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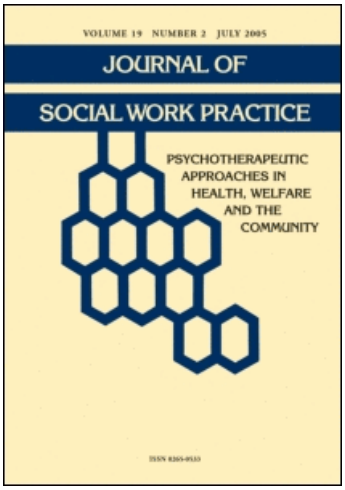

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Simon Duffy

THE CITIZENSHIP THEORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF PERSONALISATION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

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Personalisation is a new term that is being used in different ways. Often it is used as a shorthand for a range of new forms of practice, or technologies. These new technologies include direct payments, self-directed support, individual budgets and person-centred planning. The values which underpin these technologies have developed from the experiences of disabled people, but these values are not well represented in theories of social justice. This paper describes a new theory, a Citizenship Theory of social justice, that is based on two fundamental moral beliefs: (a) the equal dignity of all human beings; and (b) the positive value of human diversity and difference. Developing this theory of social justice leads to an inclusive model of citizenship and an imperative to organise society so that everyone can become a citizen. Social workers could see personalisation as an externally imposed dogma, but this will lead to defensiveness, resistance and cynicism. However the profession could instead embrace the technologies of personalisation, and the Citizenship Theory that should underpin it. It is this second path that will lead to critical engagement and the practical use and improvement of the tools of personalisation.

Keywords personalisation; citizenship; social justice; disability; individual budgets; self-directed support

Introduction

In this essay I want to explore the meaning of personalisation for social work. Not its practical meaning, which I have explored elsewhere (Duffy, 2007), but its philosophical meaning. In particular I want to explore what personalisation means for our understanding of social justice.

Social work is a profession whose very purpose is intimately connected to the ideal of social justice. As the National Association of Social Workers states:

> Social work is a practical profession aimed at helping people address their problems and matching them with the resources they need to lead healthy and

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> productive lives. Beneath this practicality lies a strong value system that can be summarised in two words: social justice.
>
> (NASW, 2010)

This suggests that if we can understand the implications of personalisation for social justice then we can understand what personalisation means, in the most important sense, for social work.

However I must begin by acknowledging a very personal stake in this debate. I have been one of those people who have been working for over 20 years to develop the theory and practice that lies behind personalisation and I am occasionally cited as one of the advocates of personalisation. So I cannot pretend to be neutral in any discussion about personalisation, nor can I pretend to disown approaches that I have spent many years testing and reflecting upon.

In addition, as I will try and show, there is still much more work to be done and in writing this essay I have needed to do some original theoretical work in order to make the link between personalisation and social justice clearer. In particular I will argue that, while personalisation itself is not a philosophy, it does point us towards a new theory of social justice — the Citizenship Theory.

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The meaning of personalisation

Personalisation has become a dominant term within social care policy in the UK. Many changes to practice and policy are being proposed in its name, and many long-standing practices are being re-described so that they are seen as part of the new zeitgeist (HM Government, 2007). Unsurprisingly the reaction of social workers is mixed. Some are enthusiastic, others are sceptical, but most are still uncertain whether personalisation will really bring benefits to those they serve.

However before beginning it is important to understand what the term personalisation means and how it is being used. In particular it is important to notice some of the different uses of the term, for rational discussion of personalisation will be undermined if we ignore distinct meanings. It seems to me that we can identify three distinct uses of the term:

1. rhetorical — personalisation is sometimes used to describe a positive direction for public service reform;
2. technological — personalisation is sometimes used as a generic term for one or more of the specific technologies or practices that are referred to by advocates of personalisation; and
3. policy — personalisation is sometimes used to describe a set of government initiatives that are justified in terms of personalisation.

To someone coming upon these ideas for the first time it may seem that all three uses are rationally aligned. It would be easy to imagine that we start from the broad rhetorical idea, that this then inspires new government policies and that in turn this then leads to new forms of practice; but this is not the real relationship between the

three meanings of personalisation. The real relationship is more complex, less coherent and much more contested than may at first be apparent.

