Office 1997) and policy and standards such as the *National Care Standards for Care Homes for Children and Young People* (Scottish Government 2005). These specify information to be kept by residential establishments in relation to young people. The Data Protection Act 1998² provides clients the right to access their own personal information held electronically by social work departments. Its principles are considered good practise for non-electronic information (Clark and McGhee 2008). Principle 3 states that data must be adequate, relevant and not excessive for purpose.

Recording is underpinned by human rights legislation and professional codes. Articles 12 and 16 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child*, for example, provide that the views of the child must be taken into account and that children have a right to privacy. The Scottish Social Services Council's (2009) *Codes of Practice*, state that social workers must maintain 'clear and accurate records as required by procedures established for [their] work' (code 6.2). This provides little insight or guidance into difficulties in recording, reflecting a view that recording is a routine and instrumental task and assumes that agency procedures are unproblematic. Other codes include respecting and maintaining the dignity and privacy of service-users (code 1.4). This is particularly pertinent in residential child care due to the intimacy of the engagements and relationships forged in the 'livespace' (Smith 2009) and the high levels of supervision of young people (McIntosh et al. 2010).

Comben and Lishman's (1995) *Setting the Record Straight* is the principal guidance on recording in residential child care. This was commissioned following the Skinner Report (1992), a major review of residential child care in Scotland, which recognized that recording in such settings had been a 'neglected subject'. *Setting the Record Straight* outlined several purposes of recording relating to support of direct practise, communication and accountability. Recording supports direct practise by storing information which may otherwise be forgotten, facilitating communication between staff, children, families and other agencies (Comben and Lishman 1995), helping workers to think (Payne 1978), and informing assessment and care planning. Monitoring, review and evaluation of care plans can take place by comparing records over time.

Residential Child Care in Scotland.

Residential care is one option in state provision for children who cannot be cared for in their family of origin. Units generally consist of around six beds for young people with about four day shift teams of three staff each plus night staff. In Scotland children are generally accommodated either through an order made by a Children's Hearing or voluntarily through section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Residential care invariably caters for children from conditions of poverty (Bebbington and Miles 1989) and increasingly is a residual option for children who cannot be maintained in alternative family settings, whether kinship or foster care. It is described as 'a physical setting in which children and young people are

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents>

offered care—physical nurturing, social learning opportunities, the promotion of health and wellbeing and specialized behaviour training’ (Fulcher 2001: 418). Steckley and Smith (2011) argue that moral and relational considerations are also central to how care is offered and experienced; ‘the giving and receiving of care happens at instrumental but also emotional levels’ (Smith et al. 2013: 1). Whilst in Scotland and the rest of the UK residential child care is located and conceptualized within the social work profession, it evinces significant differences from other branches of social work (Smith 2003). Chief amongst these is the ‘lifespace’ orientation of residential work: ‘practitioners take as the theatre for their work the actual living situations as shared with and experienced by the child’ (Ainsworth 1981: 234).

Historically residential child care mirrored, and was in many respects considered an extension of, the family and in that sense was located firmly within the private realm. Recording of daily life was minimal. A number of developments have seen care shift from the private to the public domain. Attempts to ‘professionalize’ care from the 1970s onwards led to a move away from live-in staff and towards what Douglas and Payne (1981) called an ‘industrial model’. This saw the introduction of shift systems and the attendant separation of the personal and professional lives of staff. Shift systems entailed that knowledge on children, or what needed to be done, could no longer be held in the heads of key adults but that systems were required to communicate information between individuals who might go days without seeing one another. The voluminosity of records in some settings is captured in the following example:

Staff are expected to keep three simultaneous daily logs. The first is a handwritten diary noting movements of staff and children in and out of the home... The second is a round-the-clock record of the children’s activities and staff registering, for instance, if a child gets up for a glass of water in the night. The third is an individual log compiled each day for each child, noting their activities and behaviour. All these logs and diaries must be stored for a minimum of 75 years—partly in case a child makes an allegation of abuse against a care worker. So many need to be held onto that thousands are kept at a disused salt mine in Kent.

(*Sunday Times*, 18th March 2007, cited in Smith 2008; cf. Hacking 1982)

A tension arises between this kind of hyper-recording and the current policy discourse of corporate parenting within which attention, it is claimed, ought to focus on the ‘parenting’ rather than the ‘corporate’ dimension (Scottish Government 2008a). This raises the question of how much of looked after children’s lives ought to be recorded, corresponding to wider debates concerning the extent to which children’s lives are subject to surveillance (Marx and Steeves 2010).

