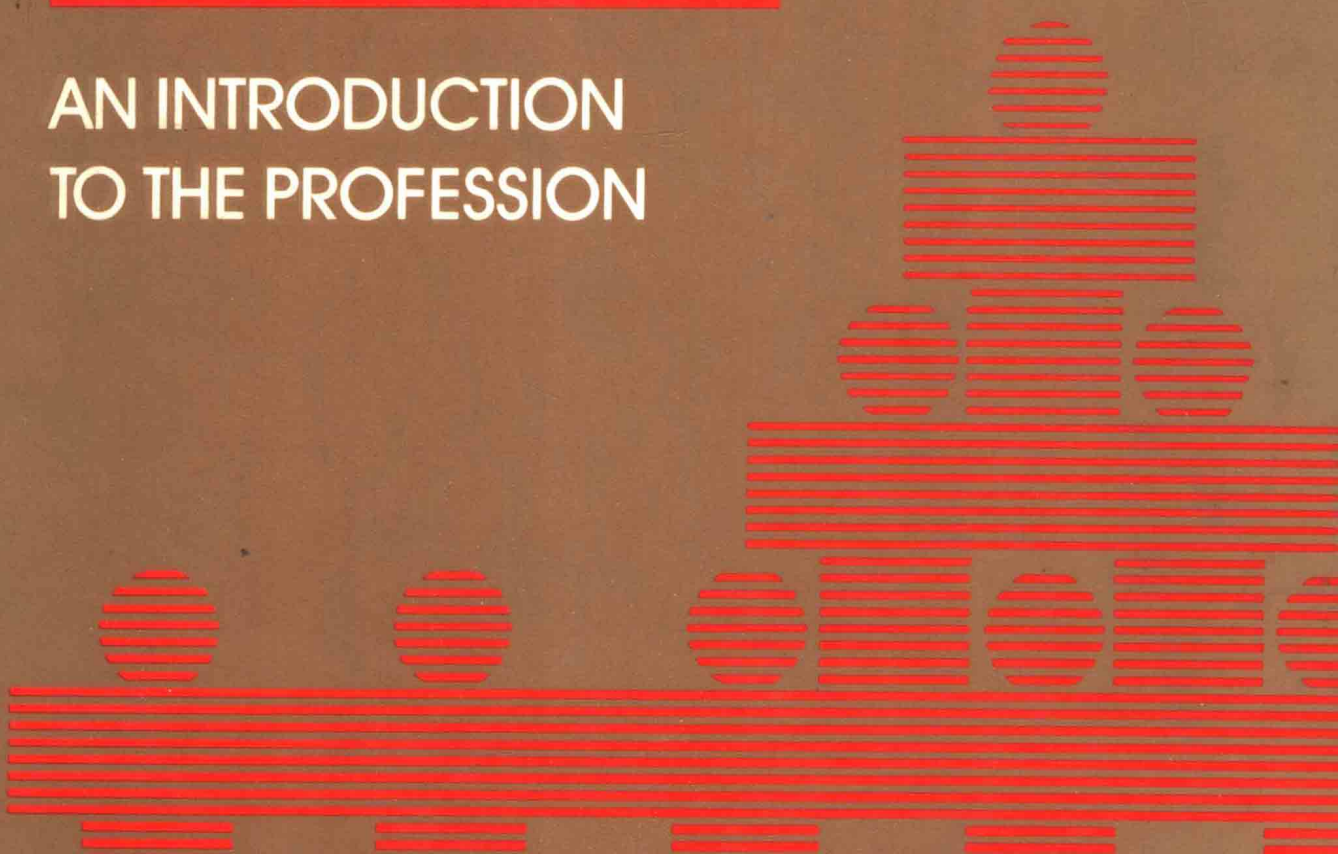


MARY ANN SUPPES
CAROLYN CRESSY WELLS

THE SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE PROFESSION



THE SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

An Introduction to the Profession

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An Introduction to the Profession

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To Fred (Fritz) Suppes for unfailing encouragement
and support, and for inspiration
at the very moments when it was most needed.

To Merritt Wells Stites for loving friendship,
for ongoing consultation as a colleague in social work,
and just for being my cherished sister.

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Appendix

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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 who 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 three 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 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 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 so as 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.

We were 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 when

in field work students 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. Instead, 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.

Today, somewhere between Milwaukee and Stevens Point, Wisconsin, as we again journey to our state social work education conference, we are writing the final paragraphs of this book. We wish to recognize and thank those who assisted us in this project. While the book is basically the creation of the authors, it has been substantially enriched by the critiques and contributions of its editors and reviewers. Irving Rockwood, senior editor, provided consistent encouragement and many useful suggestions. Ronald C. Federico, Iona College, served as a major consultant in terms of content. Elsa Van Bergen assisted in refining the final product. We are grateful to the following reviewers for their helpful critiques and comments: Paul Ammons, University of Georgia; Mary Ellen Elwell, Salisbury State University; John M. Herrick, Michigan State University; Ellen T. Kennedy, State University College at Buffalo; Donald G. Magel, Arizona State University; and Jan Schull, Manchester College.

Our gratitude is also expressed to those who provided materials for or helped to design our composite case studies: Liz Burgos, Rachel Forman, Michael George, Carrie Hatzis, Sandra Hill, Howard Kaufman, Richard Kindel, David Kucej, Julie Kudick, Ronald Lintvedt, Maureen Martin, David Schneider, Deborah Trakel, and Jeanne West.

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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PART ONE

Social Work and Its Context

Chapter One introduces the generalist social worker, a professional who has earned the baccalaureate degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Major competencies required by the generalist social work practitioner are identified and discussed. The purpose and tasks of social work as a profession are compared with those of related disciplines, such as sociology and psychology. Social work values and ethics are outlined, and their central role to the profession is identified and discussed.

Chapter Two examines social welfare as a system or institution and explains the place of the profession of social work within this system. The institution of social welfare is central to the referral work of the generalist. In the United States it derived primarily from that existing in England when the first European settlers came to America. Hence, in order for students of social welfare to have some understanding of how the U.S. system developed, old world history, especially English, will be explored briefly.

An overview of social welfare history in the United States, highlighting major themes and trends, leads to an examination of major contemporary governmental social welfare programs. Although social workers today do not typically work in welfare agencies in roles providing financial and material aids, they need to know what the major programs are in order to provide adequate referral information to clients in need.

The Professional Social Worker

SUSAN DUNN

THE GENERALIST SOCIAL WORKER:

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES

Applying Competencies

Interviewing—A Key Skill

Exploring Options

SOCIAL WORK AND RELATED

PROFESSIONS

Comparing Related Occupations

How Professions Relate

ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK

ORGANIZATIONS

BACCALAUREATE SOCIAL WORK

CURRICULUM

Human Diversity

Research

Values

Code of Ethics

SUMMARY

KEY TERMS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

NOTES

FOR FURTHER READING