The use of the term 'personalisation' was first popularised by the writer Charles Leadbeater in a series of publications starting in 2004 (Leadbeater, 2004). Leadbeater defines personalisation in the following terms:

> ... putting users at the heart of services, enabling them to become participants in the design and delivery, services will be more effective by mobilising millions of people as co-producers of the public goods they value.
>
> (Leadbeater, 2004)

To describe this use of the term personalisation as rhetorical is not pejorative. Rhetoric is an important part of policy-making, it demands finding ways of picturing the world which are attractive and which guide different people to necessary collective decisions. The rhetoric of personalisation points people to a common failing of public services — that they may be perceived as impersonal, inflexible or insensitive — but it avoids explaining this problem in terms of ideological categories that ignite fear or resistance. A phrase like 'putting people at the heart of services' is welcome both to those who want to see users of public services take more economic control over services, and also to those who want to see more collective control by citizens. In other words, personalisation is an appealing term that can be embraced by people with different political prejudices and preferences. And although it is true to say that this use of the term is broad, or even vague, it is not meaningless. The rhetorical use of personalisation does draw attention to the central importance of the person (their needs, their experience, their participation, their control) in public services.

Furthermore the rhetorical use of personalisation is linked to the second use of the term, the technological use of personalisation, for Leadbeater does not just offer an attractive vision of personalisation, he also links this to new technologies which he believes show the idea of personalisation in action. And from the beginning, advocates of personalisation have paid particular attention to innovations in social care. For example, in *Making it Personal*, Leadbeater and others draw principally on the development of self-directed support and the changing role of social workers in this new system (Leadbeater *et al.*, 2008). The authors not only argue for the value of self-directed support as an overarching system for organising social care, they also point to many of the earlier technologies from which it developed:

> Many of the ingredients — direct payments, person-centred planning, peer and family support teams, and user-led organisations — are well established approaches for people with learning and physical disabilities.
>
> (Leadbeater *et al.*, 2008)

It is particularly important to understand that it is these new technologies and the benefits they bring to people's lives that have inspired writers like Leadbeater. It is not the rhetoric which inspires the technology, it is the technology that inspires the rhetoric. In other words it is the kind of good practice developed by social workers and others that has led to the enthusiasm of thinkers like Leadbeater.

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Personalisation is also now used in a third way, as shorthand for those policies of central government which are done in the name of personalisation. In particular the government's recent declaration of intent to reform adult social care services called *Putting People First* (HM Government, 2007):

> The time has now come to build on best practice and replace paternalistic, reactive care of variable quality with a mainstream system focussed on prevention, early intervention, enablement, and high quality personally tailored services. In the future, we want people to have maximum choice, control and power over the support services they receive.
>
> (HM Government, 2007)

As the text above shows, government policy is also a response to new technologies. It is not the government which has created these technologies; rather the government has finally reached a point in its own decision-making where it wants to bring into the mainstream those technologies that it once saw as marginal or irrelevant. And this change in government thinking is neither final, clear, nor uncontested. It is for this reason that government prefers, in articulating its own policies, to use a broad and vague term like personalisation, because the use of such a term does not close down policy options or force government to reconcile competing views both within and without government.

For the reality is that while certain changes in practice, policy and rhetoric have been underway, with many of these changes led by social workers, there is no consensus on the value of these changes and many (including some social workers) are highly suspicious of personalisation, in all its forms. For example, Iain Ferguson argues:

> ... in its uncritical acceptance of the marketisation of social work and social care; in its neglect of issues of poverty and inequality; in its flawed conception of the people who use social work services; in its potentially stigmatising view of welfare dependency; and in its potential for promoting, rather than challenging, the deprofessionalisation of social work, the philosophy of personalisation is not one that social workers should accept uncritically.
>
> (Ferguson, 2007)

However Ferguson refers to the 'philosophy of personalisation' and this is to set the bar for philosophy rather low. Personalisation does not qualify as a philosophy. When the term is used rhetorically or used by civil servants its very virtue is that it manages to embrace competing philosophical positions in a way that is attractive to some and unobjectionable to most. Moreover when we use personalisation in its technological sense, as a catch-all for such technologies as direct payments, individual budgets, self-directed support, person-centred planning and other practical innovations, we are not referring to a philosophy but to diverse forms of practice. However, what we could usefully explore is what the values that have inspired the technologies of personalisation are. This may be the most useful way of coming to understand the true meaning of personalisation.