Residential child care has been subject to the same push for accountability that has affected all public services in recent years. This assumes an additional dimension in residential child care where revelations and allegations of abuse have erupted over the past 30 years or so. The anxiety induced by these scandals has encouraged a culture of recording to evidence the kind of transparency that policy makers and managers seem to want and that practitioners believe, rightly or wrongly, will protect themselves from allegations of abuse. The last New Labour government oversaw a massive increase in regulatory regimes in the belief this would lead to greater accountability of public institutions (Humphrey 2003). In Scotland, the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 established the Care Commission, now Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland. The requirement for service providers to evidence their practise to comply with the demands of inspections and audits has increased the demand for recording. Recording functions as a mechanism of accountability by making practise ‘visible’ to external scrutiny (Munro 2004; Pithouse 1987). Shift records also act as evidence where there has been a complaint or significant incident; they have a key role in risk management (Gelman 1992).

Information and Communication Technologies

The increasing use of ICTs by local authorities (Garrett 2005) has been a significant development affecting recording practise. The principal local authority in this study was introducing an electronic client information system into its residential units. This database is accessible to a large number of local authority social services workers. Rather than recording paper shift reports, workers now complete electronic 'case notes' which are 'workflowed' to each young person's social worker.

Rather than reducing recording demands, there is evidence to suggest that elsewhere the introduction of ICTs has increased them (Burton and van den Broek 2009). Concerns exist for individuals' privacy given the increased potential for surveillance and information sharing (Keymolen and Broeders 2011). This is particularly pertinent in residential child care where it may be difficult to determine what is relevant to record and a great deal of incidental information may be gathered. This has implications for whether the amount of information recorded is excessive and with whom it should be shared.

Parton (2008, 2009) has suggested that the use of ICTs has epistemological implications. Social work has now become more 'informational' than 'social', with diminishing emphasis placed on relationships. In order to make decision-making more accountable and predictable there has been a shift from 'knowledge', which is mental and often kept in people's heads, to 'information' which is 'disembodied, decontextualised and objectified' (2008: 262), resulting in the subjugation of aspects of service-users' identities. Bradt et al. (2011) investigated data-recording practises in a victim-offender mediation service in Belgium, concluding that recording focusing on social workers' activities also fails to recognize the *social* dimension of social work practise.

This is not to suggest that within residential child care there has been a fall from a pre-technological Eden. According to Willse (2008), technology is not antithetical to the social; both are involved in rendering subjects as knowable. Residential child care, like social work, is 'always already technologized' (ibid.). Each age has its technologies to facilitate communication and control within residential homes, such as the telephone or the handwritten diary. More broadly surveillance within the private and social realms has been transformed by changes in technology. The protection of children through surveillance is said to be characteristic of modern childhood (Fotel and Thomsen 2004) and has been presented as 'a necessary tool of responsible and loving parenting' (Marx and Steeves 2010: 192). Boundaries between public and private spaces have become increasingly permeable (Rapoport 2012). Children in residential childcare are not necessarily subject to *more* surveillance than their peers. Surveillance does however have differential impacts upon different individuals and groups and may have a role in maintaining and reproducing systems of inequality (Willse 2008). This study seeks to understand the qualities of shift recording as a surveillant technology and its implications for children in this particular setting.

Recording as Surveillance

Foucault (1975: 189) regarded recording as a disciplinary technology. Such technologies involve mechanisms of hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgment and examination. Hierarchical surveillance operates as a 'nonreciprocal monitoring gaze' (Parton 1999). Shift recording is based upon the observations of staff and therefore requires surveillance. Normalizing judgment involves the evaluation of conduct in relation to standards (ibid.). Staff members exercise judgment in what they record, firstly in evaluating what they see and then deciding whether it is relevant to record or not. Judgments on what to record are necessarily based upon standards or norms such as 'age-appropriate behavior', 'risk factors', 'resilience', 'signs of abuse' etc. Such norms may have different foundations. For example, what is regarded as 'age-appropriate behavior' may be based upon theories of human development, culture and/or personal experience. Standards or norms may reflect legislation and policy such as the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) 'Wellbeing Indicators' used in Scotland (Scottish Government 2008b). Judgment is also used by workers in translating observations into writing. The examination is the combination of hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment (Foucault 1975)

and occurs whenever young people are subject to the 'gaze' of staff, producing knowledge inscribed in shift reports. This falls short of the Panoptic ideal of continuous surveillance as there will be times when young people are outside this gaze, in spaces which afford them varying degrees of privacy such as their own bedrooms or outside the unit (although they may still be subject to other surveillance). This particular surveillance is therefore discontinuous (c.f. Gallagher 2010) and multi-directional, as young people can also observe staff whilst being observed (McIntosh et al. 2010).

