SOCIAL WELFARE

History, Politics, Policies, and Services

WORKOUT 1 Appreciating the Contributions of Social Work to Our Lives

The history of social work is filled with vibrancy, excitement, struggle, and change. Heavily influenced by such historical events as the waves of immigrants coming to our shores at the turn of the century, the two world wars, the Great Depression, the continuing struggles for civil rights for oppressed minorities, and the affect of military incursions into Iraq and Afghanistan, social work continues both to respond to historical events and to proactively grow and change.

The primary texts assigned to you by your instructor discuss the history of our profession at considerable length. Most begin with the development of the competing ideas of Jane Addams and Mary Richmond. The former, the founder (along with Florence Kelly and Ellen Gates Starr) of Hull House, is credited with establishing the social reform movement in social work. Addams's belief that problems resulted from environmental deficiencies was in stark contrast to Richmond's, the prime mover behind the Charity Organization Society, which promulgated, through its "friendly visitor" program, the idea that problems are a result of interpersonal deficiencies that can only be cured through moral betterment. Eventually (and with significant assistance from Freud), Richmond's view gained greater acceptance, and although the profession has evolved significantly and become more secular than Richmond's views would suggest, her influence is still felt.

It is quite difficult to imagine what social work was like back in those days, but a visit to some of the museums and archives around the country provide fascinating insights. For example, if you do not plan to visit Chicago, do the next best thing: Visit the Hull House museum online (http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/urbanexp/contents.htm), There, you will find a variety of primary source documents, documentary photographs, and scholarly essays exploring the legacy and history of social reform movements in the Windy City. Begin by reading the introductory essay, which will orient you to the general layout of the site.

Similarly, an online visit to Ellis Island Museum in New York City (http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/tour) allows you to get a glimpse of the experience of new immigrant arrivals (be sure to activate the audio portion of the tour for a poignant recollection by one of the arrivals). If you actually go there, however, you will see a bit of the role social workers played in assisting immigrants coming to their new home (one of their roles, believe it or not, was to apply cosmetics to the women who were getting off the boats to meet their future husbands for the first time. If the prospective husband found his prospective bride unappealing, she had to go back, so she wanted to look as good as she could!).

Although schools of social work were developing on campuses in the early 1900s, it was not until 1955 that the National Association of Social Workers was formed and our major professional journal *Social Work* began to be published. And it was not until 1958 that the working definition for social work practice, from which we still operate today, was published in those pages.

WORKING DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Social work practice, like the practice of all professions, is recognized by a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method. No part alone is characteristic of social work practice, nor is any part described here unique to social work. It is the particular content and configuration of this constellation that makes it social work practice, and distinguishes it from the practice of other professions. The following is an attempt to spell out the components of this constellation in such a way as to include all social work practice with all its specializations. This implies that some social work practice will show a more extensive use of one or the other of the components but it is social work practice only when they are all present to some degree.

Value

Certain philosophical concepts are basic to the practice of social work:

1. The individual is the primary concern of this society.
2. There is interdependence among individuals in this society.
3. Individuals have social responsibility for one another.
4. There are human needs common to each person, yet each person is essentially unique and different from others.
5. An essential attribute of a democratic society is the realization of the full potential of each individual and the assumption of his or her social responsibility through active participation in society.
6. Society has a responsibility to provide ways in which obstacles to this self-realization (i.e., disequilibrium between the individual and his or her environment) can be overcome or prevented.

These concepts provide the philosophical foundation for social work practice.

Purpose

The practice of social work has as its purposes the following:

1. Assist individuals and groups to identify and resolve or minimize problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment.
2. Identify potential areas of disequilibrium between individuals or groups and the environment to prevent the occurrence of disequilibrium.
3. Seek out, identify, and strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups, and communities.