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Self-directed support

I am going to begin this exploration of the values which underpin personalisation by exploring the technology with which I am personally most associated, self-directed support. I will try to show that what has driven the development of this technology is a reaction against the injustice, discrimination and disadvantages faced by disabled people.

Self-directed support is a flexible system for organising services in ways that give the citizen the maximum degree of control over their own support (Carr, 2008). It is a complex system with many component parts, and different versions of self-directed support can be found in Western Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA. The particular version that has developed in England was actually first developed in Scotland in 2000 as part of my work with social workers in North Lanarkshire Council (Glasby & Littlechild, 2009). It was then published by In Control in 2004 and subsequently tested by growing numbers of local authorities (Duffy *et al.*, 2004). The results of this piloting were then published in two reports that have had some influence on government policy and the work of Leadbeater and others (Poll *et al.*, 2006; Poll & Duffy, 2008). In outline, self-directed support is a universal system that involves (Duffy, 2010):

1. a process by which the citizen controls their own budget, develops their own plan and directs their own support;
2. a conditional contractual framework that enables the state to ensure the citizen's safety and control; and
3. a range of community-based supports that enable citizens to get an appropriate level of additional support where necessary.

This new system was not developed simply for the sake of change itself; nor was it developed to advance some notion of personalisation. From its very beginnings the purpose of self-directed support was defined as one means to promote social justice for disabled people:

> The drive to self-directed support comes from the recognition that society has often failed those who need support by providing it in ways that limit and constrain the individual. Too often the price of receiving support is exclusion from the life of citizenship.
>
> (Duffy *et al.*, 2004)

In other words, self-directed support is a practical response to the reasonable demand of disabled people that their need for support be met in a way that doesn't put their citizenship at risk. In the old system of social care a disabled person who accepted support from the state would find that they could only receive support if they were prepared to: (a) sacrifice control over that support and thereby large parts of their lives; and (b) accept services that then excluded them from meaningful engagement in community life (that is, they would often be placed in residential care or segregated in day centres).

Self-directed support turns this old paternalistic system on its head. Self-directed support assumes, as a default, that people who need support should still be in as much control of their lives as possible. If they are unable or unwilling to take control then a flexible set of supports is available to provide sufficient additional support. Not only

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does this model seem more consistent with citizenship in principle (because being in control is part of citizenship), it also seems to lead to improvements in other aspects of citizenship, like income, dignity, safety and community involvement (Poll *et al.*, 2006; Poll & Duffy, 2008).

The roots of self-directed support

Moreover if we trace these technological developments even further back then it is clear that they all sprang from the disability movement and, in particular, from the reaction against the segregation of disabled people into long-stay institutions, for, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries eugenic theories were used to justify the rapid growth of asylums and mental hospitals. People who were mentally ill, disabled, old or even just socially unacceptable, like some unmarried mothers, were forced to live in large, congregated and segregated camps, with lives characterised by tedium, diminished status, deprivation and systematic abuse (Jones, 1993).

It was only from the late 1960s onwards that there started to be significant social pressure to reform the institutions and part of that pressure came in the form of new ideas about the social injustice of institutionalisation (Glasby, 2007; Atherton, 2007). Particularly important was the work of Wolf Wolfensberger, who argues that such injustices are rooted in the socially constructed categories that are applied to natural human differences, which then harden into damaging stereotypes (Wolfensberger, 1972). Society not only embraces such damaging stereotypes but also responds to these stereotypes in ways that serve to reinforce them. For example, to remove someone who happens to be less intelligent than average from mainstream schooling will enforce their 'abnormal' status and will justify the development of a damaging stereotype for those people who need 'special education'.

Although Wolfensberger has now fallen out of fashion, his argument that it is society that constructs negative stereotypes about people who are different and then maintains those stereotypes through its own response is highly persuasive. It was particularly influential in supporting the closure of the mental handicap institutions and the development of 'ordinary life' responses (Towell, 1988).

