

THE NEW THRUST OF THE COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM: WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICES? *

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A RADICAL revision is being experienced by the social work profession—we are finally becoming aware that the solutions to the important, overwhelming problems of our urban society cannot be solely invested in a plan for individual and familial change. Heretofore, the profession has made the implicit assumption that the internal defects of individuals, piled one on another in society, constitute the source of our collective troubles—be they inadequate housing, blight, poverty, crime, mental illness or discrimination. This assumption carries the corollary that society, by and large, is a fairly benign entity and leads to the conclusion that if we could eliminate the faults of individuals and families and achieve their adjustment to a good world, our biggest social troubles would be eliminated.

Beginning with a new assumption—that society has great defects and that the social scene needs to be re-adjusted in order to permit individuals to have a “good shake” out of life—the social work profession has begun to swing toward the production of practitioners who have the skills and understanding to intervene in the processes and the structures of society. In short, profes-

sionals are being produced who seek a change in the fabric of social life, a re-adjustment of the social system in favor of equity of opportunity. In other words, we are developing a practice of planned social change, producing a breed of community social workers.¹

This change is taking hold in the schools of social work, the launching pads of the profession. We find, for example, that thirty-eight schools of social work today offer a major in community organization, community development and social planning compared with thirteen schools offering that major ten years ago. Last June, 283 community-oriented practitioners were graduated from social work professional schools compared with twenty-two only ten years earlier. Twenty schools of social work have new two-year community or social change-oriented curricula on the draw-

¹ The term “community social work” has been chosen to describe the community-focused aspects of the social work profession. We might have used some of the other terms currently popular, such as community organization, (traditionally used), social planning, social welfare planning, community planning for human services, community development, and community relations. In that there seems to be excessive emotional attachment to these various terms, the designation which seems most appropriate is community social work. In the same vein, group social work and individual-familial social work appear to be satisfactory terms.

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Washington, D.C., May 16, 1966.

ing boards or in beginning stages of operation.²

The increased production of community social workers is, then, an outstanding trend in social work education. The University of Michigan, for example, has capacity for sixty community majors compared with five majors only three years ago. Wayne State University's community social work sequence, the frame of reference held by this writer in commenting about the relationship between the Jewish field and the community curriculum, will have expanded to forty students in 1966-67 from three students two years ago. It is evident that schools are re-thinking purposes and programs and re-allocating resources accordingly, but what meaning does this hold for the Jewish community organization field?

Planned Social Change and the Jewish Field

The meaning is this: The development of an emphasis of planned social change corresponds closely to *Tzedakah*, the ancient concept of social justice basic to all Jewish communal services. It captures the essence and the ideal of the social action ethic underlying the welfare function of the Jewish religion, although our recent stimulus for planned social change comes not out of the Jewish field per se, but from a much broader mandate of American society. This mandate is embodied in the civil rights and voting rights acts of 1964 and 1965, in the war on poverty, in urban renewal and housing legislation, in the community mental health program, in new approaches to aid to education, in the prevention of unemployment, in Medicare

and in efforts to elaborate and humanize the nation's public welfare structure.

A social change emphasis had been lodged in the Jewish community relations agencies for some time. Philip Bernstein has noted that "Community relations and intergroup services under Jewish auspices originated as 'defense' programs to overcome anti-semitism and to combat discrimination in employment accommodations, education. . . ."

He also notes that "These programs have broadened to a concern with human rights for all groups."³ And for some time these programs lead the nation, in terms of both philosophy and action. But it is not often that one now hears about Jewish community relations agencies in regard to the problems of the inner city, the Indian reservation, the rural south, the sites to which most planned social change efforts are directed.

Jewish agencies have been "consumers" of new professionals produced by schools of social work. They have utilized social workers in large numbers who have been trained in techniques of individual change. And, typically, these persons having made good in lesser jobs are promoted into staff leadership positions in the community relations agencies. But our community and policy-oriented students are of a different breed. They come from a generation tempered by the civil rights movement, impatient with stalling excuses, anxious to see the world improved, adamant that goals be attained as well as postulated. They are oriented to the broader, non-sectarian community; they view the inner city and the legislative arena as their battlegrounds; they will not be satisfied with a long wait before assuming leader-

² Community Organization Curriculum Development Project, *Social Work Students in Community Organization*, Council on Social Work Education, Waltham, Mass., January, 1966, Mimeographed.

