Education for Social Work Practice in Jewish Communal Service*

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The Need for a Rationale

PROFESSIONAL education is distinguished from academic education by its focus on preparation for professional *practice*. It is not exempt from evaluation on the basis of academic criteria, however, since professional education, at the moment at least, is based in universities and colleges. In short, the general objective of professional education is professional preparation, but its implementation is guided by standards of scholarship.

Although the particular aim of professional education is development of the student's knowledge, skill, attitudes, values, and ethics for professional practice, the schools and departments of social work are also accountable for the discriminating certification of students as having met the scholarship requirements connoted by the academic degrees that students are granted upon completion of their course of professional study. Schools and departments of social work as well as students, therefore, are bound by the requisites of both the professional and academic cultures to which professional education is currently connected.

This undoubtedly complicates the educational objectives and processes of schools and departments of social work, and the experiences of students in them. On the other hand, insufficient attention either to academic or professional necessities represents neglect of responsibility and expectations.[1]

A rationale is needed both to validate this bifocal emphasis in social work education, and to guide its objectives, processes, and procedures. As far as social work education for Jewish communal service is concerned, an additional rationale is required which reconciles—if that is possible—the requisites of professional education and the professional goals of Jewish communal service. Social work education is limited, and perhaps irresponsible, as a result, to the extent that its application is peculiar to Jewish communal service. Social work education is also limited, and perhaps irresponsible as a result, to the extent that it is inapplicable to Jewish communal service; unless, of course, the goals of social work education and of Jewish communal service are entirely incongruous, in which case it must be decided that there is no or little room for social work in Jewish communal service, or that social work education is not sufficiently relevant to Jewish communal service.

This does not imply that a perfect fit is essential between social work education and Jewish communal service, or that social work education is the exclusive or even preferred educational treatment of choice for Jewish communal service. Quite to the contrary, a perfect fit between social work education and Jewish communal service is not desirable even if it would be possible. In the first place, some disparity between professional goals and the goals of Jewish communal service is virtually inevitable, just as it is with re-

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[1] cf. Charles S. Levy, "A Framework for Planning and Evaluating Social Work Education," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 8:2 (Spring, 1972), pp. 40-47.

spect to professional practice in any institutional setting. Agencies and settings are invariably committed to ends which do not always or in every respect coincide with the professional ends of their practitioners. How much difference these practitioners or the institutions can tolerate depends upon how critical the difference is—that is, how basic in relation to their guiding ideologies—and how serviceable the professional practice of the practitioners nevertheless remains in helping the institutions to achieve their goals.

In the second place, as has already been intimated, the more social work education is peculiar to Jewish communal service, the more *vocational* it is in nature, and the less amenable to application in other settings in which social work is practiced. To this extent social work education must be transcendent and intransitive if it is to qualify as *professional* preparation. The caution by which schools and departments of social work must be guided is that social work must not become irrelevant to Jewish communal service, and Jewish communal service must not become irrelevant to social work, unless the judgment can be confidently made that they are mutually irrelevant and hence social work education is not appropriate preparation for Jewish communal service. This judgment will have to be based on the conclusion that social work as a discipline has no place in Jewish communal service, a conclusion which is empirically remote in the light of contemporary Jewish communal service.

Finally, and also on empirical grounds, social work is not, nor has ever been intended as the exclusive, or even predominating discipline for the achievement of the purposes of Jewish communal service, although it has at times been emphasized more in some Jewish communal service settings than in others. Even then the intention has not been to depend exclusively on social work to achieve particular agency purposes. Most agencies and organizations in Jewish communal service resort concurrently to a number of professional disciplines in the fulfillment of their goals, if not horizontally to make a variety of services available to their memberships or clienteles—as in Jewish community centers for example—then vertically to cope with responsibilities at different levels of organizational or agency structure—as in Jewish community relations agencies. In the former instance, clienteles may have access to the services of social workers, physical educators, Jewish educators, and so on. In the latter, community social workers will be operating concurrently with sociologists, lawyers, public relation specialists, and administrators.