Sanction (i.e., authoritative permission; countenance, approbation, or support)

Social work has developed out of a community recognition of the need to provide services to meet basic needs, services that require the intervention of practitioners trained to understand the services, themselves, the individuals, and the means for bringing all together. Social work is not practiced in a vacuum or at the choice of its practitioners alone. Thus, there is a social responsibility inherent in the practitioner's role for the way in which services are rendered. The authority and power of practitioners and what they represent to the clients and group members derive from one or a combination of three sources:

1. *Governmental agencies* or their subdivisions (authorized by law)
2. *Voluntary incorporated agencies,* which have taken responsibility for meeting certain needs or providing certain services necessary for individual and group welfare
3. The *organized profession,* which in turn can sanction individuals for the practice of social work and set forth the educational and other requirements for practice and the conditions under which that practice may be undertaken, whether or not carried out under organizational auspices

Knowledge

Social work, like all other professions, derives knowledge from a variety of sources and in application brings forth further knowledge from its own processes. Because people's knowledge is never final or absolute, social workers in their application of this knowledge take into account those phenomena that are exceptions to existing generalizations and are aware and ready to deal with the spontaneous and unpredictable in human behavior. The practice of the social worker is typically guided by knowledge of the following:

1. Human development and behavior characterized by emphasis on the wholeness of individuals and the reciprocal influences of people and their total environment—human, social, economic, and cultural
2. The psychology of giving and taking help from another person or source outside the individual
3. Ways in which people communicate with one another and give outer expression to inner feelings, such as words, gestures, and activities
4. Group process and the efforts of groups upon individuals and the reciprocal influence of individuals on the group
5. The meaning and effect on the individual, groups, and community of cultural heritage including its religious beliefs, spiritual values, laws, and other social institutions
6. Relationships—the interactional processes between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups

7. The community—its internal processes, modes of development and change, social services, and resources
8. The social services—their structure, organization, and method
9. The self, which enables individual practitioners to be aware of and to take responsibility for their own emotions and attitudes as these affect their professional functions

Method (i.e., an orderly systematic model of procedure; as used here, the term encompasses social casework, social group work, and community organization)

The social work method is the responsible, conscious, disciplined use of self in a relationship with an individual or group. Through this relationship, practitioners facilitate interaction between individuals and their social environment with a continuing awareness of the reciprocal effects of one upon the other. It facilitates change within (1) the individual in relation to his or her social environment, (2) the social environment in its effect upon the individual, and (3) both the individual and the social environment in their interaction.

Social work method includes systematic observation and assessment of the individual or group in a situation and the formulation of an appropriate plan of action. Implicit in this is a continuing evaluation regarding the nature of the relationships between worker and client or group, and its effect on both the participant individual or group and the worker himself or herself. This evaluation provides the basis for the professional judgment that workers must constantly make and that determines the direction of their activities. The method is used predominantly in interviews, group sessions, and conferences.

Techniques (i.e., instruments or tools used as a part of method). Incorporated in the use of the social work method may be one or more of the following techniques in different combinations: (1) support, (2) clarification, (3) information giving, (4) interpretation, (5) development of insight, (6) differentiation of the social worker from the individual or group, (7) identification with agency function, (8) creation and use of structure, (9) use of activities and projects, (10) provision of positive experiences, (11) teaching, (12) stimulation of group interaction, (13) limit setting, (14) use of available social resources, (15) effecting change in immediate environmental forces operating upon the individual or groups, or (16) synthesis.

Skill (i.e., technical expertness; the ability to use knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance). Competence in social work practice lies in developing skill in the use of the method and its techniques described above. This means the ability to help particular clients or groups in such a way that they clearly understand the social worker's intention and role and are able to participate in the process of solving their problems. Setting the stage, the strict observance of confidentiality, encouragement, stimulation or participation, empathy, and objectivity are means of facilitating communication. Individual social workers always make their own creative contribution in the application of social work method to any setting or activity.

As a way of increasing skill and providing controls to the activity of the social work practitioner, the following are used: (1) recording, (2) supervision, (3) case conferences, (4) consultation, and (5) review and evaluation.

Teaching, Research, and Administration

Three important segments of social work—namely, teaching, research, and administration—have significance for the development, extension, and transmission of knowledge of social work practice. These have many elements in common with social work practice but also have their own uniqueness and some different objectives.

WORKOUT 1 Instructions

Location

Inside or outside class

Purpose

1. To provide you with a sense of the professional history that all social workers have in common and the ways it resonates in the present.
2. To provide you with experience in reading original documents.

Background

To gain a more profound sense of our history and to be able to judge it in the context of current developments in social work and social welfare, it is necessary to turn to primary sources. Included here are the words of one of the profession's most important figures, Frances Perkins. Perkins never gained the fame of Jane Addams, yet her contributions to our history cannot be underestimated.