Over time the language and thinking that began with normalisation developed into a more positive framework. Normalisation became social role valorisation, which emphasised the importance of supporting people to play socially valued roles (Race, 1999). Many thinkers associated with the movement started to emphasise the importance of social inclusion and argued for the importance of children of all abilities being educated together (Slee, 1993). There was also increased emphasis placed on advocacy, self-advocacy and the role of person-centred planning. All of these approaches were united by a greater emphasis on the positive role to be played by the person themselves (O'Brien & O'Brien, 2000).

At the same time as these developments were taking place around people with learning difficulties another very important movement was growing. By 1964 disabled people had begun to organise themselves into a powerful force for self-advocacy and mutual support (Shapiro, 1993). Increasingly leaders of the disability movement began to frame the experience of disabled people in terms of their human rights and to demand that society address their right to independent living. In addition some started to propose

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that society's response to disability was framed by the medical model of disability which implied that the 'problem of disability' was located in the body of the person. Against this these thinkers proposed a social model of disability which identifies the problem of disability with the social barriers that disabled people face (Oliver, 1990).

My contention is that if we look at any of the technologies that are typically cited as examples of personalisation in practice we find that they are practical approaches that were developed by people in the disability movement and their allies. And if we ask what ideas inspired those new technologies we will find that they are ideals like independent living, inclusion or social role valorisation. It is to these ideas that we need to turn if we are to understand the true meaning of personalisation.

The gap in social justice theory

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Although it is possible to see some modest theoretical differences between approaches like social role valorisation and the campaign for independent living, both are best understood as legitimate and positive efforts to find a solution to an even more wider problem, the problem of social justice. Social justice demands that we seek to organise society in a way that is fair; and fairness, almost always, implies some conception of equality (although, as we will see, there are competing ideas about what kind of equality is morally important).

However any attempt to achieve equality must be sustained along with a lively recognition that human beings are fundamentally diverse — in mind, body and situation. Furthermore this initial diversity only increases over time as a result of our actions and the impact of fortune (good or bad luck). Diversity brings forth more diversity.

All of this may encourage us to see diversity as bad, but diversity is not only natural and inevitable, it is also good. Diversity brings change, beauty and interest to human life, creating opportunities for meaningful exchange in a way that sameness never can. For example, in 1994 I supported Hayley, a young girl with extreme physical, communication and (possibly) cognitive disabilities in her school classroom in Denver, Colorado. Hayley only lived a short life, but she touched many people with her beauty, humour and sheer determination. A world without Hayley is a poorer world. Whilst she lived, Hayley added to the quality of everyone's life who knew her — not despite her disability — but with and through her disability. Hayley's uniqueness, Hayley's diversity, was a blessing, a good thing that she brought into the world.

However, as we have already seen from the history of disability, this diversity also creates a significant risk that those who are seen as 'too different' will become the victims of oppression. In fact, as Hannah Arendt rightly observes, a simple-minded focus on equality can even increase the risk of injustice:

> The more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do individuals and groups become ... This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then the differences become all the more conspicuous.
>
> (Arendt, 1986)

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However when we turn to the theories of social justice that dominate Western philosophy we find a significant gap, for none of these theories seems to take seriously both the value and reality of diversity, nor the great hazards that it can create, particularly for those who may be seen as 'too different'. Three theories of social justice have dominated political theory and practice in the twentieth century.

1. Liberalism — this view assumes that a fair society is one where everyone is free to run their own lives. Any concern with equality should be limited to the ordinary rights of criminal law and individuals should then live with the consequences of their own actions, whatever different outcomes then develop. Thinkers from this tradition are suspicious of the state's interference in the lives of citizens, either because they think it unjustified or because of its negative consequences (Nozick, 1974; Hayek, 1944).
2. Marxism — this view assumes that social structures create inequalities of power, which in turn creates injustice (Marx, 1844). Marxists tend to see the state as the necessary means to change those structures and to eliminate those injustices. From this perspective social justice demands that social institutions deliver equal treatment and that there must be suitable methods of collective control over these institutions. Within this tradition the welfare state tends to be seen as a good thing which should be progressively expanded into social life (although there are also Marxists who will criticise the welfare state and its institutions).
3. Left-liberalism — this perspective shares with liberalism the view that people should be free to make their own decisions, but only within a framework which also ensures some additional socio-economic rights or securities. Although there are many important differences between thinkers within this tradition they are united in believing that social justice demands some interference by the state in society and by seeking to define the proper purpose and limits of any such interference (Rawls, 1971). From this perspective the welfare state is justified, but its proper size and its relationship to areas of freedom, like markets and civil society, are much debated.