In any case, a rationale is needed for professional education which takes into account the nature of Jewish communal service[2] as well as the nature of social work, and which takes into account the requisites of academic as well as professional education.

Premises of Professional Education

A number of premises may be enunciated which can serve as guides to the formulation of educational objectives in schools and departments of social work, and as guides for curriculum planning and educational practices in them, particularly in relation to preparation for social work practice in Jewish communal service. They may also serve as a basis for interaction between schools

[2] For an exploration into the nature of Jewish communal service as a field of practice, and an attempt to distinguish the emphases of various professional disciplines in it, see Charles S. Levy, "Toward a Theory of Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 50:1 (Fall, 1973), pp. 42-49.

and departments of social work, and Jewish communal agencies, first to determine whether and how each is suited to the other and, secondly, to determine what each must do, separately and together, for each to work well for the other, if it can in fact be determined that they can appropriately work together at all. It should be no mystery to anyone that, to this writer, this last is but a rhetorical question, but it would be well for educators and practitioners to muse thoughtfully over it if only to settle it once and for all proximate time.

The following, then, are the premises of professional education which are offered for consideration and, perhaps, for application should they stand the test of responsible scrutiny.

1. Social work is a creditable way of helping people. Its chief asset in comparison with other human service professions is that it is not bounded by a particular pathology or anatomical defect. Social work is addressed to the person or persons who constitute its clientele, and not to a particular problem, malfunction, or deficiency. Moreover, it deals with the relationship between its clientele and their environment. Finally, the need for social work is not invariably externally determined but rather is determined by its clientele or through the collaboration of its clientele.[3] Even when the clientele is more or less involuntary as in a correctional setting or in a court, social work practice is founded upon their perception and concern about a need or problem, although the social worker may precipitate that perception or concern, and generate a view of the clientele's responsibility to others and their surrounding community [4]

Social work practice, in other words, is not based entirely or even primarily on the practitioner's judgment regarding the problem or need of his clientele that merits his attention, but rather any need in relation to their welfare or relationship to their environment that they perceive as requiring the practitioner's help and attention.

This perspective of social work emphasizes not only what is done by the social worker, but why it is done, and the role of clients (individuals, groups, or communities) in determining both. As Vigilante puts it, this perspective stresses "the importance of involving the client in practice decision-making," which is both a social work value, and "an instrumentality for providing service." [5]

This perspective of social work, moreover, emphasizes the provisional as well as restorative dimension of social work practice in not being limited to problems which require corrective attention, but including developmental opportunities for social work clienteles so that their well-being, individually and collectively, may be advanced and not only restored in the face of crisis or malfunctioning. This is an important element in Jewish communal service, and one especially compatible with social work's function.

2. This suggests the second premise, namely that social work is an especially apt way of helping Jewish people, Jewish organizations, and Jewish communities to fulfill their individual and collective aspirations, and to meet their individual and collective needs. It is not the *only* way; nor does it provide for all existing needs; but it is an apt way. It is different from other approaches to meeting the needs of Jews, in their own

[3] Cf. Charles S. Levy, "Putting the Social Work Back Into Social Work," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 51:2 (Winter, 1974) pp. 171-178.

[4] Joseph L. Vigilante, "Between Values and Science: Education for the Profession During a Moral Crisis or is Proof Truth?" *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 10:3 (Fall, 1974) pp. 107-115.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

right and in their association with one another in communal and ethnic enterprises, and it is guided by different conventions and values.

These conventions and values do not necessarily conflict with those of other disciplines, but neither do they always coincide with them. And the other disciplines are just as necessary and creditable as social work. They do different things, in different ways, with differences in relative commitment to professional and Jewish communal values and goals. But all have a part to play in relation to the collective aspirations of Jews and the needs of individual Jews.

The conventions and values of social workers, however, do lead to differences in practices in comparison with the practices of other disciplines. All must aim at the interests of the Jewish collectivity, and all must be seen as contributing to the fulfillment of this aim. But what they aim at in particular, and how they proceed to make their contribution, must be differentiated.