There is a wonderful biography of Perkins that you might want to read for a better understanding of her contributions (Downey, 2009). The basic facts are that around the turn of the century, and upon her graduation from Mt. Holyoke College, Perkins moved to Chicago for a short period and became involved in Hull House. Profoundly influenced by Jane Addams, and moved by the plight of immigrants there, she continued to work with immigrants when she moved to Philadelphia. In 1910, she received her master's degree from Columbia.

Perkins was an eyewitness to the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911 which, at that point, was one of the largest preventable industrial disasters the country had ever experienced. It undoubtedly influenced the direction of the rest of her life as an advocate for the rights of workers. Here, in a lecture given to the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations over a half-century later, on September 30, 1964, she recalled what she saw (with thanks to the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation & Archives):

> I remember that the accident happened on a Saturday, I happened to have been visiting a friend on the other side of the park and we heard the engines and we heard the screams and rushed out and rushed over where we could see what the trouble was. We could see this building from Washington Square and the people had just begun to jump when we got there. They had been holding until that time, standing in the windowsills, being crowded by others behind them, the fire pressing closer and closer, the smoke closer and closer. Finally the men were trying to get out this thing that the firemen carry with them, a net to catch people if they do junp. They were trying to get that out and they couldn't wait any longer. They began to jump. The window was too crowded and they would

> jump and they hit the sidewalk. The net broke, they [fell] a terrible distance, the weight of the bodies was so great, at the speed at which they were traveling that they broke through the net. Every one of them was killed, everybody who jumped was killed. It was a horrifying spectacle. We had our dose of it that night and felt as though we had been part of it all.

It is undoubtedly fortunate happenstance that, at the time of this tragedy, Perkins was also the executive secretary of the National Consumer's League, where she was able to lobby for better hours and better working conditions for women and men in the labor force.

As a social worker and political activist, Perkins felt that "poverty was preventable, destructive, wasteful and demoralizing. In the midst of potential plenty, it is morally unacceptable in a Christian and democratic society. Because the 'poor' are people, with hopes, fears, virtues, vices and fellow citizens. . . ." (from: Thomaides, A., March, 2009).

In 1933, Perkins took her social work knowledge and values to Washington, DC, when President Franklin Roosevelt appointed her as his Secretary of Labor, making her the first woman in the United States to hold a Cabinet position. She served longer than any other Secretary of Labor, from March 1933 to July 1945.

As secretary, she played a key role in shaping the New Deal. She immediately proposed federal aid to the states for direct unemployment relief, an extensive program of public works, an approach to the establishment in federal law of minimum wages and maximum hours, unemployment and old-age insurance, abolition of child labor, and the creation of a federal employment service. She was also a guiding force behind the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act, 1935), which gave workers the right to collective bargaining and created the National Labor Relations Board.

It is instructive to look at what Perkins was able to accomplish in her day, how hard-won those reforms were, and just how far-reaching those reforms continue to be, especially in light of the recent conflicts over the shape of health care reform under President Obama. I think you will appreciate the accomplishments of this social work pioneer even more when you complete this workout. To do so, read the following transcript of a radio address, delivered by Frances Perkins on February 25, 1935. This was one of the earliest popular explanations of what became the Social Security program. A series of questions will follow.

"SOCIAL INSURANCE FOR U.S."

BY HON. FRANCES PERKINS

(available at www.ssa.gov/history/perkinsradio.html)

I have been asked to speak to you tonight on the administration's program for economic security which is now, as you know, before Congress. It seems to me that few legislative proposals have had as careful study, as thorough and conscientious deliberation as went into the preparation of these

measures. The program now under consideration represents, I believe, a most significant step in our National development, a milestone in our progress toward the better-ordered society.

As I look back on the tragic years since 1929, it seems to me that we as a Nation, not unlike some individuals, have been able to pass through a bitter experience to emerge with a newfound insight and maturity. We have had the courage to face our problems and find a way out. The heedless optimism of the boom years is past. We now stand ready to build the future with sanity and wisdom.

The process of recovery is not a simple one. We cannot be satisfied merely with makeshift arrangements which will tide us over the present emergencies. We must devise plans that will not merely alleviate the ills of today, but will prevent, as far as it is humanly possible to do so, their recurrence in the future. The task of recovery is inseparable from the fundamental task of social reconstruction.