All these theories, whatever their differences, are united by their primary focus on the economic consequences that flow from differences in talent, inheritance or social structure. But the experience of disabled people, women, the Jews, of black people and many other groups, demonstrates all too vividly that there can be worse forms of oppression than capitalism (Sen, 2009). We seem to be at our very worst when we have deluded ourselves that those we oppress are 'too different', that they do not really count, and that they are not really human, not like us.

I would argue that the mainstream traditions of social justice theory have failed to pay significant attention to the experience of disabled people (and many other oppressed groups). These theories deny the reality of diversity: both its value, which needs to be protected and sustained, and the particular hazards it creates for those who might be alienated or disadvantaged, including the possible creation of negative stereotypes.

The central task of this essay is to sketch a theory of social justice that does justice to the experiences of disabled people and other oppressed groups. And my aim will be to develop a theory which can be expressed in terms that are universal, which are not just restricted to the field of disability.

The Citizenship Theory

This alternative approach, which I will call the Citizenship Theory, takes as its starting point two moral beliefs. First, that all human beings, however different they may be from each other in colour, gender, body or mind, are fundamentally of equal worth — equal in dignity. Second, that human diversity, in all its forms, is essentially a good thing. These two basic moral facts should underpin any new theory of social justice.

Moreover we can reconcile the tension between equality and diversity only, as Arendt suggested, by recognising that 'unequal people have equal rights'; and the most fundamental right is that right to be treated 'as an equal', as a fellow citizen. This then gives us the first principle of our theory.

> Principle 1 — a fair society is one where all its members treat each other with respect, that is, as equal citizens.

It is important to recognise that here the concept of a citizen is not being defined in some purely local sense, such as 'people who hold the same passport as we do' or something similar. Here we are defining citizenship in a much deeper sense, as someone who possesses those qualities that are necessary to call forth an attitude of respect. As Jeremy Waldron says:

> The concept of a citizen is that of a person who can hold [their] head high and participate fully and with dignity in the life of [their] society.
>
> (Waldron, 1993)

In other words the idea of a citizen is here being used in a way that is very similar to the way in which Wolfensberger used the concept of the normal or the socially valued role. However there are two important differences between the concept of the normal and the concept of the citizen. First, the concept of the citizen is a morally positive concept (whereas few explicitly argue that being normal is the same as being good, virtuous or morally worthwhile). Second, citizenship is quite naturally understood to be something that society itself can define and redefine (it is not a naturalistic concept — it is a social concept). This means that this theory is not committed to simply supporting what happens (for good or ill) to be normal or what happens (rightly or wrongly) to be valued by a particular society. Instead the Citizenship Theory invites society to make a positive definition of citizenship, one that can itself be used to ensure the positive inclusion of those who are most likely to face discrimination, prejudice or disadvantage. This therefore leads to the second principle of social justice:

> Principle 2 — a fair society ensures that the grounds for respect (the keys to citizenship) are so defined that everyone can achieve citizenship, and thus be respected as an equal.

It is also important here to note that this does not mean that the category of citizenship is empty or that it can be defined in any way that we please. In order to be

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actually productive of the necessary sense of mutual respect, and yet be sufficiently inclusive, the concept of citizenship must also be suitably constrained.

