# Education for social work as a self-regulating profession

El artículo fue presentado el 5 de abril de 2000 en la Universidad de Macereta, en Italia, con la ocasión de la apertura de un nuevo programa de formación en trabajo social (asistencia social). El artículo considera distintos modelos de educación que pretenden formar asistentes sociales como profesionales que pueden equipararse a los médicos, abogados, administrativos, etc. Estas profesiones se caracterizan por ser autónomas y auto-reguladas en su ejercicio (libera profesione). Otros temas tratados son modelos internacionales de la práctica del trabajo social, ámbitos generales del trabajo social, educación para el trabajo social, dimensión clínica del trabajo social y la practica especializada y avanzada del trabajo social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: PROFESIÓN AUTO-REGULADA, PRINCIPIOS ÉTICOS DEL EJERCICIO PROFESIONAL, PRÁCTICA GENERAL, PRÁCTICA ESPECIALIZADA.

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The paper was given on 5 April 2000 as an invitational paper at the university of Macerata in Italy upon the opening of their new program preparing for social work (assistence sociale) practice in Italy. The paper discusses models of social work education which would prepare for free-standing, self-regulated practice (una libera professione) of social work, similar to professions of physicians, lawyers, accountants, etc. there is discussion of international models of social work practice, the general scope of work an advanced, specialized practice.

KEY WORDS: SELF-REGULATING PROFESSION, ETHICAL PRACTICE PRINCIPLES, GENERALIST PRACTICE, SPECIALIZED PRACTICE.

**ESTUDIOS**
ROBERT CONSTABLE

## I. INTRODUCTION

I thank you for your invitation for me to speak on education for social work. The overall intent of this meeting is to examine, discuss and learn from models of education for the social work profession as they are emerging in the United States and in Italy We have almost the reverse of Italy's situation in social work education, and I am very hesitant to apply our experience to any but ourselves, but you may find it instructive and useful, even to find our mistakes and benefit from them. There is in fact an enormous diversity in my country in everything, including social work. Consequently there has been an overriding need to find a common understanding amid this diversity. We have plenty of social problems and a strong tradition of people addressing them. For almost a century social work has been established as a *libera professione* (self-regulating profession) and has developed strength in areas, such as clinical social work, family and child welfare, and school social work. It was on the strength of professional practice, serving people at all income levels but continuing a deep commitment to poor and disadvantaged people, that social work education developed. For almost eighty years the educational basis of this *libera professione* has been the Masters in Social Work (MSW) degree, a two-year degree following a four-year university education. While we have innovated methods of group, organizational, and policy development in social work, our strongest development has been practice with the individual person and with families, at one time called *social casework*, now called *clinical social work*. Despite centralizing tendencies in the form of a strong professional association, a national process of program accreditation, and a strongly developed clinical social work, social work and social work education in my country preserves a certain amount of diversity with certain common understandings and traditional approaches to practice theories, education programs and legal and professional organization.

For almost fifty years standards for social work education have been set by a very powerful non-governmental association, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). A *Curriculum Policy Statement* for all social work education is developed by social work practitioners and professors in a Commission of the CSWE, and these standards are used to review and approve (or disapprove) educational programs. A program which does not meet these standards simply cannot continue. In addition to the masters degree about thirty years ago a second professional level degree level, the Bachelors in Social Work (BSW), was approved as a first-level generalist degree, with the Masters Degree now an advanced degree. The Bachelors degree could be gotten as part of a four-year university degree from a program which met professional standards. After the approval of the Bachelor's in Social Work we spent another twelve years finding a way to relate the two emergent professional degree levels. This eventuated in the 1984, and then 1994, CSWE Curriculum Policy Statement, which resolved the relationship in a general way. We are still working on the meaning of specialization at the Masters in Social Work degree level. In this sense we are also working on something similar to the concerns of Italian social work educators on the development of a second social work practice and degree level. I hope to address some of this in my paper, but we could also have a very free and interesting discussion as you identify some of your concerns and ideas in the period following this paper.