These processes have disciplinary and regulatory effects. Discipline 'produces knowledge by constituting individuals as objects of scientific discourse' (Parton 1999: 112). Regulation functions by influencing people's behavior, both the young persons' and professionals', as it influences their understanding and interpretation of reality. A person's behavior is influenced by their 'lifespace', involving the individual and their psychological environment at a given time (Lewin 1943). Within this field is included the individual's views about their past and future. A young person's record becomes part of their lifespace as it affects how others behave towards them and the constitution of 'the 'reality-level' of the past' (ibid: 303). A simplistic example would be where a young person is admitted to a unit under the influence of alcohol and assaults a member of staff. A recording is made of this violent incident within the young person's record. Staff reading this may respond by being wary around that young person, or especially strict. Either way, their behavior will be influenced by what has been recorded. The young person may respond by attempting to avoid situations that may lead to such incidents or they may play up to their developing reputation if they find that staff placate them (see Hardy 2012 for further examples).

For Foucault, power is inscribed in practises rather than vested in or exercised by one group over another (Foucault 1975). Although power is not held by anyone, people and groups are positioned differently within the 'play of forces' (Bordo 1993). As workers have 'definitional privilege', the power to define reality in recording (Taylor and White 2000), and agencies and managers set the principles on which this takes place, shift reports will necessarily be professional representations shaped by professional interests. Young people may find it difficult to put forward alternative representations or influence the content of reports (Askeland and Payne 1999; Tice 1998). The disparity between official records and young people's perceptions has been documented by Martin (1998) who interviewed 30 young people aged 18-19 and found that they felt their records did not reflect their realities.

Residential workers are also subject to discipline, as records may be used to control and evaluate them (Comben and Lishman 1995). They are 'supervisors, perpetually supervised' (Foucault 1975). Such disciplining of the workforce is a key feature of the development of managerialism within social services, 'a set of beliefs and practises that assumes better management will resolve a wide range of economic and social problems' (Tsui and Cheung 2004: 437). This has led to increased managerial scrutiny of front-line staff, demanding the development of a conceptual framework for describing practise and documentation for recording in order to make social work more 'visible' to scrutiny (Munro 2004). O'Rourke (2010: 162) describes the role of the record in accountability as 'concerned with producing an account that adequately documents... that both the individual practitioner and the organization have properly discharged their duties and responsibilities'. This may lead to a predominant emphasis on the documentation produced and compliance with regulations, rather than the quality of direct practise (e.g. Munro 2004).

Methodology

Seven professionals were interviewed, five residential care officers (RCOs) and two assistant unit managers (AUMs). All informants worked in local authority open and secure units, six of them in one local authority. Two of the informants were previously known to the author as work colleagues. The informant who worked for another local authority had previously worked for the principal local authority. This local authority was chosen as the author lived and worked there. This had the benefit of the author

already being familiar with recording practise in the local authority but he did already hold views on that practise, specifically that it was taken-for-granted.

A fairly homogenous sample was chosen in order to provide a more detailed picture of recording in this specific context. A larger and more varied sample may have allowed comparison between different types of provision and the inclusion of other perspectives, such as those of young people. The scope of the study was limited by it being a Masters dissertation. Due to confidentiality restrictions the author was unable to observe practise or read records. The findings therefore relate to workers' perceptions of recording practise rather than the records themselves.

Permission was obtained from the principal local authority for the research and unit managers were contacted and asked to identify a member of staff willing to be interviewed. Informants were contacted and provided informed consent to be interviewed and tape-recorded. The interviews took place between March and April 2011 at locations of the informants' choosing, usually their place of work. Each interview was scheduled to last for an hour but some were longer, up to eighty minutes, if the informant was happy to continue and it was productive.

Informants were provided with a brief description of the research project in advance of the interview and a list of questions to be explored. These were: What are the purposes of case recording? What are the main difficulties in recording? How does recording relate to practise? How well do case records reflect the 'daily life' of a unit? What is the influence of ICTs on case recording? What implications does case recording have for children and young people's rights? 'Case recording' rather than 'shift recording' was used within the questions so that shift recording could be discussed within the context of overall case recording but any ambiguity about what records were being referred to was clarified during interviews.