Among the objectives of that reconstruction, President Roosevelt in his message of June 8, 1934, to the Congress placed "the security of the men, women and children of the Nation first." He went on to suggest the social insurances with which European countries have had a long and favorable experience as one means of providing safeguards against "misfortunes which cannot be wholly eliminated in this man-made world of ours."

Subsequent to this message he created the Committee on Economic Security, of which I have the honor to be the chairman, to make recommendations to him with regard to these problems. The recommendations of that committee are embodied in the economic security bill, now pending in Congress. The measures we propose do not by any means provide a complete and permanent solution of our difficulties. If put into effect, however, they will provide a greater degree of security for the American citizen and his family than he has heretofore known. The bill is, I believe, a sound beginning on which we can build by degrees to our ultimate goal.

We cannot hope to accomplish all in one bold stroke. To begin too ambitiously in the program of social security might very well result in errors which would entirely discredit this very necessary type of legislation. It is not amiss to note here that social legislation in European countries, begun some 25 years ago, is still in a developmental state and has been subjected to numerous changes as experience and changing conditions dictated.

It may come as a surprise to many of us that we in this country should be so far behind Europe in providing our citizens with those safeguards which assure a decent standard of living in both good times and bad, but the reasons are not far to seek. We are much younger than our European neighbors. Our abundant pioneer days are not very far behind us. With unlimited opportunities, in those days, for the individual who wished to take advantage of them, dependency seemed a reflection on the individual himself, rather than the result of social or economic conditions. There seemed little need for any systematic organized plan, such as has now become necessary.

It has taken the rapid industrialization of the last few decades, with its mass-production methods, to teach us that a man might become a victim of circumstances far beyond his control, and finally it "took a depression to dramatize for us the appalling insecurity of the great mass of the population,

and to stimulate interest in social insurance in the United States." We have come to learn that the large majority of our citizens must have protection against the loss of income due to unemployment, old age, death of the breadwinners and disabling accident and illness, not only on humanitarian grounds, but in the interest of our National welfare. If we are to maintain a healthy economy and thriving production, we need to maintain the standard of living of the lower income groups in our population who constitute 90 per cent of our purchasing power.

England, with its earlier industrialization, learned this lesson earlier, as well. The world depression caught up with Great Britain sooner than it did with us. She has known the haunting fear of insecurity as well as we. The foresight of nearly three decades has, however, found her somewhat better prepared with the basic framework of a social insurance system. Social insurance in Great Britain has proceeded progressively since the first decade of the century. Championed by the liberal Lloyd George and beginning with the old age pension act of 1908, it has known many revisions and extensions. Since its inception, however, it has gradually overcome the opposition of its critics, and there has never been any thought of abandoning the system. It is today in a healthy state of growth.

Practically all the other industrial countries of Europe have had similar experiences. In the trial and error procedure of Europe's quarter century of social legislation—in that concrete experience—is contained sound truths as well as mistakes from which we can learn much.

But we cannot build solely on European experience. We, with our particular kind of State-Federal Government, our wide, expansive country, with its varying economic and social standards, have many needs different from those of the more closely knit, homogeneous European countries.

The American program for economic security now before our Congress follows no single pattern. It is broader than social insurance, and does not attempt merely to copy a European model. Where other measures seemed more appropriate to our background or present situation, we have not hesitated to deviate from strict social insurance principles. In doing so we feel that we have recommended the measures which at this time seemed best calculated under our American conditions to protect individuals in the years immediately ahead from the hazards which might otherwise plunge them into destitution and dependency.

Our program deals with safeguards against unemployment, with old-age security, with maternal aid and aid to crippled and dependent children and public health services. Another major subject—health insurance—is dealt with briefly in the report of the Committee on Economic Security, but without any definite recommendations. Fortunate in having secured the cooperation of the medical and other professions directly concerned, the committee is working on a plan for health insurance which will be reported later in the year. Our present program calls for the extension of existing public health services to meet conditions accentuated by the depression. Similarly, the provisions for maternal aid and aid to dependent and crippled children are not new departures, but rather the extension and amplification of safeguards which for a number of years have been a recognized part of public responsibility.

