



THE --- SOCIAL WORK --- EXPERIENCE ---

*An Introduction
to the Profession and
Its Relationship to
Social Welfare Policy*

Second Edition

MARY ANN SUPPES
CAROLYN CRESSY WELLS

The Social Work Experience

An Introduction to the Profession and Its Relationship to Social Welfare Policy

SECOND EDITION

Mary Ann Suppes

Mount Mary College

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Marquette University

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*With love to Fred (Fritz) Suppes for unfailing encouragement
and support, and for inspiration at the very moments when
it was most needed*

*In memoriam to Chuck and Louise Wentworth for all their
help and encouragement throughout the years*

THE SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

An Introduction to the Profession and Its Relationship to Social Welfare Policy

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Foreword

The Social Work Experience by Mary Ann Suppes and Carolyn Wells is a book that upsets many of our preconceptions about the sources and roles of scholarship. We do not usually think of texts intended for introductory courses as a source of innovative scholarly thinking. Nor do we look to faculty teaching in small undergraduate social work programs to produce creative scholarly publications. Yet this remarkable volume, written by two authors from small undergraduate social work programs and designed as a text for the introductory course in social work, is at once both an unusually effective teaching tool and a source of innovative thinking about the field of social work.

Watching this book come to fruition has led me to reflect on how scholarship is defined and rewarded. The Carnegie Foundation, for example, recently examined new models of scholarship. One of these, "the transformation of knowledge," is described as a type of scholarship in which educators put knowledge into a form that can be used effectively by students. To me, there is no better example of this process than this book, and no better evidence for the Carnegie Foundation's claim that the transformation of knowledge is a contribution to scholarship.

Mary Ann Suppes and Carolyn Wells have succeeded in presenting generalist social work practice in a way that integrates its multiple dimensions into a manageable whole that is both engaging and understandable to anyone seeking an understanding of the profession. The book is an introductory text, yet its integration of knowledge—from practice and from theory—is creative and effective. The authors have achieved their goal of presenting a profession rich in diversity as a unified whole.

Each chapter focuses on a client population and its unique needs. The basic foundation upon which the authors have constructed their edifice are the extended case studies that open each chapter. These case studies, fraught with drama, richness and life, make real the meaning of problems, the people who struggle with them, and the social workers who provide help. Thus the reader first encounters each of the many diverse groups who comprise social work's

client base not as abstractions but as individuals, not as statistics but as people, and in this fashion comes more readily to an understanding of each group's social and cultural context.

The book is, however, much more than a collection of case studies. The conceptual dimensions of practice are fully explored as is the role of the generalist social worker and all pertinent value issues. Throughout, the authors draw upon and introduce a broad range of relevant research data that illuminate the problems, policies, and issues that abound in a field such as social work.

Similarly, their discussion is in each case accompanied by an examination of the historical roots of the problem under discussion and the profession's response to it. They systematically examine the impact of political and economic variables on social policy, especially with respect to the needs of women and members of minority groups. The conceptual and historical perspectives are unified through an analysis of appropriate social work roles, ranging from personal counseling and support to community, organizational, and social policy intervention.

The result is an inspiring new clarity about the profession's goals and potential that will prove invaluable to the beginning student. The humanity of the extensive case material is linked to a sound empirical and theoretical foundation. Most remarkable of all, there is a seamless interweaving of the multiple dimensions of social work from which emerges quite naturally a holistic view of the profession.

So, while this book is most simply described as an introductory text, it is in reality a piece of superb scholarship. Its authors are models for the new teacher-scholar that the Carnegie Foundation describes as engaged in the transformation of knowledge. Suppes and Wells apply their practice experience, conceptual clarity, and empirical rigor to a new level of scholarship in social work. Their book will change the way a new generation of social workers understands its profession.

Ronald C. Federico
November 1989

Preface

One beautiful, crisp fall day several years ago two friends, both social work educators, set off by car for a conference 200 miles to the north. We were those friends and our conversation during that drive sparked the ideas that resulted in *The Social Work Experience*. We were both teaching an introductory course in social work that semester and, because our roots were in social work practice, we were frustrated by the lack of well-developed, contemporary case study materials. Authentic, current case material, we were convinced, would help students to identify with the real people that are served by social workers across the United States, and with the social workers themselves.

It occurred to us that we could create these materials ourselves from our own professional practice experiences and from the field learning experiences of our students. Our case studies could portray ethnically and racially diverse populations in both client and social worker roles. Some could illustrate baccalaureate social work students in field work practice. We could synthesize real-life situations of people we had known and thus avoid exact duplication of any actual cases. With these ideas and commitments, the book emerged.

Over the next months, as the first edition of the book developed, case studies were designed which presented generalist social work practice with different systems levels and connected case materials with theoretical content. Common themes were integrated into each chapter: generalist practice, social research, ethics and values, and human diversity. Our concern for special issues relevant to women helped frame several of the case studies as well as the content of the text. The development of major social welfare programs in the United States was traced. The history of the social work profession was presented within each field of practice, to acquaint students with the social and political context of the times and with the persons who provided strong leadership in the development of the profession. The primary focus of the book was entry-level generalist social work practice, but the linkage between generalist and specialist practice was also presented.