In my own professional career I have had the good fortune to have been a part of much of these developments in North American social work. Over almost forty years I have practiced, first as a social worker in schools, and then, while teaching in the University, with families. I have developed university programs at the Bachelor's Level and later developed specialized concentrations at the

**69 ESE** Nº2 2002

**ESTUDIOS**
EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL
WORK AS A
SELF-REGULATING
PROFESSION

Masters degree level. For eight years prior to its writing of the 1984 Curriculum Policy Statement I was a member of the CSWE Commission, which defined the two levels of content in social work education, foundation (generalist) and advanced and related them to social work education programs and university degrees. As my interests shifted to specialized practice I became very involved with school social work and with social work with families. My book in school social work, initially published in 1982, went into its fourth edition in 1999 and is a standard text in that area of specialization. Over the last decade I also assisted in the development of a Masters in Social Work Degree in a Lithuanian university, this time with a focus on social development and lectured and taught courses in other universities in Eastern and Western Europe. I am a social work educator, but I am first of all a practicing social worker and now my practice with families has become very exciting. I am learning so much from them.

The key concept affecting education and practice in my country is that social work is regarded by most and acts as a *libera professione*. A *libera professione* regulates itself collectively and regulates the quality of its practice at a highly organized societal level. Practice, defined and somewhat predictable, is not primarily justified by laws, regulations and bureaucratic standards, but by a type of licensure of the *person* who practices professionally and then of the education institution which he or she has attended. Education builds on a known foundation of knowledge and values. This foundation is translated into curriculum and then into practice through a carefully supervised experience of practice in the professional field. In some ways the example of medical education is close to this and much of the structure of North American social work education reflects this model. Although social work is very different from medicine, the medical model of systematically developed education with accountability of each program to society and to the profession is useful and necessary.

## 2. Examples from Social Work Practice

To discuss social work curriculum we need to first develop a concept of what social work practice is. Let us first begin with a few examples of this diverse practice from different places in the world.

## 3. Social work with Families in the United States

As I write this paper I am waiting for one or another client to come to my private practice for marriage and family counseling. These are persons who are having difficulty in their marital relations with each other or in their relations with children, most often both. I am going to help them to revise and reframe their relationships with each other through learning to communicate and solve problems with each other and thus changing the basic structure of their relations. This includes some of what they have learned about relationships through their previous personal experiences, perhaps with families of origin. The fact that people can do this is in itself something exciting. I also work part-time with the families of workers in the Gary steel mills and others. These come to Catholic Family Service, an agency of the Catholic Diocese of Gary, Indiana. In my work I focus on individual persons and at the same time on the complexity of marital and family relationships in order to help persons to change them. Clients pay according to their income for each session and health insurance companies will often reimburse this practice. It is accepted that individuals and couples can do something about their situations and that the Catholic Church can and should support this highly skilled and complex work.

## 4. School Social Work in the United States

The field of school social work is highly developed in the U.S. There is also a long tradition of research into the role of the school social worker. Findings of this research show social workers working within the processes of the societal institution of education, making it possible for schools to adapt themselves to the special needs of children, and for parents to carry out their own role as first educators of their children (Constable, McDonald y Flynn, 1999). The school social worker works with individual teachers, parents and school children, with families and with groups, in consultation with other school professionals, in policy and program development in the school and with the school community, carrying out this purpose in hundreds of different ways. But there is a common core to the role of a school social worker. The research findings from national samples and from a state, such as Indiana, show that at least 33 social work tasks/skills were considered "very important" or "extremely important" to carry out their role. A general ranking of the most important tasks/skills of school social work practice resulted:

1. Consultation with others in the school system and the teamwork relationships which make consultation possible;

2. Assessment applied to a variety of different social work roles and school processes in direct service to parents, teachers and children, in consultation and in program development;

3. Direct, personal work with children and parents , in individual, group and family modalities;

4. Assistance with development of special school programs to meet particular needs of groups of teachers, children and parents (Constable, Kuzmickaite, Harrison y Volkmann, 1999).