Let me briefly describe the other measures now under consideration which do represent something of a departure from our usual course.

Recognizing unemployment as the greatest of all hazards, the committee gave primary emphasis to provisions for unemployment—employment assurance. This measure is embodied in the $4,800,000,000 public works resolution, which is separate from, but complementary to, the economic security bill itself. Employment assurance, the stimulation of private employment and the provision of public employment for those able-bodied workers whom private industry cannot yet absorb is to be solely a responsibility of the Federal Government and its major contribution in providing safeguards against unemployment. It should be noted that this is the largest employment program ever considered in any country. As outlined by the President, it will furnish employment for able-bodied men now on relief, and enable them to earn their support in a decent and socially useful way. It will uphold morale, as well as purchasing power, and directly provide jobs for many in private industry who would otherwise have none.

For the 80 per cent of our industrial workers who are employed, we propose a system of unemployment compensation, or insurance, as it is usually called. In our concern for the unemployed, we must not overlook this much larger group who also need protection.

No one who is now employed can feel secure while so many of his fellows anxiously seek work. Unemployment compensation, while it has distinct limitations which are not always clearly understood, is particularly valuable for the ordinarily regularly employed industrial worker who is laid off for short periods because of seasonal demands or other minor industrial disturbances. He can, during this period when he has a reasonable expectation of returning to work within a short time, receive compensation for his loss of income for a limited period as a definite, contractual right. His standard of living need not be undermined, he is not forced on relief nor must he accept other work unsuited to his skill and training.

Unemployment insurance, wherever it has been tried, has demonstrated its value in maintaining purchasing power and stabilizing business conditions. It is very valuable at the onset of a depression, and even in the later stages will serve to carry a part of the burden of providing for the unemployed. For those who have exhausted their rights to unemployment benefits and for those who, in any case, must be excluded from its provisions, we suggest that they be given employment opportunities on public work projects. In these two measures, employment assurance and unemployment compensation, we have a first and second line of defense which together should form a better safeguard than either standing alone.

The unemployment compensation system has been designed to remove an obstacle which has long prevented progressive industrial States from enacting unemployment insurance laws—-fear of interstate competition with States not having such laws. Having removed that obstacle, the law allows the States full latitude to develop trie kind of unemployment compensation systems best suited to their individual needs.

The bill provides for a Federal tax on payrolls against which credit is allowed the employer for contributions to an approved State unemployment compensation fund. By this Federal tax every employer will be placed on the same competitive basis from a National standpoint, and at the same time, aside from compliance with a few minimum Federal standards, every State will be free to adopt the kind of law it wants.

One of the most important of the Federal requirements is that all unemployment compensation funds shall be deposited with the Federal Treasury in Washington, so as to assure their availability when needed and make it possible to utilize the reserves which will accumulate in conformity with the credit policy of the Nation.

We feel that this is a most fortunate time for the Government to take action on unemployment insurance. There has been a rapidly growing enthusiasm for it in the States for years. Many States have already prepared excellent legislation of this kind or are studying the subject, and they are but waiting word from Washington, so that they may proceed with the plans which have been so long under consideration.

I come now to the other major phase of our program. The plan for providing against need and dependency in old age is divided into three separate and distinct parts. We advocate, first, free Federally-aided pensions for those now old and in need; second, a system of compulsory contributory old-age insurance for workers in the lower income brackets, and third, a voluntary system of low-cost annuities purchasable by those who do not come under the compulsory system.

Enlightened opinion has long since discarded the old poor-house method of caring for the indigent aged, and 28 States already have old-age pension laws. Due to financial difficulties, many of these laws are now far less effective than they were intended to be. Public sentiment in this country is strongly in favor of providing these old people with a decent and dignified subsistence in their declining years. Exploiting that very creditable sentiment, impossible, hare-brained schemes for providing for the aged have sprung into existence and attracted misguided supporters. But the administration is confident that its plan for meeting the situation is both humane and practical and will receive the enthusiastic support of the people.

We propose that the Federal Government shall come to the aid of the State pension systems already in existence and stimulate the enactment of similar legislation elsewhere by grants-in-aid equal to one-half the State expenditures for such purposes but not exceeding $15 per month. This does not necessarily mean that State pensions would not anywhere exceed $30 per month. Progressive States may find it possible to grant more than $15 per month as their share. The size of the pension would, of course, be proportionate to the need of the applicant and would quite likely vary with conditions in different States. A larger pension would, for example, be necessary in certain industrial States than in communities where living conditions are easier.