The common themes integrated into every chapter of the first edition remain the same in the second edition. However, the theme of human diversity has been augmented and expanded to include an examination of poverty, populations at risk, and social justice issues. An entire new chapter (Chapter 2) has been developed for this purpose, and new materials are integrated into every chapter.

We remain committed to helping students understand the impact of politics and economics on social welfare policy. In our experience, the relationship of social welfare policy to practice is often not clear to students when they first explore the profession of social work, but it does become dramatically clear in field work when they experience the pain of underserved populations. The case studies in this book, therefore, were selected because they demonstrate how people suffer when human service programs are poorly funded. Both the case studies and the didactic content were developed to make clear the profound impact of legislation on social welfare policy and social work practice, and on the people served by social workers. For this reason, many of the case studies illustrate social workers in roles involving community intervention, advocating for people, and attempting to influence public policy. For, in fact, the role of the true generalist goes well beyond counseling relationships and therapy with individual clients. It calls for interventions with families, groups, organizations, and communities, as well as with individuals. It demands that interventions be based on the needs and problems of people, not on a social worker's personal expertise in a specific therapeutic modality.

Most of the chapters in the text begin with a case study, which can be interesting but might also pose some problems. For instance, readers might make inappropriate generalizations from them, such as: all street people are alcoholics, mental illness is especially prevalent among Native Americans, or Asian people are all refugees. Another invalid inference would be the assumption that social workers need special life experiences, such as alcoholism and recovery, to be effective with specific problem situations presented by clients. Diverse racial and ethnic groups are depicted in the case studies, but not for the purpose of associating these groups with any specific social problems. Instead, the case studies show that when people need to use social services, their unique cultural identities must be acknowledged and respected, not ignored or violated. Case studies are a useful means to engage students and to help them explore the many dimensions of social work practice.

Critical thinking skills are essential to ethical, competent social work practice. The case studies in this text present learning opportunities that will challenge students to think carefully and critically, to recognize invalid assumptions in the situations, and also to analyze the many inappropriate generalizations made by society about the people that social workers serve.

A note about the terminology used in the text to indicate the two major levels of professional practice: "BSW" applies to persons who have been prepared at the baccalaureate level in schools accredited by the Council on Social Work Education; and master's-degree social workers are referred to as "MSWs." It should be noted, however, that many accredited undergraduate schools grant the BA degree (or the BS, the BSW, BASW, or other variations). And, while the MSW is the more commonly awarded master's degree in social work, some of

the degree variations at this level include the MSSW and the MS. All such variations are incorporated into the text's BSW and MSW designations.

Today, as we put the finishing touches to the second edition, we wish to acknowledge and thank those who assisted us on this project. While the book is basically our own creation, it has been substantially enriched by the critiques and contributions of its editors and reviewers. Irving Rockwood, senior editor of the first edition, was instrumental in providing the transitional arrangements with McGraw-Hill that made this second edition possible. Ronald C. Federico's innovative ideas continue to shape the content of the book, in spite of his untimely death shortly after publication of the first edition. Kathy Blake, senior editor of the current edition, provided many helpful suggestions and much encouragement. Nancy Blaine's enthusiasm energized us, and her refreshing and creative ideas considerably strengthened the book. Laura Warner's organizational skills brought sanity and order to the final weeks of editing. We are grateful to the following reviewers for their helpful critiques and comments: Gloria Duran Aguilar, Florida State University; Mary Ellen Elwell, Salisbury State University; Leonard Gibbs, the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire; Waldo E. Johnson Jr., Loyola University, Chicago; Charles Jones, the University of Michigan at Flint; Tim Kelly, the University of Georgia; Taylor McGlawn, Rust College; John McNutt, Indiana University; Dennis Myers, Baylor University; Andrew T. Nilsson, Eastern Connecticut State University; Kim-Anne Perkins, the University of Maine at Presque Isle; Jack Sellers, the University of North Alabama; and Marjorie P. Steinberg, Western Connecticut State University.

Our gratitude is also expressed to those who provided materials for or helped to design our composite case studies: Luz Burgos, Rachel Forman, Michael George, Carrie Hatzis, Sandra Hill, Richard Kindel, David Kucej, Julie Kudick, Ronald Lintvedt, Maureen Martin, David Schneider, Deborah Trakel, Jeanne West, Jason Dietenberger, Georgia Giese, Judith Wettengel, Mary Pelter, Wanda Priddy, Dolores Poole, Delores Sumner, Linda Ketcher Goodrich, Isaac Christie, Malcolm Montgomery, and Jan Mowdy. And we appreciate the exceptional library research assistance of Laurel J. Davis.

We are most indebted to the theorists and writers whose dream of generalist social work practice has inspired us. Along with hundreds of other social work educators, we are committed to keeping alive and strong the concept of generalist practice articulated by Betty L. Baer and Ronald C. Federico, among others.* It is our sincere hope that faculty and students alike will find this book helpful in understanding and appreciating the context and practice of social work.

Mary Ann Suppes
Carolyn Cressy Wells

*See Betty L. Baer and Ronald C. Federico, *Educating the Baccalaureate Social Worker: Report of the Undergraduate Social Work Curriculum Development Project*, Ballinger, Cambridge, Mass., 1978; and *Educating the Baccalaureate Social Worker: A Curriculum Development Resources Guide*, Ballinger, Cambridge, Mass., 1979.

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