## 5. Community Care (or Generalist Social Work)

In Rome let us imagine a social worker who works with a particular neighborhood area, dealing with problems and needs for services of children and parents, older people, everyone in the neighborhood[1]. Working for the Commune di Roma and providing a variety of concrete assistance and assistance in social relations, her work is similar to a model of *community care*, developed and refined in the United Kingdom and in Ireland (Barclay et al, 1982). She works both with people who need assistance and the formal and informal networks of community services and solidarity to assist people to improve their social relations and to strengthen the community.

In Krakow, Poland a social worker does similar things empowered by a 1990 law, which recognizes and defines social work as "professional activity aimed at helping individuals and families in strengthening or regaining their abilities to function in society, as well as creating favorable conditions for that aim"[2]. The social worker works between client and community in the development of programs that assist individuals and families to take appropriate action to deal with their difficult life circumstances. Working for the local government, She will develop and propose new services to meet emergent needs as well as work with persons and families in need. Four functions of social work develop from this legal framework:

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[1] I am grateful for an Italian social worker who presented her model of practice to a special seminar on social work held at the Rome Center, Loyola University Chicago

[2] Law on social work, passed in the Sjem 29 November 1990. Ustawa o Pomocy Spolecznej z Dnia Listopada 1990 wraz z Pozniejszymi Zmianami (tekst jednolity, za Rzeczpospolita, nr 192 z 19 Sierpnia 1996).

1. Social workers work with people and families to help them take action on their own problems and needs;
2. Social Workers work with families as essential support systems for persons in need. Community support is contingent on persons in need mobilizing and drawing from their own natural support systems;
3. Social Workers develop, work with and maintain *natural helping networks*;
4. Social workers work with the community (Constable y Frysztacki, 1994).

In Moscow a social worker working for Caritas of Moscow, a non-governmental organization of the Catholic Archdiocese of Western Russia, focuses on the needs of immigrant families in Moscow. Moscow currently has four million undocumented persons who have fled from areas of the former Soviet Union, such as Uzbekistan, in the wake of the political, economic and social collapse of the old order. She is an expert at helping people to get resources and solve problems for themselves, although mostly lacking documentation, they are in very difficult straits. Most of her practice is working in a climate of great scarcity and confusion with established systems, developing new ones, and helping people to use these systems. She is an expert at all of these functions[3].

## 6. Social Development

In Kaunas, Lithuania Ramune Jurkeviene works as a social worker for Caritas of Lithuania. She has her masters in social work from a new program at Vytautas Magnus University which combines a focus on social development practice and research. In the former Soviet republic of Lithuania the break with the old society has been almost total. Social work never existed in the previous system and new approaches to helping need to be created amidst scarce economic resources. The results are often innovative by necessity. Among the products of the enormous social confusion and disorder that post-Soviet Lithuania faces there are the problems of young girls who been raised in institutions for children and are cast off into society with no family and few choices but prostitution and eventual pregnancy. There is also a large group of older people who have lost connections with family. Taking over an abandoned kindergarten, she creates a community, a "generation home" where these two groups take care of each other and the girl's babies. Apartments owned by the older people are used by the girls as they ultimately go out in the city to get a job and become independent.

## 7. The Scope of Social Work

What may all of these examples of practice have in common? What is the scope of social work? The definition of the common scope of practice which governs North American social work education emerged after a process of ten years of discussion which eventually involved the entire profession in preparation for the Curriculum Policy Statement. The diversity of the North American context made a central definition particularly difficult to formulate. The social worker deals primarily with relationships and transactions of persons with each other and with institutions. The social worker is not simply focused on persons or families or institutions, but the relations between all of these. In

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[3] This example of her practice in Moscow was presented in 1995 by a Russian social worker in an organizing convention sponsored by various Caritas agencies within the Russian Republic.

