

CONTINUING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN ISRAEL

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In spite of the perception of social work schools in Israel that establishing continuing education programs is part of their social and professional duty, the execution of this has, in fact, occurred as an adjunct to, rather than as an integral part of, departmental functioning.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, continuing education in the treatment professions is acquiring increasing attention as professionals seek a means by which to maintain clinical skills. The process of formal training, which allowed entrance into the profession in the first place, in reality comprises only the briefest learning stage in the career of the treatment provider. Formal academic training is followed by a second learning stage, an ongoing exercise of remaining up-to-date which must be carried out throughout the career.

Interest in continuing education involves at least three separate groups. Educators at professional schools in the universities which opened their doors to the development of continuing education comprise one such group. Another is the professional associations which are concerned with the development of the means of control which would ensure continuing education among their members. Finally, there is a recognizable segment of professionals which vigilantly protects their level of professional skills.

A growing interest can be seen in the development of continuing education programs in the social work field and in the encouragement of professionals to participate in them. Furthermore, while social

work in Israel has not been recognized as a profession requiring a professional license and has not achieved significant social status as have other treatment professions, continuing education activities are becoming an increasingly predominant feature of the field.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the development of continuing education in social work in Israel, examining its strength and pointing out directions for future developments. The first part of the paper will briefly survey the history of continuing education in social work over the past 20 years, which are the most significant for this subject. Then the current picture will be elucidated. The paper will conclude by looking more deeply into the issue of the status of continuing education programs in an academic framework, a very important area for future developments.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the past, the sole means for dealing with the need for continuing education in the profession existed at the individual level within the framework of individual professional supervision. The solutions to the need for ongoing training provided by supervision was very limited, firstly, because of a scarcity of skilled supervisors, and, secondly, because of low motivation for supervision on the part of both employers and employees.

The 1960's can be characterized by the employers taking responsibility for this

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subject. During those years, continuing education programs for groups of workers were established in the form of professional development within organizations. At times these were mainly staff development programs, and, at times, they comprised specific skills-training workshops thought likely to fulfill the needs of the workers. This process encouraged the development of special funding allocations and departments devoted to in-service training in various agencies (eg., health, welfare, national insurance) broadened.

This training was characterized by its sporadic nature and by the fact that it arose reactively, that is, after the problem became recognized as demanding attention. A system was not produced whereby programs addressed renewal of workers' skills or services provided.

During that period, the main provider of continuing education programs was the Social Work Training Institute of the Welfare Ministry (the "Machon") which was established even before Israel's independence and which was the sole training institute for social workers in the country until, in 1959, the Paul Berwald School of Social Work was established at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It is important to note, with respect to this period, that most social workers in Israel worked under the direction of the Ministry of Social Affairs, either directly or through local authorities. Most of the senior staff had had no formal academic training and a large number of them were graduates of the Machon.

At the beginning of the 1970's, changes in the arrangement of personnel in social work began to appear. The number of workers in the health and rehabilitation services, not connected with the Ministry of Social Affairs, grew quickly. More social workers began working on interdisciplinary teams as well as in a growing diversity of specific services in the Ministry itself. Academic training in social work was established in Tel Aviv in 1960, in Haifa in 1963, at Bar Ilan in 1964. Each year,

the various government agencies began to absorb a large group of social workers with formal academic training.

In parallel, the social work schools gradually joined the list of those providing continuing education programs, sometimes within the general extension programs. From a survey of the few programs which were carried out within this framework, it was found that they were conducted based upon the input of visiting experts from outside of Israel. This was because, at that time, responsibility for development of this area of instruction and policies for its execution were not defined by the departments.

Professional Awareness

Two major characteristics of the social work profession in Israel are relevant to this discussion of continuing education:

1. A certificate granting the graduates of the various university and institute training programs the right to work in the profession is conferred and remains permanently valid. That is, graduates can take a break of even many years from their professional work and then return to work without requiring investigation regarding the level of professional skills which they have been able to maintain during their absence from the work environment.
2. There is no obligation for social workers to continue to study. The situation is described by the phrase "Do your best" as the condition is called by those dealing with organizational behavior. However, there are goals for continuing training, although these are not specific ones and the degree to which they are attained depends solely upon the motivation of the individual. Researchers found that the level of performance of industrial workers in such a situation is lower than when goals are specified.

In the second half of the 1970's it is possible to discern more and more weight being given to responsibility and obligations on the part of the individual worker

to obtain ongoing training. This was paralleled by further developments in the social work schools and by professional association activities. In those years, the concept that continuing education is a part of the responsibilities of the Israeli social work schools became stronger and more crystallized, leading to the setting up of special departments for continuing education in the schools of social work at the Hebrew University in 1976, Tel Aviv University in 1977 (as a cooperative project with the social work association), Haifa University in 1979, Bar Ilan in 1980, and Ben Gurion University in 1982 (in the Faculty of Behavioural Science).