A semi-structured interview format was used in a flexible manner to avoid prejudicing informants' opinions and encourage introduction of novel perspectives. Open-ended questions were used in a non-prescribed order determined by the development of themes during the interview. Follow-up questions were used to develop emerging themes. The interviewer ensured that all questions had been covered. The interviewer did not offer his own opinions or approval/disapproval of answers. Interviews were transcribed and anonymized and the data coded and analysed to identify themes. A limitation affecting the validity of the findings was that this was carried out by the author alone. The principal themes related to the performative function of the record, its location within the matrix of identity formation and power relations, the subjugation of particular forms of knowledge and to the effects of ICTs on recording practise.

Findings

The Record as Performative

Communication and supporting practise were the purposes most frequently cited. Informants considered them closely linked. AUM1 summed this up succinctly as 'If it isn't written down it doesn't happen'. All informants agreed that written communication and practise are positively related and most cited at least one example demonstrating this. RCO2 spoke of an occasion when the failure to record that a young person was allowed to have a radio in their bedroom meant this was not communicated to the rest of the staff team, later leading to conflict when the young person asked for a radio. This may have been avoided if the permission had been recorded.

Shift records store information that can be easily referenced by temporary workers or those returning from leave and needing an update, meaning that information is less likely to be lost or forgotten. They are used in assessing young people, recording their progress over time, recognizing patterns of behavior and contributing to care planning. Their use for these varies between workers, with some more regularly

reading them than others. Three informants felt recording facilitates analysis and reflection. Informants' understandings of the purposes of recording were largely consistent with those identified by Comben and Lishman (1995).

Accountability was cited less frequently. Shift reports provide evidence of practise and decision-making so that workers can be held accountable, not only to employers and inspection bodies, but also to young people and their families. Two informants, however, felt that shift reports are used to 'cover your back'. RCO4 described how workers record when an eighteen year-old girl with learning difficulties goes for a drink at her local pub. The recording is 'just in case'. Concerns over risk can lead to 'defensive' and excessive recording that may undermine clients' privacy (Ames 1999).

Records are 'concerned with producing an account that adequately documents... that both the individual practitioner and the organization have properly discharged their duties and responsibilities' (O'Rourke 2010: 162). Pithouse's (1987) study of an area social work team and Taylor's (2006) study of reflective accounts in social work both concluded that records tend to obfuscate practise rather than reveal it. According to Garfinkel (1967), it is 'structurally normal' for organizational records to conform to an 'approved reality'. In shift recording this could occur, for example, in the recording of critical incidents if there is a concentration on demonstrating how a young person's behavior breached unit rules and how practise met approved standards and procedures, rather than a more critical account of the inevitable messiness and ambiguity of everyday practise (Smith 2009). This could contribute to the demands of accountability 'crowding out' the recording of information which may facilitate a greater understanding of a young person.

Records are not passive but act as agents in their own right (Prior 2004). They are able to operationalize particular discourses, such as risk (Dahlberg et al. 1999). Risk discourses identify young people as either 'a risk' or 'at risk', failing to recognize elements of their identity that challenge these conceptualizations (Stanford 2010). Alternative discourses, such as rights or needs, would likely represent young people differently (Steckley and Smith 2011).

Subjugated Knowledges

Legislation and policy tend to take an uncritical stance towards recording, presenting objectivity and the distinguishing of fact and opinion as unproblematic. Recording is, however, socially constructed (O'Rourke 2010). *Approaches to* and *ideas about* recording are taken-for-granted and perceived as inevitable, yet may not necessarily be so; they are dependent upon contingent historical determinants (Hacking 2000). Tice (1998) showed that the adoption at the end of the 1920s of 'scientific objectivity' as the preferred approach to social work recording was related to the profession's desire for greater status. 'Subjective' and 'feminine' elements had to be removed from case records in favor of phenomena which met the demands of 'scientific objectivity'.

According to Smith (1988), the adoption of scientific objectivity requires positioning oneself at an Archimedean point, 'an abstracted conceptual space away from the local and particular' (1988: 75). Mechanisms of accountability make visible only that which fits with categories and concepts defined by this objectivity, therefore experiences that are a necessary part of the organization's work may be left invisible (c.f. Comben and Lishman 1995: 1.22). What is repressed is 'knowledge which is diffuse, interpretive, emotionally embedded, makes connection—in favour of that which is discrete, quantifiable, positivist' (Froggett 1996: 125). Such 'subjugated knowledges' have been identified in some recent studies (Broadhurst et al. 2010; O'Rourke 2010). For example, where a young person earns a positive school report a residential worker may record only that detail but not their pride in the young person. In the case of physical restraint a worker can record what physically happened but not that they experienced fear or sadness. A 'bifurcated consciousness' is required when recording (Smith 1988), posing problems

in residential child care where the building of relationships and the act of caring inevitably and rightly entail emotional involvement (Cameron and Maginn 2008).