³ Philip Bernstein, "Jewish Social Services," *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, National Association of Social Workers, New York, 1965, pp. 418-27.

ship in some important spot in the professional practice of planned social change.

The Community Curriculum

In order to harness the thrust of the students seeking professional education, and in order to prepare practitioners who can take hold on the cutting edge of community action, it is necessary to construct a curriculum which is realistic, broad-gauge, theoretically sophisticated, and clued into the most crucial issues of social policy. At Wayne State, we are embarking on this task by creating a curriculum with several distinctive characteristics.

In our minds, the most important characteristic of a community practice curriculum is its stress on social policy.⁴ As a point of basic philosophy, social policy is treated as the guidelines to the solution to social problems created by various groups at local, state and national levels. These guidelines determine if and how the critical social problems of our time are to be solved.⁵ The art and science of social work practice, as these are taught in the community curriculum, then, are directed to prepare people to affect social policy—to institute new social policy, to evaluate and change ineffective existing social policy and to retire dysfunctional or outmoded social policy.

Regarding the second characteristic, three intervention orientations are postulated in the curriculum as those around which practice skills should be developed. They are: *advocacy*, *innovation* and *exchange*.⁶ In the *advocacy*

orientation, student practitioners are expected to develop skills in working with disenfranchised populations such as ghetto dwellers and mental hospital discharges. The objective here is to assist powerless groups improve their ability to compete in a market society for the goods and services they need to live richer lives. In the *innovation* orientation, student practitioners are expected to develop skills in bringing about institutional and organizational change when society and community fail to assist equitably or sufficiently those in need. In the *exchange* orientation, student practitioners are expected to develop skills in facilitating communication and exchange of prerogatives and jurisdictions among competitive service organizations and institutions; this requires the creative use of conflict strategies. All orientations should be familiar to the graduate practitioner as well as the design and implementation tools necessary to execute each orientation with precision.

The third characteristic of the curriculum is that it employs a multi-discipline knowledge base. In addition to a core of social work values and skills, community practice must utilize concepts and information from political science, economics, sociology and anthropology, city planning, public health and the legal profession. The simplest example we might cite, for example, the block club will have its political, economic, cultural, psychological and legal aspects. The more complicated the task, the more the practitioner draws upon a wide range of knowledge and skills to be adapted within his intervention orientation.

A fourth characteristic concerns the practicum. Working three days a week

⁴ Harold Wilensky and Charles Lebeaux, *Industrial Society and Social Welfare*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1959, especially Chapters VI and X.

⁵ J. A. Ponsioen, Ed., *Social Welfare Policy: Contributions to Theory*, Mouton & Co., 'S-Gravenhage, 1962, pp. 17-19.

⁶ Franklin M. Zweig, "A Conceptual Back-

drop for Community Social Work," in *Proposals for a Two Year Community Social Work Curriculum*, Wayne State University, Detroit, December, 1965, Mimeographed.

in order to confront experience with didactic material presented in two classroom days, students are being assigned to organizations on the "cutting edge" of the latest developments in the broad arena of social welfare. A sample of field work placements being used in September, 1966 includes: the office of a United States Congressman; the office of a member of the Detroit Common Council; the Community Mental Health Planning Unit of the State Department of Mental Health; CORE; Detroit's Anti-Poverty Program; the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union; the United Auto Workers (AFL-CIO) Social Security and Community Services Department; top administrative offices of Wayne State University attached to urban renewal policy and student management units; the Neighborhood Service Organizations, operating decentralized community organization programs in public housing; a grass roots neighborhood action effort known as the West Central Organization; administrative levels in the Detroit Housing Authority and the Community Renewal Program, Detroit's administrative unit for social renewal and the demonstration cities effort; the Urban Law Program of the University of Detroit Law School; the Detroit and Ann Arbor Commissions on Community Relations; the Michigan Welfare League, a state-level lobbying and legislative policy organization; the Detroit Public Schools' school-community agent program, sponsored under the Ford Foundation Great Cities School Improvement Project. In addition, placements have been developed in a number of the more familiar settings such as the United Community Services Organization and a number of settlement houses.

The final characteristic of the community social work curriculum to be discussed here concerns the management of the practicum. In order to integrate

class and field experiences, and in order to assure quality control in field instruction, all seven of the community faculty will be engaged in both class and field teaching. In so far as possible, training units consisting of three or four students and a faculty person will be placed in several of the organizations mentioned earlier. This is viewed as a means to integrate better what is taught in the classroom with what goes on in the real world.