A respectable proportion of the developments and furthering of the subject of continuing education in social work which occurred during the second half of the 1970's can be attributed to the Joint Distribution Committee. The JDC aided in increasing the awareness of the need for continuing education within the professional community, in enhancing cooperative efforts among the various concerned elements, the universities, government agencies, and the social work association, and combined financial assistance for developing specific programs. All of these combined to produce a basis for an all-inclusive program for continuing education in social work in Israel.

CURRENT SITUATION

The developments in continuing education in social work in Israel in the current decade are expressed at a number of levels: in the development of programs, in cooperation between central bodies dealing with the execution of programs, and in social-professional awareness which increase for the need to determine policy and translate that into application.

Development of Continuing Education Programs

As already mentioned, from the beginning of the 1980's, all social work schools in

Israel contained continuing education departments. The Social Work Training Institute (*Machon*) is an additional important provider of continuing education programs for social workers employed by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This is a function which achieved predominance when the *Machon* ceased to function as a provider of basic training for social workers (in Tel Aviv in 1978; Jerusalem, 1981; Haifa, 1983; and Beersheva, 1984).

Other continuing education programs, open to various clinicians including social workers, are conducted in a number of university departments and at a number of private institutes. The availability of such programs, however, is very limited.

Today's continuing education programs across the country can be divided into four characteristic models:

1. training programs lasting one or two years for specific roles, such as welfare service directors, probation officers.
2. one- or two-year programs for specialization in specific methods, such as family therapy, group therapy, treatment of children.
3. short-term programs (one semester or short workshops) to refresh or deepen expertise in a specific topic, or to acquire certain skills; and
4. staff development programs.

A survey of the program offering in this period indicates that most of those proposed belong to the group of short-term programs (E.L.K.A. 1983-1987). It is clear, however, that programs for specialization and training for specific roles are growing. During the years 1986 and 1987, seventeen such programs were offered. Of these, one-half were for training in specific tasks and one-half for specializations. While in actuality only about 40-50% of the short-term programs proposed were actually executed, training programs for specific tasks and specialization reached an average execution rate of 80-90% in the last two years, this is because the operation of programs from a list of those proposed depends

Table 1
 PERCENTAGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS PARTICIPATING IN CONTINUING EDUCATION
 PROGRAMS IN ISRAEL FOR THE YEARS 1982-1984, (N = 485)

Year	Participants in			Did not participate	Total
	1 course	2 courses	3 courses		
1982	19	1	—	80	100
1983	27	3	—	70	100
1984	30	2	1	67	100

upon demand for that particular course. The entire framework determines the minimum number of participants required to cover the costs of the program.

Cooperation in Execution of Programs

Since 1980, a national forum for continuing education exists which includes participants from all the universities with social work schools, the Ministry of Social Affairs (representations from the *Machon* and the Department for Research and Planning), the Social Work Association, and JDC-Israel. This forum deals with issues central to the subject of continuing education, such as: development of assessment methods, updating of skills in the field, determining priorities, and providing initiative for different programs. Through this body, a national syllabus listing continuing education courses is published each year, including all the programs at the universities and at the *Machon*. It is delivered to the homes of most of the social workers in Israel and to all the social services. This book, in addition to being a tool for publicizing courses, is in itself an educational tool in that it emphasizes the importance of the subject, presenting to the workers a range of updated materials. It also contributes to nation-wide communication about specific areas of interest. Similarly, by means of the forum, decisions are made concerning priorities for, and subsidies to, the various programs.

In fact, this forum creates the only professional framework for those actually dealing with the execution of continuing education programs. It facilitates conduct of cooperative studies of problems com-

mon to the members, whether these issues concern determination of policy or aspects of performance, and it brings about a framework for feedback from a peer group.

From these two characteristics, it is possible to explain the fact that there are no statistics which are official and all-inclusive concerning the level of participation of social workers in continuing education programs. Also, the information which is available from continuing education units is only fragmentary. Amid this scarcity of statistical data, a partial answer has been provided by a study of all the social workers in public services in the north of Israel.¹ This research found that during the three years examined, 55% of the social workers participated in continuing education programs. The participation pattern is presented in Table 1.

Since most social workers in Israel are employed by public services, and the individual-professional characteristics of the population studies resemble those of the social workers in the country in general, it can be assumed that the general population of social workers experiences a similar pattern of participation. It was not possible, in that study, to examine patterns of non-participation of social workers.