For those now young or even middle-aged, a system of compulsory old-age insurance will enable them to build up, with matching contributions from their employers, an annuity from which they can draw as a right upon reaching old age. These workers will be able to care for themselves in their old age, not merely on a subsistence basis, which is all that gratuitous pensions have anywhere provided, but with a modest comfort and security. Such a system will greatly lessen the hazards of old age to the many workers who could not, unaided, provide for themselves and would greatly lessen the enormous burden of caring for the aged of future generations from public funds. The voluntary system of old-age annuities is designed to cover the same income groups as does the compulsory system, but will afford

those who for many reasons cannot be included in a compulsory system an opportunity to provide for themselves.

Many of you will be interested to know that the two proposed annuity systems in no way infringe on the commercial annuity markets. Officials of insurance companies have themselves remarked that these measures would touch a strata of our population for whom commercial annuities are prohibitively expensive. These officials feel that the measures we propose will prove advantageous to their companies rather than the reverse, in so far as they promote public interest in the insurance movement.

This, in broad outlines, is the program now before us. We feel that it is a sound and reasonable plan and framed with due regard for the present state of economic recovery. I can do no better than to pass on to you the words with which President Roosevelt closed his letter submitting these recommendations to the Congress now in session:

"The establishment of sound means toward a greater future economic security of the American people is dictated by a prudent consideration of the hazards involved in our national life. No one can guarantee this country against the dangers of future depressions, but we can reduce these dangers. We can eliminate many of the factors that cause economic depressions, and we can provide the means of mitigating their results. This plan for economic security is at once a measure of prevention and a method of alleviation.

"We pay now for the dreadful consequence of economic insecurity—and dearly. This plan presents a more equitable and infinitely less expensive means of meeting these costs. We cannot afford to neglect the plain duty before us. I strongly recommend action to attain the objectives sought in this report."

WORKOUT 1 Workspace

Directions

Answer the following questions in the space provided below.

Name ______________________________

Date ______________________________

1. What are the social work values reflected in this speech?

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2. Think about the recent debates over health care reform, which culminated in President Barack Obama signing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act ("health care reform"), or the extension of unemployment benefits in the summer of 2010. If Perkins were alive today, would she have supported either bill? On what grounds?

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3. In her explanation of the construction of the Social Security legislation, Perkins drew on the lessons learned from Europe's efforts to protect their citizens. Today, it would be considered very risky for any U.S. politician to invoke the system comparisons that Perkins did. Why? What has changed, in terms of national values, or the terms of our national discourse?

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4. Do you think that Perkins's ideas about the responsibility of government to enable a basic standard of living for its citizens represent the mainstream of the profession of social work? Why or why not?

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WORKOUT 2 Learning From Your Professional Community

As you may have read in your social work textbook or heard in a lecture, the roots of the social work profession lie in the two decades leading up to the Progressive Era, beginning with the founding of the Charity Organization Society (in Buffalo, New York in 1877), and ending with the publication of *Social Diagnosis* (Richmond, 1917), the first textbook used in the first school of social work (at Columbia University). These two events have come to be seen as major milestones in the development of the "individual helping" stream of social work activity, which remains one of the primary models for social work practice today.

The opening of Hull House, the first settlement house, in Chicago in 1889 is widely viewed as the seminal event in the development of the second stream of social work activity: the social reform movement. This movement, characterized by a recognition of the influence of structural or environmental barriers to the realization of human potential, is recognizable today as "macrolevel" or social policy practice.

Both of these streams of practice, transfigured by time as well as social and economic exigencies, are what give social work its uniqueness within the pantheon of helping professions: (a) working with individuals to alleviate their distress and enable the fullest use of human potential and (b) advocating for social change by working to reduce those environmental barriers, often through social policy initiatives.

Our history is truly an illustrious one that generations of social workers have relished repeating to our newest professionals. Undoubtedly, your instructors will invoke the names, ideals, and writings of Addams, Richmond, and many others who have shaped the profession. However, remember that history is written continuously; thus future generations will read and reflect upon the words of current scholars and activists.