abstract, ecological language the social worker works where people's coping patterns intersect with patterns of the environment and the social worker mediates this transaction, while working with the background conditions for this transaction – individual persons and the relational and institutional environment. This represents from my perspective the most succinct statement of what practice is. A definition of practice which begins from the practitioner and moves to the transaction of human needs and relations and a social (institutional) context, is quite different from one which begins in the legal, institutional context. It would be, as Pierpaolo Donati proposes for social work in a different context, a non-bureaucratic model of practice with some autonomy in the professional response to needs (effectiveness) and in the development of services (efficiency). A mediator in the normal life worlds of clients, the social worker avoids stigmatizing labels: "poor" or "sick" or "deviant", the medicalization of life, the enforced passivity which results when the organization maintains control. There is a broader transaction of worker, client and organizational or institutional systems. The orientation of this exchange is toward creativity, communication and emancipation (freedom), rather than passivity and conformity (Donati, 1981). The statement of the scope of social work begins with four principles:

1. The fundamental objects of social work concern are the relations between individuals and between individuals and social institutions;
2. Social work focuses on the transactions between people and their environments that effect their ability to accomplish life tasks, alleviate distress and realize individual and collective aspirations;
3. Social workers work with individuals, families, small groups, organizations and communities by helping them to prevent distress and utilize resources. Such resources are personal or environmental, found in people's intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities or abilities and in social services, institutions and other opportunities available in the environment.
4. Social work includes policy development and implementation of social policy, services and programs, legislative advocacy and political action (Council on Social Work Education, 1984).

This common professional scope is applied both to the foundation (generalist) practice level and to the advanced level.

## 8. William E. Gordon's Definition as the Basis for Knowledge and Professional Action in Social Work

Professional knowledge and action and thus all social work education is based on this core definition. The key concept in this definition of the transaction between the individual and the environment reflects the conceptual work of William E. Gordon. Gordon's framework, which itself emerged in his work with Harriett Bartlett on the Commission on Social Work Practice in the late 1950's and early 1960's, represents one of the strongest collective efforts to think through the often-elusive definition of social work. The following excerpt, representing the full ripening of Gordon's thought, is worthwhile reviewing for its implications for social work practice and social work education.

> The fundamental zone of social work is where people and their environment are in exchange with each other. Social Work historically has focused on the transaction zone where the exchange between people and the environment which impinge on them results in changes in both. Social

Work intervention aims at the coping capabilities of people and the demands and resources of their environment so that the transactions between them are helpful to both. Social work's concern extends to both the dysfunctional and deficient conditions at the juncture between people and their environment, and to the opportunities there for producing growth and improving the environment. It is the duality of focus on people and their environments that distinguishes social work from other professions (Garber, Gordon, Lewis, Meyer y Williams, 1979).

The focus on the transaction zone between people and the environment means that in practice the social worker would intervene with the environment , with the person, or with the transaction between persons. This would delineate the difference between social work practice and a focus on the person or the environment only. It would delineate what could be useful from other sciences: sociology, psychology, political science and other professions, such as psychiatry. Beyond what is useful and needed from other areas, it illustrates how this knowledge can be *utilized* as well as the unique areas of social work knowledge, which need to be *developed*.

## 9. Professional Values in Social Work Practice and in Education

If the first component of the common scope of practice is *professional knowledge*, the second is *professional values*. Values govern and explain the ends and means of action. Since professions, by definition govern the actions of their constituents, professional action must be based on a determinate set of values. Social work is governed by two primary and interdependent values: *the worth and dignity of every human being and the reciprocal obligations of individuals and society*. It is in the nature of every human being to need others and to need to give to others, to work collaboratively with others and to form social units and networks with others, in families, peer networks, neighborhoods, work organizations and communities. And so if human beings are of overriding worth, social workers assist in the creation of relationships in the *mondo vitale* which respect that worth, since the worth and dignity of every human being can be achieved only in the context of human social relationships.