(a) Our conception of citizenship must be attractive. It must be something that we should want to achieve and which does not conflict with either moral behaviour or basic human instincts. An account of citizenship that was either unrealistic or unattractive would fail to motivate human behaviour. Ideally our account of citizenship would be consistent with our best understanding of human flourishing and personal development.
(b) Our conception of citizenship must be valuable. It must be something which it makes sense for other members of the community to value and respect. If the citizenship of another doesn't seem valuable to us and to our lives then it will not generate the kind of respect that we need the category to possess. Ideally our account of citizenship would be consistent with our best understanding of community and the kind of society in which we would want to live.
(c) Our conception of citizenship must be coherent. Our account of citizenship must be sufficiently connected to the values and beliefs that we already hold. This does not mean that our understanding of respect cannot change or evolve, but unless it is rooted in some established sense of value it will not take hold or begin to develop. This means that our definition of citizenship will be subject to the process which the philosopher John Rawls calls 'reflective equilibrium' by which we incrementally align our own broad theoretical understanding with our more concrete judgements through a process of reflection and mutual adjustment (Rawls, 1971). For example, a conception of citizenship which did not capture our sense that mutual support and contribution was valuable would not be sufficiently coherent with our current judgements; but if our conception of citizenship makes us realise that we should also value our needs, because they give meaning to our contributions, then this may in turn lead us to a more positive account of human need and a change to some of our practical moral judgements.
(d) Our conception of citizenship must be sustainable. The concept of citizenship must be self-sustaining in the sense that the kind of society that is created by people valuing and striving for citizenship must then be the kind of society that continues to value, refine and seek citizenship. Citizenship must not be something that is neither so easy to achieve that it becomes redundant, nor must it lead to values and approaches that become destructive of its on-going support within that community. Citizenship must promote the ideal of citizenship.

In the light of these constraints I developed a specific account of citizenship in my book *Keys to Citizenship* (Duffy, 2006). There I argued for a six-fold account of citizenship and offered practical strategies for ensuring that citizenship, thus understood, could fully include all disabled people, particularly people with the most complex learning difficulties. The six keys to citizenship which I proposed were:

1. authority — the ability to be in control of your life;
2. direction — having a distinct purpose and meaning to your life;

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3. money — having enough resources to direct your own life;
4. home — having a place where you belong;
5. support — needing other people, giving value to the lives of others; and
6. contribution — giving to others through family and community.

This is not the place to rehearse the details of that argument. However, given this definition, or some other inclusive, positive, sustainable and realistic account of citizenship, it is then possible to define a third principle of social justice. For not only must a society define its concept of citizenship it must also ensure that it organises itself in such a way that everyone gets the practical assistance needed to achieve citizenship. Hence the third principle of social justice is:

> Principle 3 — a fair society organises itself so that everyone gets sufficient support to be able to achieve effective citizenship.

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It is not enough therefore to just declare everyone a citizen, it is also important to ensure that society actually works to sustain and strengthen its members in their citizenship. In practice this would seem to imply that everyone has an equal right to receive that level of support which is sufficient to achieve citizenship. In other words the Citizenship Theory is a radically egalitarian theory, but it is not concerned primarily with the equal distribution of income or wealth. Instead the Citizenship Theory is concerned that everyone gets the chance to be treated as an equal citizen.

The value of the Citizenship Theory

So in summary I have argued that we can draw upon the experiences of disabled people to develop a new theory of social justice, and one which effectively reconciles the fact of equal human dignity with the positive value of diversity. The basic principles of the Citizenship Theory are:

1. a fair society is one where all its members treat each other with respect, that is, as equal citizens;
2. a fair society ensures that the grounds for respect (the keys to citizenship) are so defined that everyone can achieve citizenship, and thus be respected as an equal; and
3. a fair society organises itself so that everyone gets sufficient support to be able to achieve effective citizenship.

I have also offered the six keys to citizenship as an initial account of how citizenship can function as the grounds for respect while being open and accessible to all. There are, of course, many more questions to be resolved and much more to be done in developing the theory and exploring its practical consequences. Nevertheless I think, as it stands, the theory does provide a framework for understanding the true meaning of personalisation.

