



SOCIAL WELFARE

History, Politics, Policies,
and Services

WORKOUT 1 Appreciating the Living History of Social Work

The history of social work is filled with vibrance, 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 War on Poverty, and the continuing struggles for civil rights for oppressed minorities and women, 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. Her 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 ever have the chance, visit the Smithsonian Institution of American History, where the exhibit "From Parlor to Politics: Women and Social Reform" is on permanent display. This exhibit, which details the social activism of African American women, mothers of sons in war, and the social reformers of Hull House, made me very proud of my professional ancestors. Similarly, a visit to Ellis Island in New York City allows you to 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, which we still operate from 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. They 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 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 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. Since 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, its 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. 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) utilization of available social resources, (15) effecting change in immediate environmental forces operating upon the individual or groups, and/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

In 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, Josephine Shaw Lowell. Lowell never gained the fame of Jane Addams, yet reading her words, it is interesting to think about how her experiences shaped our profession. Lowell brought a somewhat different perspective to social work than many of our other professional forebears.

Lowell was one of the founders of the Charity Organization Society of New York and a leader in the movement in the United States to reorganize public and private charities in accordance with the principles of "scientific philanthropy." Her greatest contributions include the instigation of many notable reforms such as increasing the number of institutions for the insane, state reformatories for women, and asylums for "feeble-minded" women. She deeply believed in the cause of wage and working-hour regulation for women, whom she saw shamelessly exploited; she also championed women's suffrage and civil service reform. Although she was widowed very early in life, her three sisters, all of whom married men who were in public service, were supportive of her work (and of her) throughout her life.

Directions

1. Read the following excerpt from a speech by Lowell, recorded in the *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections* (Lowell, 1890/1997). The piece reflects her thoughts on the effects of social welfare. Over a century later, this remains a timely subject.
2. After reading the piece, answer the questions in the Workout 1 Workspace.

The Economic and Moral Effects of Public Outdoor Relief

by Mrs. Charles Russell [Josephine Shaw] Lowell, of New York

I have not been able to assent to the report of the Chairman of the Committee on Indoor and Outdoor Relief, only because, as it seems to me, it does not draw the distinction which is necessary between public and private relief.

I admit, of course, that there are persons who need relief (that is, *help*) with their own homes, and that both Pitt's argument and Mr. Sanborn's argument apply to such: "Great care should be taken, in relieving their distresses, not to throw them into the great class of vagrant and homeless poor." Such people, however, are to my mind, not proper subjects for relief at all; for what is public relief, and upon what grounds is it to be justified? Public relief is money paid by the bulk of the community (every community is of course composed mainly of those who are working hard to obtain a livelihood) to certain members of the community; not, however, voluntarily or spontaneously by those interested in the individuals receiving it, but paid by public officers from money raised by taxation. The justification for the expenditure of public money (money raised by taxation) is that it is necessary for the public good. That certain persons need certain things is no reason for supplying them with those things from the public funds. Before this can be rightly done, it is necessary to prove that it is good for the community at large that it should be done . . .

The practice of any community in this particular is a matter of great importance, for there can be no question that there is an inverse ratio between the welfare of the mass of the people and the distribution of relief. What some one has called "the fatal ease of living without work and the terrible difficulty of living by work" are closely interrelated as cause and effect; and if you will permit me, I will try to show by a short allegory what this relation is.

Once upon a time there lived in a valley, called the Valley of Industry, a people who were happy and industrious. All the goods of this life were applied to them by exhaustless subterranean springs of water, which they pumped up into a great reservoir on the top of a neighboring hill, the Hill of Prosperity, from which it flowed down, each man receiving what he himself pumped up, by a small pipe which led into his own house, a moderate amount of pumping on the part of everyone keeping the reservoir well filled.

Finally, a few of the inhabitants of the Valley, more keen than the rest, reflected that it was unnecessary to weary themselves with pumping, so long as everyone else kept at work. The Hill of Prosperity looked very attractive; and they therefore mounted to a convenient point, and put a large pipe into the reservoir, through which they drew off copious supplies of water without further trouble. The number of those who gave up pumping and withdrew to the Hill was at first so small that the loss did not add very much to the work of the mass of the people, who still kept to their pumping, and it did not occur to them to complain; but those who could followed the others up the Hill until it was all occupied, and by this time, although those who remained in the Valley did find their pumping a good deal harder than it was when all who used the water joined in the work, yet every one had become