Professional action is based on ends and means. *Justice, Freedom* and *Caritas* (or relational love) are both goals of the social worker and goals of persons who work with social workers to achieve relational betterment. *Social Justice* makes explicit the rights of persons and collectivities to what is proper for the development of their own potential and for the common good. Social justice obliges individuals and societal collectivities to the creation of a social order which respects these rights and enables the fulfillment of human potential. *Freedom* involves a progressively greater enhancement of the possibility of appropriate human action and of choices to act which are in accord with human dignity and worth., together with the social responsibility to bear the social and human consequences of one's actions and choices. *Social Justice* makes explicit the rights of persons and collectivities to what is proper to their dignity, the development of their own potential and for the common good. *Caritas* or relational love denotes an unqualified, nonpossessive love of sharing based on a recognition and respect for the vulnerable humanity of all persons (Constable, 1995)[4].

The means to achieve these ends, the practice of social work, its methodology, is also governed by values. In the United States, despite our great diversity, we did agree on a set of five core values of

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[4] Also see Constable 1983, 1989.

social work practice which since 1982 has governed social work education. I believe these values do encompass the practice of social work and in turn they become specific *ethical practice principles:*

- Social workers' professional relationships are built on their regard for individual worth and human dignity and are furthered by mutual participation, acceptance, confidentiality, honesty, and responsible handling of conflict;
- Social workers respect peoples' rights to choose to contract for services and to participate in the helping process;
- Social workers contribute to making human institutions more humane and responsive to human needs;
- Social workers demonstrate respect for and acceptance of the unique characteristics of diverse populations;
- Social Workers are responsible for their own ethical conduct, for the quality of their practice, and for maintaining continuous growth in the knowledge and skills of their profession (Council on Social Work Education, 1984).

The final point, the responsibility of the social worker, is the key to all of the other points since the focus of the profession and of social work education is on the self-responsible social work practitioner.

The implications of this common understanding of the scope of social work are very important for social work education. First of all, such a common understanding of scope allows for differentiation in a logically consistent way. With this common understanding we can have different levels and foci of practice and still be the same *libera professione* with societal sanction. Second, the understanding of common scope differentiates social work from other disciplines which are very important to it, such as sociology, psychology, political science, law, etc. We draw from these disciplines, but we have our own theoretical, research and practice focus and integration of knowledge and values. We are not simply applied sociology or applied psychology. Finally, the integration of knowledge and values in action (practice) has a profound effect on social work education, since this integration takes place partly in the classroom, but mostly in a carefully designed and supervised field experience. For the student this field experience is the *sine qua non* of social work education.

Social work practice and social work education in the United States is paradoxically diverse. More than 155,000 practitioners belong to the professional association, the National Association of Social Workers, but many more social workers practice. All social work education programs must be members of the Council on Social Work Education, and so statistics on them are more easily collected. There are 128 Masters in Social Work (MSW) programs, graduating about 14,000 students each year. At the Bachelor's (BSW) level there are 394 programs, graduating about 12,000 students per year. All of these programs at both degree levels are housed in a university or college and all of these programs have passed an individual and laborious accreditation review. If a program does not receive accreditation, its university will not support it and it very quickly ceases operation. In addition there are 56 programs who grant the doctoral degree to around 250 graduates each year.

What may differentiate levels of practice from each other? The actual diversity of practice and consequently of social work education in each country and even within countries provides no simple answer to this question. However using our examples at the beginning of the paper we may first of all discover a more general level of practice where the field of practice and education has not been highly

defined. We may call this for want of a better term *generalist* practice. The social worker uses a variety of methods –working with individuals, families, groups and organizations– to accomplish some of the purposes of social work within an institutional framework. The institutional framework generates some of the general goals of practice, but not the practice itself. The first-level social worker exercises a certain amount of creative autonomy, but also needs professional supervision in relating the practice methods at his or her disposal to the problems and purposes of intervention. In the USA we have a very active baccalaureate level of social work education. In many ways particularly where there is not a highly developed profession with clearly identifiable fields of practice and levels of education, the resulting generalist practice demands a great deal of creativity and professional competence. These are real innovators in practice situations where expectations are either undefined or excessively defined in bureaucratic prescriptions.