You can contribute to that history either by becoming a leader yourself or by chronicling the lives and times of those leaders who live in our midst now. It is the latter that is the focus of this workout.

WORKOUT 2 Instructions

Location

Outside class

Purpose

1. To increase skill in the discovery of living resource material in historical research.
2. To learn more about the development of the profession, or the social services in your community, from a historical perspective.
3. To learn how to develop a historical research question.
4. To exercise your skills in interviewing.

Background

The conduct of historical research using the informational interview of someone who was present during a time or event of interest to you can be an exciting endeavor. It allows you to ask questions and, when appropriate, examine documents in their possession about a period in which you are interested and to draw your own conclusions about its meaning. This makes *you* an expert on your subject rather than a biographer or historian who has already done the work for you.

Any research endeavor requires careful planning prior to execution, and the informational interview is no different. When conducting interviews with persons present at an event of historical significance, you need to read about the event, if possible, and have some questions prepared. If you have selected someone to interview whose ideas and ideals, you believe, shaped social services in your area in some way, gather background material related to the configuration of social services before that person came along, what some of the barriers to change were perceived by others to be, and the like.

You should also be prepared to have your assumptions challenged and myths debunked. For example, we lionize Jane Addams today because of her strong commitment to poverty amelioration and social change and her apparently feminist commitments regarding the role of women in public life. Yet Jane Addams did not believe in federal intervention in the care of the poor. That was one of the reasons why she was so committed to Hull House—it was privately funded. A limited federal government is an idea most often embraced by conservatives, but no one thinks of Addams as a conservative! So be prepared to come across the unexpected.

Directions

1. In consultation with your instructor, select a historical research question that you would like to answer, focusing on someone in your community. This may be done as a group project.

   You want to interview a person who was influential in the development of social services, the ideas that shaped the development of the

profession in your area, or a social worker who successfully organized for social change. This person might be any of the following:

- A retired professor from your school or department who may be able to speak on the establishment of the social work major within your college or university and might have also held some interesting and important positions in the field of social work prior to becoming an academician. You may wish to examine the professor's perceptions of social work now and then, or you may be interested in recording an oral history of how the social work major got started. You may also be interested in the sum total of the person's contributions to and observations of social work over the many decades of their professional life. You will thus frame your interview accordingly.
- A local social worker, perhaps retired and living nearby, who was at the creation of one of the social service agencies presently operating in your community. This person may be willing to be interviewed about some of the controversies that surrounded the creation of the agency, the persons who first thought about starting it, and the like.
- A community organizer (preferably with a social work background) who organized constituent groups for social change. For example, is there a social worker who successfully lobbied, either locally or at the state level, for services to battered women before domestic violence was recognized as a problem? Or is there someone in your community who was active in a civil rights campaign (organizing African Americans in the South during the civil rights movement, organizing to press for the rights of persons with disabilities, organizing migrant workers, etc.)? Such persons had a unique vantage point from which to view the changes they fought for and may have some interesting notions about what remains to be done and what the struggles of tomorrow are likely to be.

2. Where appropriate, you may also wish to avail yourself of archival material housed in a local agency (including the agency's first bylaws, minutes from meetings, correspondence from funding sources, etc.) that would shed additional light on your topic.

3. You may wish to begin the research process by writing a formal letter to the person(s) you would like to interview and following up with a phone call. Prior to the interview, you may wish to read some background material. Once you have done that, prepare a list of questions you would like to have answered, but always be ready, once in the intervew, to follow the respondent and ask follow-up questions.

4. Using a tape recorder to supplement your own notes, conduct the interview.

5. Upon completion of your data collection procedure, write a report of your efforts in the Workout 2 workspace, answering the questions contained therein.

WORKOUT 2 Workspace

Name ______________________________

Date ______________________________

1. What question(s) did you wish your respondent (interviewee) to answer?

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____

____

2. What sources, if any, did you use (besides the respondent) both to prepare you to make the most of your interview and to help you answer your questions?

____

____

____

3. What degree of difficulty (not difficult at all, moderate, or very difficult) would you assign to this project in terms of (a) finding a suitable respondent and (b) finding appropriate background material to help prepare you for the interview? Why?

____

____

____

4. What did you learn from this project about your particular research question?

____

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5. What surprised you the most?

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6. Additional comments:

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