Jewish Community Organization Agencies

In December, 1965, a meeting of executives from large city Jewish Welfare Federations concluded that, in view of the manpower shortage, it was desirable to host student interns from schools of social work and that emphasis should be given to community organization students.⁷ New job openings in the federation field alone, it has been noted, could absorb about twenty-five new people a year.⁸

Taking cognizance of manpower needs in the Jewish field, most social work educators are concerned to see that a number of fully trained people join the professional ranks in the Jewish field at commencement time. Moreover, we are interested in using Jewish community organization agencies as training sites. Our interest is motivated especially by the traditional high standards of professionalism adopted by most community-oriented agencies in the Jewish field.

In Detroit, for example, relationships between our newly-evolving curriculum

⁷ Taken from the "Summary of Discussion" Meeting of Large City Executives on Personnel, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, New York, December 11, 1965.

⁸ Taken from statistics furnished the writer in a letter from Gilbert Kahn, Personnel Associate, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, dated March 28, 1966. The writer is indebted to Mr. Kahn for his generous assistance.

and several of the Jewish agencies has been an excellent one, resulting, in the case of the Jewish Welfare Federation, in a placement and stipend offer. In spite of the fact the Jewish Welfare Federation is willing to offer one of the best paying work-study arrangements of which we have knowledge, however, we can find no takers, we have found almost no interest in either that particular setting or the Jewish community organization field in general. In short, we seem to find that the Jewish setting has little attractiveness for community social work students.

This situation is particularly disquieting since we are finding no such reluctance when we suggest church-sponsored community organization placements with the Episcopal Diocese, the Catholic Diocese, the Council of Churches. Why do we find it in the Jewish field?

Perhaps a beginning answer might be forthcoming from the reactions of students who were approached by faculty with respect to a field work experience in a Jewish community organization agency. Let me be clear about one point: the following quotations are in no way considered to be a systematic study of the attitudes of Jewish students toward the Jewish community organization field; they are comments which may illuminate understanding and which can provide the basis for a systematic study. They should be examined from the perspective that each of the four students quoted has a reasonably good acquaintance with the Jewish welfare field.

Student One: Male; age 24, married, first year community social work major; from a large west coast city; worked part-time during college and one full year after college with the Jewish community center in his city; worked subsequently as a personnel officer in a private merchandizing firm:

I really need the financial aid, but I think I would be diluting my commitment as a

social worker—in fact abandoning it—to take a placement (with a Jewish community organization agency). Why? Because I want to move in on real problems with people who really hurt. I would go into debt as much as necessary (in order to have a non-stipend placement with a municipal human relations agency).

Student Two: Female; age 44; married; husband, an engineer with Ford Motor Company; four older children; active volunteer in Jewish communal services; worked for Jewish family agency in two Southern cities for eight years as an untrained worker; first year community social work major:

The Jewish community relations agencies are, from my experience, so tied up in the inter-agency wars of the Jewish service agencies that they never really begin to work at the problems of the larger community. Community relations is given lip service, but I have yet to see the Jewish community council really set its shoulders behind the Negro human rights activities at the local level, where it counts. I am too old and have too few years to really help to think seriously of the Jewish field either for placement or employment.

Student Three: Male; age 35; married, two children; a former employee of a Jewish welfare federation, more recently having worked in a city health department as an inspector; second year community social work major:

I would not work for a Jewish welfare federation. Why? Because all the energy is tied up in fund-raising. I think it is important to raise funds, but instead of a means to render service, the job becomes an end in itself. This isn't the kind of social work I want to practice. A good businessman would do better. (With request to the Jewish Welfare Federation as a field placement): It could be a good placement, but the perspective of the supervisor is often too narrow to really show a student much more than how to survive—with a top notch supervisor, the student could learn all kinds of things useful in and out of the Jewish field.

Student Four: Female, age 22; parents active board members in Jewish

agency in a large Eastern city; financially independent; excellent student, first year community social work major; spent last summer in Mississippi in a family service project, a rural day care center:

I am definitely not interested in Jewish community organization as a placement or as a job after I graduate. Why? Because the Jewish field is just too paternalistic—doing things for people rather than helping them get power to do things for themselves. The Jewish (community organization) field is too conservative—Jews have made it out of poverty and look down at others and say, 'O.K., we pulled ourselves up, now you do it.' We (Jews) aren't working for good things anymore, really only trying to increase our own positions and maintain the status quo.