A second level is both more *advanced* and more *specialized*. Specializations or "concentrations" have always been difficult to define. The first assumption however is that achievement of specialization is built on a foundation curriculum similar to the foundation at the BSW level. The current (1994) Curriculum Policy Statement decided not to define it substantively, since specialization was still in a process of emerging. Furthermore these definitions were the prerogatives of the organized profession. Rather they simply defined it by greater skill:

> (Advanced practitioners) can analyze, intervene and evaluate in ways that are highly differentiated, discriminating, and self critical. They must synthesize and apply a broad range of knowledge as well as practice with a high degree of autonomy and skill. They must be able to refine and advance the quality of their practice, as well as that of the larger social work profession (Council on Social Work Education, 1994).

From my perspective this definition is unsatisfactory, mainly because it is worded in such a general way as to mean anything and so application becomes meaningless.. The advanced level is not well differentiated from the foundation, generalist level of curriculum and practice. However the definition does reflect the reality that the Masters Degree level has been diverse and has not yet satisfactorily resolved the issue. The second year of the masters program had been historically designed for special areas of focus, but it was rarely well defined. As long as schools were unclear on what advanced practice might be, students also were largely uncertain of their direction.

Clinical social work practice (once called "psychiatric social work") has at least an eighty year history in the United States. Social workers, long the front-line workers with problems of mental illness in the United States, received a major impetus with the development of community clinics and the renewed focus on family and social functioning rather than pathology alone in the mental health field. For a long time approximately seventy-five percent of community mental health services have been provided by social workers. Social workers have long worked as part of a team with the psychiatrist and psychologist. There are clearly defined and differentiated roles on the mental health team. More recently private social work practitioners have emerged, supported by laws which allow clinical social workers to be licensed for independent, clinical practice. In this sense the development of clinical practice is inextricably entwined with political and economic realities.

At present all masters degree programs are developing "concentrations" (specializations) following the above very general (and perhaps almost meaningless) guidelines. There are a variety of ways these concentrations may be packaged. They could be in *fields of practice*, such as work with families, or in

schools. These are the traditional areas where practice has developed in my country. They also could be with *population groups*, such as the aging, with social *problem areas*, such as poverty, or *practice roles* or *interventive modes*, such as clinical social work or group work. The result is a sort of creative chaos, dependent on faculty preference and the mission of the program. Such creative chaos is difficult for the North American mind to live with. To some extent an opportunity for social work education to influence specialized practice has been lost. On the other hand since specialized practice has developed unevenly and not all are as committed to its development, this may in fact be the most practical solution. And in reality while the foundation is an educational concept, the clear territory of social work educators, specialization is the province of the organized profession and the larger field of social services.

The issue of how fields of specialization should be defined is complex. If practice is defined too broadly to fit any situation, what is specialization and what is then the difference from generalist practice? On the other hand if practice is defined too narrowly, it can get reduced to procedures. For example "clinical social work" could be simply defined as a more refined method of helping individuals. This "more and better" approach seems inadequate to me. It is not much different from generalist social work except that generalist work demands skills in working with the environment as well as the individual. Or clinical social work could be defined by a type of medical disorder, "psychosocial dysfunction, disability or impairment, including emotional and mental disorders (National Association of Social Workers, 1991)". This medicalized approach appears inadequate and inconsistent with the common scope of social work, a conceptual distortion of the richness of practice in the area of health and mental health.

The annual *Statistics for Social Work Education*, collected by the Council on Social Work Education, point out that most students (65%) take an advanced method and combine it with a field of practice or social problem configuration (Council on Social Work Education, 1997). The advanced method is mainly in direct practice with a small scattering of administration and management. Excluding the 29 percent of students who only opt for method and the first year-students who are and should be undecided, 51 percent of students opt for fields of practice or social problem concentrations in fourteen areas listed by the Council on Social Work Education. If we combine related fields, such as *health* and *mental health, family services* and *child welfare*, some clear trends emerge from the data. The largest combined field would be social work in *health* (10%) and *mental health* (22%) with an overall thirty-three percent of these students. A close second would be *child welfare* (16%) and *family welfare* (15%) with an overall thirty-one percent. Next is *school social work* with seven percent of students. Smaller percentages of students deal with the problem areas of *aging/gerontological* social work (5%), and *alcohol, drugs and substance abuse* (3%). Two fields of practice which need much more development in my country, *occupational/industrial social work* (2%), and *corrections/ criminal justice* (2%), take up the remainder of students.