According to Chambon (1999), the absence of emotional expression distances readers from actual experience. The approach to language we adopt helps define reality as it ‘has a major effect on how we construct our personal and social worlds’ (Hall and White 2005: 381). Positivism and relativism represent two opposing positions on reality (Taylor and White 2000). The former relies on a ‘correspondence theory of truth’ whereby language acts as a ‘mirror’ upon reality as long as it avoids error or bias (Potter 1996). Legislation and policy tend to approach recording from this perspective (Taylor and White 2001). Relativism contends that language constructs reality (Potter 1996); it ‘mobilizes different sets of facts’ to achieve certain purposes (Taylor and White 2001: 45). Positivism fails to take account of power and the performative nature of language, whilst critics of relativism claim it leads to an ‘abyss’ where no version can be given precedence as there is no objective reality (ibid.).

Taylor and White (2000, 2001) attempt to overcome this dichotomy by proposing a ‘subtle realism’ in which the world is treated as real but knowledge as contingent. Reflexivity is required, whereby ‘practitioners will subject their own and others’ knowledge claims and practises to analysis’ (2001: 55). Shift reports might also be viewed as ‘boundary objects’; pragmatic constructions aimed at reducing uncertainty and ambiguity in order to facilitate communication and action across boundaries, not to represent ‘Truth’ (Bowker and Star 1999). Both approaches recognize that because some knowledge will always be left invisible, recording is inevitably an ethical task (Hardy 2012). This raises the question of whether there is sufficient understanding of the knowledge subjugated by shift recording in order to understand its implications for young people, professionals and organizations.

All informants agreed that recording should be accurate and factual and on what should be included, such as family contact, behavior and so on. Relevancy is determined by a young person’s individual needs, such as whether they have issues with diet or personal hygiene. For the majority this was a judgment call, therefore the level of detail recorded varied. There was disagreement over the recording of opinion, some felt it allowed personal values and beliefs to enter the record, whilst others stated it should be clearly distinguished from facts. This corresponded with views on including emotional content. RCO5 noted, ‘it’s written by humans, there’s always going to be an element of emotion’. This presents a dilemma, however, as whilst emotion is intrinsic to the work it can also ‘cloud your views’ (RCO3).

There were varying opinions on how different workers’ perceptions were resolved. RCO1 and AUM2 both described a dialogic process to reach consensus. Not all informants supported such a straightforward process. RCO5 said workers are unlikely to challenge what is recorded if they consider it trivial. RCO3 offered an example where a worker recorded a young person’s behavior as ‘slightly challenging’ whereas he felt it had been ‘very abusive’. Issues in recording reflect wider practise issues and diversity of values and emotions.

Most informants felt discrepancies between workers’ perceptions related to their varying relationships with young people. AUM1 and AUM2 stated that when reading records they take into account the relationship between the writer and young person. This was something mentioned only by the two AUMs and not any of the RCOs, perhaps reflecting their managerial role. Such differences could be informative as they indicate ‘how young people respond to different people or different ways of working’ (AUM2) but also highlight limitations of ‘objectivity’. A further difficulty was when records were read by audiences not possessing this contextual information. Whilst paper shift reports are read by unit workers who have this information, there is greater danger of misinterpretation when records are made electronically available to a wider audience.

Informants felt shift reports give a good impression, but not a complete picture, of young people and their daily lives. The majority of informants identified some knowledge excluded from shift reports such as workers' opinions, feelings and reflections on practise. These are recorded elsewhere, such as staff meetings, supervision and reflective diaries. This illustrates that whilst some knowledge is subjugated it may be recorded in alternative, or informal, knowledge structures.

All informants considered relationships an integral part of residential practise and most identified thoughts and feelings associated with practise that are not reflected in recordings. Informants were pragmatic, suggesting they regard shift reports as boundary objects. AUM1 stated, in relation to secure accommodation:

Reading the formal recording wouldn't give you the whole kind of flavor of their experience in here... they're not really focused on what kind of positive experiences, day-to-day sort of stuff, that the young person has had and what kind of positive memories... they're all focused on what they've achieved with regards to change to get back out there.

In contrast, RCO5 tried to capture some of these elements in her recordings. There seems to be a tension between the record as biography and other purposes if workers feel it is important to make records meaningful for the young person but also comply with the requirements of accountability to be factual and objective. Workers have to hold competing demands in tension when recording (c.f. O'Rourke 2010). Partly because of this, informants mentioned a number of informal records such as Life Story Books, memory boxes and photographs.