For example, the Citizenship Theory does offer a coherent rationale for the technologies of personalisation like self-directed support, for: (a) the purpose of

self-directed support is to ensure that each person receives the resources necessary to achieve citizenship; and (b) the process is designed to be consistent with the actualisation of citizenship. Moreover, citizenship was always the motivating idea behind self-directed support, for example when outlining the rationale for self-directed support within *Keys to Citizenship* I wrote:

> Citizenship matters because we are different. The very fact that we are different makes us vulnerable to prejudice, exclusion and segregation, as the history of disability shows. But a commitment to citizenship gives us the chance to fight the human tendency to exploit the disadvantages of others. This will never be simply a matter of changing a law or of reorganising services. We will need to be constantly alert to the possibility that others are being cut-out of community.
>
> (Duffy, 2006)

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Self-directed support was certainly not designed to extend markets into public services or to promote 'personalisation'. Self-directed support was designed to extend the right to control of one's own life to all those people who, because of some disability or impairment, find that they are unduly dependent upon other people and unable to go about their own lives. It is underpinned by the Citizenship Theory, which defines social justice in terms of equal citizenship, and understands citizenship in a way that is inclusive and positive.

The Citizenship Theory also helps us gain a different perspective on some of the debates within social work. First I think it demonstrates that those who advocate independent living, social role valorisation or inclusion are all united in a much broader effort to ensure that citizenship is open to, and can be achieved by, all disabled people. The differences between these approaches may be more tactical than fundamental.

Second I think this Citizenship Theory helps to locate these local efforts within the broader intellectual framework of social justice theory, but in a way which draws attention to the failure of the dominant accounts of social justice to adequately respect the experiences of disabled people and other disadvantaged groups. Rather than trying to slot the experiences of disabled people into these dominant theories we can develop a theory which can call those other theories into question. The Citizenship Theory moves the experiences of disabled people from the margins to the mainstream of moral and political theory.

Now, with this new understanding of the thinking that underpins the technologies of citizenship we can begin to explore the meaning of personalisation for social work.

Personalisation and social work

At the beginning of this I essay suggested that the concept of social justice provides the best way of interrogating the meaning of personalisation for social work. If the ultimate purpose of social work is social justice then we must ask whether personalisation is a tool for promoting social justice.

However, as we have seen, this question is even more difficult to answer because the term personalisation can be used in such radically different ways. First of all we saw that its primary purpose has been as part of political rhetoric to justify efforts to reform public services and, in particular to encourage greater engagement between public services and citizens.

For social workers this must be an unobjectionable goal, for supporting people to be more in control or to be more involved is an essential component of social work. However, given that the rhetorical meaning of personalisation is rather broad it would also be hard for social workers to evaluate what this really means to their practice.

However the second sense of personalisation refers us to a series of technologies which have been developed by disabled people and their allies, including (but not limited to): direct payments, self-directed support, individual budgets and person-centred planning. The practical consequences of these technologies are considerable — they involve new ways of assessing, planning, supporting and facilitating support.

To embrace personalisation in this second sense is both a theoretical and a practical challenge. We embrace new technology when we believe it will bring value to our lives, but we only continue to use that technology when we have had real experience that it works. I have only referred in passing to the empirical evidence which exists about the effectiveness of these technologies and there are still legitimate questions to ask about the extent and meaning of this evidence, but it is important to see that this is always the case with new technologies. Technologies develop through the process of being used, tested, broken and mended; and this is how the technologies of personalisation have developed.

However I have tried to show that the purpose of these technologies is best understood, not as the promotion of personalisation, but as the promotion of social justice. In particular I have argued that at the root of these technologies is the long-standing effort to bring about social change and to enhance the citizenship of disabled people. Seen in this light personalisation should not be thought of as something from outside, that social work should assess. The technologies of personalisation simply are social work, social work in action; for what is social work if it is not the effort to develop, share and implement practices that promote social justice for people whose citizenship is threatened?

Yet it may be hard, if you come late to personalisation, to see it as intimately bound up with the very nature of social work itself. It is far more natural to think of personalisation in its third form, as a term that describes a series of externally defined policies that will be imposed upon social work.

This is the natural way of understanding personalisation, but it is also the most dangerous. Social work is naturally suspicious of any government-led reforms of the welfare state. Experience teaches us that such reforms, however well intentioned, are usually undermined by chronic systemic weaknesses that will eventually pervert those reforms.

But social workers cannot afford to be cynics. Social workers have a better understanding than most of the enormous difficulties that assail millions in our society today. Social workers also have to believe in the power of people to bring about positive change in their own lives and in the lives of those they love. Social workers must, in order to live up to their responsibilities, embrace the technologies of

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personalisation and find ways to make them work — and improve them when they break.

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