The diversity of this picture reflects the diversity of the practice field and the newness of specialization. How may we make sense out of this very diverse picture? Some of the best theoretical work in the definition of specialization was done in 1979 by the Joint Task Force on Specialization. The definition which emerged, product of a special commission of leadership of the organized profession and of social work education, was theoretically elegant and prophetic. Defining the common theoretical basis of specialization, and seeing the relationships between various fields, from my perspective it succeeded in developing the theoretical connections which would differentiate specialization and provide a framework for education. However it was ultimately unsuccessful because neither social work education, nor the practice field, had come to the point of conceptualizing practice in that way. Using the social institutional framework of fields of practice, practice which was

*specialized* (differentiated from *specific* practice) would rest on three general provisions. Is the particular field of practice defined and accepted by society? Has social work education for that field been well defined? Finally, is there a measure of autonomy in practice itself, or is it dictated by extensive regulations? Not all fields would pass these tests. We are still very much in transition to a two-level field of *generalists* and *specialists*. There is a difference between practicing as a social worker in a particular field and practicing at an advanced, specialized level. An important distinction to be made here has been made between *specific* and *specialized* practice. All practice is *specific*, that is the practitioner translates foundation knowledge, values and skills, which pertain to all social work fields of practice, into the specific tasks of a certain field. *Specialized* practice presupposes a higher level of development of the field of practice, so that particular educational formation of perhaps a year more than the foundation (generalist ) level is necessary. In the case of preparation for school social work, a separate certificate is now granted by the state, and the family field is gradually moving in that direction. In any case a more advanced theoretical formation and a substantial period of professional supervision is becoming necessary to justify a level of practice with such a relatively high degree of independence and responsibility.

The Joint Task Force on Specialization found the field of practice concept the key to differentiation of *specific* from *specialized* practice. In general social work fields of practice emerge in relation to social institutions which have evolved to meet common human needs. At a beginning level a social worker may take a *generic* educational preparation and practice as a social worker with supervision in any field. Advanced practice demanded deeper application of knowledge and skills to the situation in a particular field. Such advanced, specialized practice emerges from a societal framework of people's transactions with social institutions. The social worker not only works with the complex needs of a population, but also influences the institution. Virtually all of the fourteen fields of practice and problem areas previously listed could be related and grouped under five general human needs and the social institutions serving these needs. These needs and their institutions would include:

| NEED | INSTITUTION |
|---|---|
| The need for physical and mental well being | Health System |
| The need to know and to learn | Education System |
| The need for justice | Courts, Justice System |
| The need for economic security | Work,Public Welfare |
| The need for self-realization, intimacy, relationship | Family |

Fields of practice in social work grow around the transactions between persons and these institutions. In each area the social worker mediates a relation between people and social institutions. *Personal* tasks and *social* tasks are integrated in the characteristic perspective of social work. The personal and the social can be brought together with a concept of relational "work" as it takes place on an interpersonal level and in every institutional area of society, by persons and by institutions as they attempt to accommodate the needs of their clientele. Fields of practice are the potential contexts of two types of practice: *specific (generalist)* and *specialized* practice. Whether there is a level of advanced specialization is somewhat dependent on the overall level of development of a particular field. In each field the social worker focuses on the transactions between persons and their environment *in relation to a population and a social institution*. Practice, when it is developed, then differentiates itself into *specific* and *specialized* levels along these lines. At a certain historical point theory, practice and education become sufficiently differentiated to require some specialized educational preparation.