ICTs

Two informants (RCO4, RCO5) currently used the electronic information system for shift recording whilst the remainder from that local authority had been trained in its use but were awaiting implementation. Informants had mixed feelings about the introduction of the system. AUM1 and AUM2 felt there had been insufficient thought given to the recording needs of residential units and how the new system would be integrated with existing records. Although not explicitly mentioned by RCOs, it was nevertheless an implicit theme. Informants anticipated practical benefits including improved efficiency of recording, better communication with social workers and greater concision. Reservations were expressed that some workers' computer skills needed improvement and that there were insufficient computers to meet the increased demand. RCO4 and RCO5 felt the anticipated efficiency gains had not materialized as time spent logging on to the system made it less accessible for quick reference. The system did not eliminate the need for some paper recording. There was therefore a risk the system might increase recording demands.

Informants identified two implications of social workers receiving shift reports. Firstly, the general consensus was that shift recording is necessary and young people's privacy rights have to be balanced against other demands, such as meeting young people's needs and being accountable. The majority of informants felt their unit had this balance right. AUM2 noted that paper recording meant only workers within the unit could access records whilst having electronic records means any person accessing the system can have access to those records, increasing the risk of breaching privacy. She felt that if residential workers are to record similar information on the system as previously, and this is not relevant for social workers to know (e.g. whether or not a young person has left dirty underpants on their bedroom floor), not only will young people find this intrusive, it might breach principle 3 of the Data Protection Act 1998, that data must be adequate, relevant and not excessive for purpose.

Secondly, recording is a social act in which the author engages in a relationship with their anticipated audience (Askeland and Payne 1999). This becomes ever more complex in situations where there are multiple audiences and purposes (O'Rourke 2010). RCO5 said the introduction of electronic recording

initially led her to change the style and content of her shift recording because there was an increased chance of being misinterpreted due to external audiences not having the same contextual information, common understandings and relationships with young people as unit workers did. This increased anxiety over the interpretation of the recording and therefore pressure to be less concise. RCO4, for example, felt complex aspects of the residential environment, such as group dynamics, can be difficult to explain to someone without residential experience.

Another reason for RCO5 changing her approach was that social workers said shift reports were overly detailed and not entirely relevant to them. They needed to skim-read reports, potentially missing important information. Consequently shift reports were requested to be more concise and relevant to social workers. Informants felt this reflected the different roles and responsibilities of residential workers and social workers, differences in theoretical approaches and relationships with young people. AUM2 felt heavy social work caseloads increasingly mean many social workers' knowledge of young people is based on historical information and the occasional visit rather than a current relationship. This was contrasted with residential work where knowledge is based on close relationships through shared daily living. This supports Parton's (2008) assertion that social work has become more 'informational' than 'social' (where the latter is represented by the holistic biographical narrative in contrast to the former where information is disembodied, decontextualized and objectified as represented by the database):

... [If] the information you want becomes just a few certain bullet points... over the course of a day then does that start to anonymize that young person? Does that make them of less regard? Does that mean that actually nobody's interested in you unless there's some really big significant thing happens?

(AUM2)

This conflict in what to record had not been satisfactorily resolved, as guidance had not been given on what should now be recorded. RCO5 reverted to her original style as she felt this was more 'child-centered' and faithful to her role as a residential worker. RCO4's unit developed a parallel recording system whereby only more significant occurrences are recorded electronically.

Identity, Power and Participation

Most informants described a purpose of recording as providing a historical record of a young person's time in care to be read by them after leaving care. RCO1 stated 'it's just... so that the young person can go off in ten years' time and say, "well I want to look at my life as a looked after young person"'. RCO5 felt young people's case records provide a biography to help them make sense of their history and identity (cf. Goddard et al. 2013). Comben and Lishman (1995) acknowledge that records may be accessed by young people but did not include the formation of a biography as a purpose of recording. This has been identified in more recent guidance on social work recording, such as that of the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA 2010), and the local authority's own policy. Without undermining the importance of this for care leavers, the experiences of some social work clients problematizes the role of case records for this purpose (e.g. Martin 1998).

All informants recognized young people's right to access their records. The majority said some young people are interested in reading their records whilst others are not, although generally most young people most of the time are not:

It's a bit like when Wimbledon's on the television, as soon as that's on everyone wants to play tennis, after a couple of weeks it dies a death and it seems to be the same in here, if one young person reads their folder, everyone wants to read it.