Recently, within the framework of the Social Work Association, there exists a renewed momentum for enhancing profes-

1. Z. Laufer, *Participation/Non Participation of Social Workers in Continuing Education Programs: From Ideology toward Theory and Practice*. - Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1986.

sional competence levels according to a model with two developmental stages.² The first stage, from awareness to actualization, involved fighting for academic recognition. Today, steps must be taken toward achievement of two additional stages: one is to create the basis for specializations in the various branches of the profession, and the second is to create the basis for maintaining a level of expertise as part of social obligations. These two stages are actually based upon continuing studies beyond the formal requirements for entrance into the profession. The process of defining obligations for participation in continuing education is undergoing development in the Social Work Association, protected by the terms of wage agreements and the tendency to establish responsibility for the subject within its bounds.

The Status and Integration of Continuing Education Programs in an Academic System

In spite of the perception of social work schools in Israel that establishing continuing education programs is part of their professional and social duty, the execution of this has, in fact, occurred as an adjunct to, rather than as an integral part of, departmental functioning. Continuing education in Israel (instruction and program administration) has not been viewed as an activity with high status nor as one that advances the academic career of the individual.

This situation has positive and negative corollaries with respect to the number of basic components comprising the arrangement of the continuing education program. These are: availability of programs, structure of the teaching staff, the academic administration team, and availability of lecturers from the academic faculty.

Program Offerings: There exists a great

deal of dynamism in the course offerings. The process for authorizing courses within the program is fairly simple and there is no need for formal procedures such as are required in regular degree granting programs. The lecturers enjoy complete academic freedom, whether they are academic faculty or experts drawn from the field. The only demands made concern the framework, such as the need to perform evaluations throughout the course and, to present a syllabus at the beginning of the course. Advice given to most lecturers concerns marketing strategy for the subject and teaching technologies appropriate to the special kind of students who register in continuing education courses.

The teaching staff: The teaching staff is composed of academic faculty from the various universities and experts with a reputation in the field. The latter are not required to pass an academic appointments committee and are included in the teaching staff by virtue of the attractiveness of the subject which they offer and their reputation.

The academic administration staff: the main characteristic of this team in most continuing education units in Israel is high turnover. At this stage the schools have not learned to build a financial foundation for continuing education. Therefore, it is not possible to offer permanent appointments to staff members. This means that the development of study programs—i.e., strategies within a world of adult education—is not conceived of as an expertise requiring excellence, nor that it is worthwhile investing in separately. Usually the academic directors who fulfill their duties for short terms are either permanent faculty or untenured faculty who see the position as an intermediate stage toward becoming integrated within the permanent faculty. Therefore, the level of expertise of unit directors varies.

Availability of lecturers from the academic faculty: As described above, the continuing education unit does not offer permanent appointments to its lecturers.

1. I. Kadman, "Standards of Professional Practices—a Model for Change," *Society and Welfare* (1986) 7:67-83.

The members of the academic faculty teaching within this framework do so:

1. in addition to other tasks in the system;
2. while under other pressures given that the financial revenues for teaching are not high;
3. knowing that teaching in continuing education is not prestigious in the academic community;
4. knowing that it is not given special value in discussion of career advancement.

It is possible, therefore, to understand the constant lack of teaching personnel and a constant need for wooing of academic faculty on the part of those responsible for the programs.

This situation stands in contradiction to the awareness of much of the valuable input which the continuing education programs perform for the formal academic studies. It is an important channel for basic training, for communication between academic instructors and workers in the field, and a stimulation for some students to continue on to a higher degree (M.A.).

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

There are those who feel that the system of continuing professional education in Israel is in utter chaos and must be put to order by restructuring the program so that it becomes a bona fide academic stream and part of the central flow of academic learning.³ It appears that there exists a tendency to avoid the efforts which would lead to such changes. Dynamism is needed in the attempt to fulfill quickly changing realities in the field and the academic system has difficulties in being dynamic with much time being required to introduce up-dated material into the formal

program of studies.⁴ Indeed, the academic sub-system appears to avoid other sub-systems, such as the professional association, Israeli society, and the social workers as individuals.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the practicalities of continuing education in social work in Israel in the past 20 years were described. It is possible to conclude that the developments and the goals for the future in Israel are related to those in the social work community the world over, with specific reference to professional literature, educational activities of the professional associations, and other activities aimed toward professionalization and increasing competence in the various practices included in the profession.

Together with this, a certain degree of unity exists among continuing education programs in Israel arising from the small dimensions of the country which allow planning and coordination at a national level. The national forum for continuing education allows a degree of cooperation which facilitates improved efficiency and extracting maximal benefit from the limited resources available for this domain of education.

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3. A. A. Vicere, "Creating Order From the Chaos: Academic Integrity in Continuing Professional Education," *Adult Education Quarterly* (1985), 35:229-239.

4. D. Macarov, "Changes in the World of Work: Some Implications for the Future." In Disburg, ed., *Work Now and in the Future World*. Maryland: World Future Society, 1983, pp. 3-24.