For one thing, the self-determination and self-esteem of each Jew with whom the social worker works—whether he works with him individually in relation to his own needs and desires, or with him and other Jews collectively in relation to their common endeavors—are primary preoccupations for the social worker. They may not be so primary for the rabbi, the Jewish educator, and other Jewish communal practitioners to whom the collective ends of Jews are transcendent.

For social workers, "Contemporary theories of practice emphasize the importance of self-determination by the client as well as enhancing self-esteem through interaction with significant others."[6] For rabbis, Jewish educators, and others, these are not invariably denied, but relative priority is properly placed on the survival of Jews and their ideologies, and the nurture of their collective self-interests.

This perspective of social work would obviously become a pertinent dimension of social work education.

3. A third premise of professional education is the conception of the social worker himself as the chief instrument of professional practice. What he knows, what he values, what he aspires to, and what he can do, he incorporates into himself, and uses through himself in the service of others whether as social group worker, social caseworker, or community social worker.

The social worker does accumulate knowledge of available resources—communal, therapeutic, income maintenance, programmatic, etc.—but what he produces, he produces in response to clients' interaction with him, and through his body, his intellect, his emotions, his communications, and his being. Agency structure and Jewish communal goals become a context and a framework for the social worker's use of himself in relation to his clientele, but he uses himself nevertheless responsibly and with discreet judgment in relation to the needs, the expressions, the desires, and so on, of his clientele,

Whatever the utility and appropriateness of indoctrination, sermonizing, and urging for the practitioners of other disciplines in Jewish communal service, they are inappropriate for social workers. They contravene both the values and the function of social work. This, too, becomes pertinent for social work education.

4. Another premise to guide the processes and procedures of social work education which flows from this one is that professional education is not technical or vocational training but educa-

[6] Janet S. Chafetz *et al.* "A Study of Homosexual Women," *Social Work*, 19:6 (November, 1974) p. 722.

tion for the incorporation by students of practice knowledge, skills, values, and principles for use in the service of others. It requires mastery of bases for professional action rather than routine responses to explicit instructions, addressed to specific and limited case situations. Professional education for social work practice requires opportunities and skilled guidance to effect that combination of intelligence, compassion, sensitivity, judgment, and other qualities which make possible generalization to other cases of like kind.

5. Professional social work education, therefore—and this is another of its premises—aims at the student's own professional development, as it can be manifest not only in what he can reiterate by way of knowledge content, even including practice knowledge and articulated principles, but also in what he can do in response to clients and practice situations. The aim of professional education in this connection is the development of capacity and initiative for the exercise of professional judgment in relation to any case or need that might emerge in social work practice, and not only in the cases that the student happens to experience in field instruction (supervised agency practice).

> The "pure" professional is controlled in very different ways [from that in which correct actions are spelled out for the worker in concrete instructions and in specific rules and procedures]. Instead of minute regulations, competence is based upon a generalized body of knowledge and generalized skills assimilated over an extended training period. Thus, the worker can apply his knowledge to a greater variety of situations than is possible under concrete instructions and use himself more flexibly. The professional person comes to identify with ethical standards during his professional education. These are reinforced continually by pressures within the professional community, the professional literature and, sometimes, legal sanctions. In effect, ethics becomes "part of the practitioner."[7]

6. A critical premise which links student and faculty to school is that responsibility for professional education is shared by students and faculty. The responsibility to learn, however, is that of the student. The faculty—in both classes and field instruction—on the other hand, has the responsibility to provide opportunities and stimulation to learn, and to generate in students the imperative need to learn in order that they may become capable of competent and ethical service. This, too, implies student initiative. It implies also faculty individualization of students since students are bound to have varied learning needs as well as different learning styles. This would tend to require varied learning opportunities to some extent at least.

7. A final premise to be enunciated is that faculty responsibility in social work education is multifaceted. Though they owe considerable responsibility to students, as the previous premise indicates, they also owe responsibility to the university of which their school or department is a part, to the social work profession, and to the community including its present and prospective social work clienteles.