so accustomed to some people using the reservoir water without doing any pumping that it had come to be considered all right, and still there were no complaints. Meanwhile, the people on the Hill of Prosperity having nothing to do but enjoy the prospect, some of them began to explore the neighboring country, and soon discovered another valley at the foot of the Hill, running parallel with the Valley of Industry, and called the Valley of Idleness, and in it were a few people who had wandered from the former Valley (for the two were connected at the farther end), and who were living in abject misery, with no water, and apparently no means of getting any, so long as they stayed where they were. The people from the Hill of Prosperity were very much shocked at the suffering they found. "What a shame!" they cried. "The poor things have no water! We have plenty and to spare, so let us lead a pipe from the reservoir down into their Valley." No sooner said than done: the pipe was carried into the Valley of Idleness, and the people were made more comfortable. But as soon as the news was brought into the Valley of Industry, some of the pumpers who were tired or weak, and some who were only lazy, left their pumping, and hastened into the neighboring Valley, to enjoy the "free" water; but the pipe was not very large, and soon there was want and suffering again, and the people from Prosperity Hill were much disturbed, and decided to lay down another small pipe, which they did. But the result was the same, for the new supply of water attracted more people from the Valley of Industry. And so it went on, new pipe, more people, new pipe, more people, until the inhabitants of Prosperity Hill were full of distress about it, and exclaimed, "It seems a hopeless task to try to make these people happy and comfortable!" And they would have given up in despair, but a new idea occurred to them; and they said, "They do not seem to know how to take very good care of their children, and we will therefore take their children from them, and teach them to be comfortable and happy." So they built large, fine houses for the children, and they carried water in large pipes into the houses. And some of them said, "Let us put faucets, so as to teach them to turn on the water when they need it." But others said: "Oh, no! How troublesome it is to have to turn a faucet when you need water! Let them have it as we do, free." And sometimes one or other would suggest that, perhaps, after all, it was not quite right to waste so much of the water from the reservoir, and that the large pipe itself, which supplied the Hill of Prosperity, ought to have some means of checking the flow; but the answer was. "It is necessary and right that the water should be wasted; for otherwise the people in the Valley of Industry would have nothing to do, and they would starve." Usually, however, the Prosperity Hill people were too much engaged in taking care of the inhabitants of the Valley of Idleness to give much thought to those of the Valley of Industry; and their anxiety was quite magnified, for they had to keep up a perpetual watchfulness, the people increasing so fast that it was necessary constantly to lay more pipe to keep them from the most abject suffering, and even this device never succeeded for very long, as I have said.

In fact, no one thought much about the Valley of Industry or its people. Those in the Valley of Idleness only thought of them long enough to reflect how silly they were to keep on pumping all the time and making their backs and arms ache, when they might have water without any exertion, by simply moving into their Valley. The children born in the Valley of Idleness did not even know there was a Valley of Industry, or any pumps, or any pumpers, or a reservoir: they thought the water grew in pipes, and ran out because it was its nature to. As for the people of the Hill of

Prosperity, they were, as we have seen, rather confused in their views in this particular; and, besides thinking that their waste of the water from the reservoir was what kept the people in the Valley of Industry from starving, they used to also say sometimes: "How good it is for those people to have such nice, steady work to do! how strong it makes their back and arms! how it hardens their muscles! What a nice, independent set of people they are! and *what* a splendid opportunity of pure, life-giving water they get out of our reservoir!"

Meanwhile, you can imagine, though they could not, that it was rather hard on the men in the Valley of Industry, not only to have the water they pumped up drawn off at the top to supply two other communities, but also to have their own ranks thinned and their work increased by the loss of those who were tempted into the Valley of Idleness, to live on what the Prosperity Hill people and the Valley of Idleness people like to call euphemistically "free water," because they got it free, though actually it was not free at all; the Valley of Industry people paid for it with their blood and muscle.

I might go on to tell you how the situation was still further complicated and made harder for them, and indeed for almost everyone, when a few of them obtained control of the inexhaustible subterranean springs; but here, I think, the allegory may end for the purposes of this Conference, and it seems to me to teach a lesson which we may well heed.



WORKOUT 1 *Workspace*

Name _____

Date _____

1. What were the primary ideas contained in Lowell's allegory?

2. Does Lowell seem to see the problems of individuals as rooted in personal deficits, environmental deficits, or both? Explain.

3. Think about a specific legislative issue currently or recently debated at the state or local level—welfare reform or health care reform, for example. Given Lowell's views on relief, what values might she have expressed, and what views might she have taken on that issue?

4. If Lowell were alive today, which of the policymakers and politicians in your state, or representing you in Congress, would she support? Why?

5. Do you think that Lowell's sentiments would represent the mainstream of the profession as you understand it? Why or why not?