(RCO2)

Despite this, informants identified benefits to a young person reading their record such as helping them reflect on their circumstances and improving their participation. Young people sometimes write their own shift reports or ask workers to add specific things to them. This seems to reflect a view from some workers and young people that there is value in young people participating in recording.

Recordings are almost always made by staff. The content of case records will tend to reflect the conceptions and benefits of the most powerful in social situations (Askeland and Payne 1999), potentially leaving young people without a voice. It was hoped that the introduction of open access legislation in the UK would lead to greater participation by service-users and subsequent improvements in recording, objectivity and accountability (Shemmings 1991). There is a lack of evidence on how this operates in residential child care. Action research conducted by Prince (1996) aimed at developing participatory recording in a child guidance clinic found that only 48 per cent of information was shared with clients, suggesting that in practise fulfilment of this hope may be impeded by power differentials and competing demands.

Improved access to records for looked after children and care leavers has been campaigned for by advocacy groups such as the Care Leaver's Association (www.careleavers.com/accesstorecords) on the basis that for some it can be a positive experience and can help them make sense of their past. Reading their records has the potential to be distressing, containing as it does sensitive aspects of their lives and professional judgments (Comben and Lishman 1995). This may be exacerbated where recording focuses on the negative aspects of individuals' lives rather than presenting a more balanced picture. The participation of young people not only improves access but may also promote dialogue on what is recorded or at least ensure young people's views are recorded (Comben and Lishman 1995; SWIA 2010).

There is a problem here though, in that merely involving young people more in the recording of their own lives, whether through recording their views or having them make their own recordings, may simply extend the responsibility for surveillance on to young people rather than addressing the political and institutional drivers contributing to recording practise disempowering them.³ Such policies of participation appear tokenistic or may become an 'empty ritual' unless they involve a redistribution of power (Arnstein 1969). Key within this is freedom of choice (Hart 1992). Children and young people in residential care do not have the choice over whether or not to have their daily lives recorded, or on the content of those recordings. A question arises as to whether recording practise could be made empowering, or less disempowering, for young people and this will be addressed in the following section.

Implications for Theory and Practise

The findings indicate broad agreement between workers and official guidance on the purposes of recording. The interviewees viewed recording as valuable in supporting the achievement of these purposes but also recognized a number of limitations and implications. Whilst shift recording may support care, it may also be controlling of and disempowering for young people. The ways in which subjects are constituted as objects through shift recording is influenced by its purposes. These include organizational and professional imperatives such as accountability, risk management and the need for communication within staff teams and across organizational and professional boundaries to a range of audiences. The positivist approach within policy and practise may result in the subjugation of certain knowledges, particularly relational knowledge and young people's perspectives. The technologies used for recording influence what information is recorded, how it is communicated across boundaries and to whom it is communicated. These factors have implications for the construction of children and young people's identities and the conception of care as an ethical/relational, rather than technical/rational, endeavor.

³ I am indebted to anonymous reviewers for making this point.

On a theoretical level, shift recording resembles more traditional panoptic models of surveillance, in contrast to the 'social surveillance' of social networking sites. This can be seen in the power differentials between staff and young people and in the hierarchical relationship and lack of reciprocity between the two when it comes to shift recording (Marwick 2012). Freedom of choice seems important here in that young people in care cannot choose whether shift recordings are made or not, in contrast to the (constrained) choice young people have of whether to engage in social networking. This difference in choice extends to some degree to what information about a young person is made visible. In shift recording staff choose what is recorded and young people have little input. Whilst they have a degree of choice over what aspects of themselves they make visible to different staff, this choice is limited by the intimacy of a shared lifespace and the sharing of information between staff. In contrast, young people have greater choice over how they represent themselves on social networking sites, although this is not absolute as others also contribute to how they are represented. The construction of young people's identities and the degree to which these are shaped by professional discourses such as risk, is influenced by these differences between traditional and social surveillance along the lines of power, hierarchy and reciprocity.

The intimacy of residential child care is closer to that of the home rather than the social networking site. Whereas the surveillance potential is high both in homes and residential units, the findings point to some potential differences in the quality of surveillance between the two settings. According to Marx and Steeves (2010), surveillance technologies aimed at parents are predominantly related to safety. Whilst the findings indicate that shift recording is related to meeting the needs of children, including safety, it is also more related to organizational risk and accountability should something go wrong than a technology that *keeps* children safe. There is an inherent tension between meeting the needs of children and those of organizations as these needs are currently formulated. Maier (2005) referred to this as the struggle to reconcile primary care requirements with secondary organizational demands. Such tensions seem characteristic of residential child care as distinct from the family.