Whatever the humanitarian impulses of faculty in relation to students, faculty cannot neglect responsibilities to others for social work practice, and graduation only of students with sufficient competence to earn an academic degree. Faculty, in short, have the responsibility to help students to learn to become social workers, but also to judge the extent to which students have succeeded in doing so.[8]

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[7] "Utilization of Personnel in Social Work: Those with Full Professional Education and Those Without," Final Report (New York: National Association of Social Workers, n.d.) mimeographed.

[8] *Cf.* Charles S. Levy, "A Conceptual

Implications for Curriculum Planning

Curriculum planning in social work education is more than a compilation of courses and content for the communication of information that faculty wishes students to "know." Curriculum planning is a design for the provision of academic and practice opportunities through which students will learn what they need to learn, and experience what they need to experience, in order to become competent and ethical social workers. Courses and field instruction, and specific course and field content are really contexts and emphases for students' learning experiences and opportunities. They are also means for specifying criteria for learning and evaluation.

All of the premises of professional education which have been discussed serve as relevant guides for curriculum planning. Courses, agency assignments, reading, papers, recording, and other media should be calculated to provide students with means to learn the ways in which social work is used to help people, and the ways in which they use themselves to do so. They should also be designed to help students acquire such substantive knowledge about people, agencies, Jewish communal service, and themselves as will help them to understand those they work with, the settings in which they work, and the mutual responses between themselves and their clienteles.

Curriculum is not a random assemblage of offerings, or an intellectual bill of fare from which students make their sections on the basis of sheer inclination, but the school's macro-view of what each student ought to feel a responsibility to know and to master. Whatever the student's ultimate vocational preference as a graduate practitioner, the curriculum as a whole should represent to him the faculty's judgment of what he should at least be exposed to by way of learning opportunities, and perhaps accountable for by way of certification of his educational accomplishments and professional competence.

There is room for electives, especially at the upper class level in undergraduate social work departments, and in graduate social work schools, but these should represent special opportunities for enrichment, for filling gaps in the student's professional foundation, and for meeting particular professional needs.

Some conception is necessary of what every student ought to feel the need to know and to be able to do, if curriculum planning is to ensure a degree of commonness to the foundation of social work education at all levels and in all schools. Despite opportunities for individualization, for variation, and for satisfying varied interests, learning needs, and educational objectives, the validity of the concept of a body of social work knowledge, skill, values, and ethics is attested to the extent to which the curricula of social work schools and departments reflect a common core of prescribed exposures for students, whatever the course labels and arrangements, their sequence, and their interrelationship. Hamovitch has missed this reflection:

> Somewhere we have lost sight of what a professionally educated social worker is, as distinguished from other professional and nonprofessionals working in similar areas. Is there a common base of knowledge, skills, attitudes and ethics that schools of social work impart to their students? There probably still is in most schools, but not in all. And very few of us are willing even to suggest that there should be.[9]

Framework for Field Instruction in Social Work Education," *Child Welfare*, 44:8 (October, 1965) pp. 447-452.

[9] Maurice B. Hamovitch, "New Directions for Social Work Education's Relationship with Government," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 10:3 (Fall, 1974), p. 38.

I do not know about the "imparting" but I am "willing,"not to gratify some arbitrary wish but to stress the multifaceted responsibility of schools and faculty. "Loosening up" curricula

> to encourage innovation and diversification, to permit schools to develop their own styles, and to encourage students to formulate their own programs[10]

is quite democratic and might even appear to be creative, but that is not what makes for professional education. There is ample room for creativity within the framework of social work education, and within the framework of the professional as well as educational accountability to which schools and departments of social work and their faculties are necessarily committed.

Hamovitch offers a basis for defining the common foundation which should be shared by schools and departments of social work, which need not preclude special practice emphases or professional approaches in different schools and departments, or invalidate them in professional practice:

> First, on the question of the educational program, I believe that social work is a legitimate profession, with its own identity, with a body of specific knowledge, with specific skills, and a specific role. To become a professional social worker one must engage in an educational program that provides basic preparation to that end.... I believe that the heart of the social work profession is the provision of direct services—to individuals, families, groups, and communities—and that the professional degree certifies that the individual has demonstrated the mastery of certain knowledge, the acquisition of certain skills, and the ability to perform certain tasks.[11]