These comments are raw, biting and critical. While they may not be representative of the opinions or feelings of all Jewish community-oriented students, they may predict a viewpoint which is widely held. The only certain way to know is to sample the broad cross-section of students and to find out by scientific means how Jewish students perceive the Jewish field. In any case, the remarks quoted are sufficiently disquieting to give us cause for some additional analysis.

The Central Points of Student Criticism

It is evident that the students discussed do not believe that the Jewish community organization field continues to implement the concept of Tzedakah, the commitment to social justice. Whether there is an *actual* softening in the rigor of that implementation or not, it is clear that the Jewish field is viewed as tortoise-in-shell, pulling away from the critical social issues in favor of concrete gains won in the past.

Moreover, the Jewish field is viewed as inhospitable to social work practice

utilizing the *advocacy* and *innovation* intervention orientations. The development of effective competitive capacity among disenfranchised groups seems to be viewed as at least absent in Jewish organizations. The improvement of bureaucracies established to help people appears to be viewed as abandoned in favor of activities to defend the existing organizations.

The *Exchange* orientation may be viewed as the only community intervention orientation which is held to be legitimate by the Jewish community organization agency. And this orientation, stressing the pouring of oils on troubled organizational waters, seems not related to issues or to policies directly and does not find much favor among students at Wayne.

It might be asked here whether student demand or faculty expertise shapes the community social work curriculum. Some may question the heavy emphasis given student viewpoints and preferences. The central point is this: Both student demand and faculty incentives in any professional school are largely derived from the best, most important practice of the time. Moreover, what is deemed "best practice" relates to three factors: the available knowledge base, vitality of the service organizations, and current social trends, patterns and forces. A tentative, interim conclusion can be presented as a working hypothesis: From a limited sample of student responses, in terms of "best community practice," the Jewish community organization field seems to be less than attractive as a training site.

Strategies for Attracting Community Social Workers

What will influence community social work students and practitioners to harness the several community intervention

orientations in favor of and with the Jewish communal services? Three areas seem to stand out.

The first is concerned with tangible, visible moves the Jewish agencies can make toward supporting social reform. The Jewish community organization field at local, state and national levels can lend staff and other resources to assist in the development of anti-poverty, community mental health and civil rights organizations. The organizational and interpersonal skill possessed by the staffs of Jewish agencies constitutes an immense reservoir in an otherwise drab manpower picture. The application of that reservoir as third party interveners in institutional and social reform activities would be dramatically indicative of Jewish concern for the total community.

A second area for urgent consideration is the inclusion of a social action value base in the treatment regimens of the direct service agencies. The quest for social justice can often be tapped as a therapeutic, socially useful mechanism for the client of the casework agency. The development of responsible leadership and participation skills in tackling the great social issues of our time as a deliberate focus of group work agencies could go a long way toward assisting youth and adults to identify with the concept of *Tzedakah*.

Finally, Jewish fund-raising agencies can allocate a portion of their collections, say ten percent, as risk capital to be used by serious organizations in experimenting with new and promising ways of dealing with crucial social prob-

lems. By establishing such grants on a competitive basis and making them available to the total community, the Jewish funding bodies could establish important new beachheads in the wars on social ills and would concretely illustrate their commitment to social progress.

Summary

The newly evolving curriculum to educate professional community social workers is built upon the idea that society is perfectible but not perfect, less than just but capable of justice. In short, it reflects the social climate of the current era, a climate which incorporates and displays a basic philosophy of human rights and equal opportunities.

Jewish community social work students have expressed concern that the Jewish field does not share in that climate, that it has abrogated its traditional responsibilities for the continuing improvement of community life in favor of an emphasis on the maintenance of past gains for the Jewish sub-community. This concern persists in spite of the desire of faculty members to utilize Jewish agencies for training purposes in order to take advantage of the high degree of professionalism developed there.

It appears that the attraction of community social work students and new practitioners to the Jewish field depends upon how well the field can demonstrate that it not only is *rooted* in the concept of *Tzedakah*, but that it is *programmatically committed* to the vigorous pursuit of social justice as the major business of the day.