A distinction between the family and the residential home is that relationships within the former are thought of in terms of informality and trust more than the formality and written rules of organizations (Marx and Steeves 2010). Whereas historically residential child care may have more closely resembled a family model, declining trust has led to increasing managerialization, bureaucratization and 'routinization' of the sector and increased scrutiny of the workforce (McLaughlin 2007; Smith 2008; Webb 2006). Such developments have put faith in technical/rational approaches to caring, at the expense of relational approaches (Smith 2009). Shift recording practise is an example of this. One hypothesis may be that relational approaches might be more evident than technical/rational approaches in the surveillance practises of parents as compared to those used within residential child care. The increasing use of new technologies such as mobile phones and radio frequency identification (Ema and Fujigaki 2011) may however suggest that the surveillance practises of parents are also becoming increasingly technical with the development of new ICTs. Further research into this area may be useful and also provide insights into the extent to which surveillance of children and young people within residential child care is consistent with family life and what is a feature of delivering primary care in secondary settings.

In practise there may be ways of overcoming or resolving the limitations and implications. One option may be to accept them on the basis that they are necessary to achieve the purpose of supporting the care and protection of children and young people. This however seems unsatisfactory. Another alternative would be to encourage young people to participate more in recording, as some staff were doing already, and to ensure that their views are recorded, as is a requirement of the GIRFEC guidance. Research has found that participation can contribute to effective engagement with involuntary service users (Gallagher et al. 2012). Increased participation risks being tokenistic however, and may merely shift the responsibility for their own surveillance on to children and young people unless it involves a genuine redistribution of power.

Regan and Steeves (2010) looked at social networking sites to see what conditions might permit empowerment to emerge in a surveillance environment and identified two conditions: firstly, where surveillance allows opportunities for a young person to self-reflect, enabling them to act in empowering ways unencumbered by the original surveillance; secondly, where the multiplicity of watchers dilutes the power that any individual watcher can yield. Within social networking systems, the acts of surveilling and being surveilled were found to lead to both personal empowerment relating to personal competence and growth, and group empowerment relating to self-esteem and social belonging. Social surveillance systems vary however from the surveillance of shift recording in relation to power, hierarchy and reciprocity within the relationship between surveillers and surveilled. It is questionable therefore whether these conditions could lead to empowerment within a traditional system of surveillance.

Dahlberg et al. (1999) offer 'pedagogical documentation' as an alternative approach to recording. This does not claim an objective view of the world but concerns itself with gaining understanding through a self-reflexive process involving dialogue, reflection and the discussion of records with other parties such as young people, in order to introduce multiple perspectives. This could mean young people discussing and reflecting with staff, family, other workers and each other about what gets recorded on their individual records and using that process as a means of promoting self-awareness and personal development. What is important here is the process rather than the final recording. In practise this would perhaps mean a shifting away from individualized records of each shift and towards a recording system which was about children and young people deciding what was important to be recorded about their activities as individuals and groups, including whether or not a record was required at all. There would be a redistribution of power towards young people and recording would then be an activity undertaken alongside them rather than done to them. This would be particularly so if it was alongside young people having more say in how their care is delivered. It may not overcome the dilemma of surveillance as such, but it may refine and rebalance recording towards meeting the needs of children rather than those of organizations, fundamentally changing some of the qualities of recording away from a traditional model and towards a more social model. This might unlock the productive capacities of recording from its preoccupation with risk and impoverished conception of accountability.

Conclusion

Marx and Steeves (2010: 225) state that 'surveillance of and by children is multi-faceted and not adequately understood'. Given the small sample size and limitations of this study the findings are tentative and the discussion of their implications exploratory rather than prescriptive. The study raises questions, both practical and theoretical, that are preliminary to a greater understanding of recording, and surveillance more generally, in this setting. It strongly suggests that shift recording should not be taken-for-granted and residential child care 'needs to take seriously the need to explore its modes of representation' (Taylor 2006: 204). Shift recording has important implications for young people, professionals and organizations. Future research methods should include investigating the records themselves, the views of young people and comparing surveillance across different sites. Whilst shift recording resembles the traditional model of surveillance, residential units are only individual nodes of a wider network around looked after children and young people. Future research might investigate the characteristics of this network (cf. Manley et al. 2012), explore subjugated knowledges, compare recording practise technologies across sites and evaluate whether recording achieves its purposes. This would contribute to a greater understanding of the totality of surveillance of looked after children compared to the surveillance of other groups of children. A greater understanding of these issues would point to ways in which recording practise might overcome its drawbacks and contribute more effectively to the wellbeing and development of children and young people in residential care.

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