Curriculum planning results in specific vehicles for student learning, but it can also lead to planned approaches to the interrelationship among these vehicles and to their mutual reinforcement. Every participant in social work education has a lot to do, and can do a lot, to help the social work student to relate the various components of social work education to one another, and to relate himself to all of them. Classroom teachers, field instructors, and faculty advisors can plan opportunities for students to perceive and cope with interconnections between curriculum components and to exploit opportunities as they arise—whether through cases brought to class, through the analysis of students' learning and practice problems, or through the correlation of school experiences, agency experiences, and external events. Teachers, field instructors, and faculty advisors can collaborate to induce, stimulate, and precipitate the student's integration to his learning experiences, and seize their own opportunities, in their various relationships with the students, to do so.

The Jewish school of social work is guided by similar premises except that all of the opportunities alluded to, and all of the learning which may result, must have particular relevancy to Jewish communal service. Such relevancy cannot be restricted to Jewish communal service, however, if the social work education in the Jewish school of social work is not to degenerate into very constricted vocational training.

Vocational training is not to be disparaged, but the issue here is the role of the school of social work, including that school of social work the purpose of which is to prepare students for social work practice in Jewish communal service.

Jewish communal workers and leaders are often tempted to attribute to the Jewish school of social work the responsibility to provide substantive instruction in Judaica. A background in Judaica is obviously pertinent for professional practice in Jewish communal

[10] *ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

service, including social work practice. However, aside from practical limitations like those of time and the absorptive capacities of students, questions of appropriateness for professional education and priorities related to a school's primary mission must be addressed.

Substantive knowledge is included in the curriculum of the Jewish school of social work, but its selection and emphases must clearly be related to the school's professional education function. It is not growth and behavior in general that students are required to learn, for example—many have already learned much about this in college—but growth and behavior in the context of clients' needs and responses, and the social work student's responses to them. Similarly with other curriculum areas: as the premises of professional education suggest, the question that the school of social work—which is to say its faculty—must pose for itself is not only what must the social worker know if he is to practice competently and ethically, but why must he know it. To put this another way, the selection of curriculum and content is determined by that which is prerequisite to professional preparation, including knowledge content about and related to social work, and the way in which students must experience it if it is to conduce to their professional development.

Specific curricular opportunities related to Jewish communal service are indeed afforded in the Jewish school of social work, but these are not presumed to provide an extensive background of Jewish knowledge, history, tradition, and theology, much as such a background is valued in the school. Neither are these opportunities presumed to compensate for gaps in students' Jewish background. On the other hand, courses are required of all students (Jewish and non-Jewish alike) which are designed to afford such understanding of Jews—their organizational and welfare structure, and their beliefs, values, and traditions—as would facilitate students' performance of the social work helping function with them, at whatever level and in whatever form they may perform it—counseling, group services, administration, community planning, fundraising, etc.

In addition, students in dealing with the subject matter of these special courses, as well as with cases and other content in other courses, which affect Jews, are afforded opportunity to contend with their own ethnic and religious identification—or simply their own identity. For Jewish students destined for careers in Jewish communal service, such opportunity has particular meaning, but other students, including non-Jews, are also able to relate such an opportunity to their own concerns, problems, and aspirations related to their own identification and identity.

Curriculum planning in these terms, and in relation to the enunciated premises, makes practical sense as well as deontological sense. First of all, not all students who graduate from the Jewish school of social work practice social work in Jewish communal settings—although most do. But, more important perhaps, Jewish communal settings are highly varied in their definition of, and their commitment to, Jewish purposes, and Jewish needs are met. Thus, the more that the integrity of professional social work education is preserved, the more serviceable it may prove to be—in the fulfillment of the social work function in Jewish communal service at any rate, and in social work function in Jews wherever they are served.

If social work students learn their social work well, and do it well in Jewish communal service, and if the practitioners of other disciplines in Jewish communal service do their work well

also, there will be less risk of neglecting what Jews individually and collectively need to have done, and greater likelihood that what the Jewish community requires for its preservation, enrichment, and development may indeed come to pass—to the extent at least that the Jews will be permitted to exercise control over their own destiny as a people.