## Tabla 1.

Degree-Level Goals, Educational Content,
and Integration of content (Constable, 1987)[5]

| Degree Levels | Acquisition of Factual Knowledge and Conceptual Integration | Practice Integration |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Beginning (BSW) Level | Common knowledge, values and skills transferable from one setting, population group, area of practice, or problem to another.<br>■ Human Behavior and the Social Environment<br>■ Social Welfare Policy and Services<br>■ Social Work Practice (includes values and ethics<br>■ Social Work Research<br>■ Field Practicum. | Emphasis on Direct Services to Clients, including organization and provision of services on a client's behalf<br><br>Student should possess the professional judgment and proficiency to apply differentially, with supervision, the common professional foundation to service systems of various sizes and types. |
| Advanced (MSW) Level | Building on the professional foundation, a greater conceptual understanding of social policy and legislation, existing and potential service strategies from prevention to treatment, relevant practice theories, and methodologies and research in a particular area. A broadened base of knowledge of the social and behavioral sciences is required in pursuit of the focus. A concentration of specialized knowledge in one or more areas such as:<br>■ A field of practice<br>■ Population groups<br>■ Problem areas<br>■ Practice roles<br>■ Interventive modes | Student develops the ability to:<br>■ define and develop a professional social work role in relation to the expectations of policies, of an organization and a population in need;<br>■ assess continually the practice theories applicable to the situation;<br>■ identify the areas of knowledge and skill that should be the focus of continuing personal professional development beyond graduation.<br>Student develops advanced analytic and practice skills sufficient for self-contained, accountable, and ultimately, autonomous practice.<br><br>Student is involved in active roles in practice and program evaluation and in the generation of knowledge for practice, program development and policy formation. |

[5] R. Constable (1987) Social Work Education: Current Issues and Future Promise. *Social Work. 29, 4, p. 366-71.*

## 8. Emergent Levels and Practice Integration

The emergent schema of levels can be seen in Table 1. Although each practice level, whether generalist or specialist, has different characteristics, different purposes and different linkages to a practicing profession, each also shares common themes. Learning takes place in a spiral process, with the advanced student returning to concepts of the foundation to explore earlier themes with different learning goals and greater richness and complexity of content. There is a common and well-defined professional foundation that is adapted by the program and student in carrying out degree-level goals and particular program missions. Knowledge, values and skills of the foundation are by definition transferable from what is required to work in one setting, population group, or problem to another. This foundation consists of the following areas of study and field practice integration:

- Human Behavior and the Social Environment
- Social Welfare Policy and Services
- Social Work Practice (includes values and ethics)
- Social Work Research
- Field Practicum

There needs to be a balance between generic *principles*, which are defined by the profession and *practice applications*, which are defined specifically by the program and finally by the student. At the level of practice integration the generalist practitioner would emphasize direct services to clients, including organization and provision of services on behalf of clients. Professionalism is a function of judgment, proficiency and relative autonomy. The student should possess the professional judgment and proficiency to apply differentially, with supervision, the common professional foundation to service systems of various sizes and types.

## 9. Student Integration of Content

In a professional area curriculum must be seen, not as an assemblage of courses, but in terms of student integration of content. Students need to move from understanding to application. Indeed the problem of learning to apply knowledge in a way in which the experience and the learning can be generalized to other experiences is very complex. Integration refers to a process whereby the student relates learning already acquired, whether in the field or in the classroom, to what is being learned currently (Lowy y Bloksberg, 1968). Integration of content is an essential part of the learning process in any program that prepares the student for the application of principles of practice. In any such program a cumulative sequence of knowledge, values and skills integration should take place. The sequence involves 1) acquisition of factual knowledge, 2) conceptual integration – to know about and to understand relations between concepts, and 3) practice integration – to apply principles in practice. The student must build a factual base and then construct a conceptual base. From the conceptual base (essentially a set of generalizations) the student takes a leap to applying concepts and generalizations to specific practice. Whereas conceptual integration develops a body of principles to be applied in practice, practice integration is inductive and retrospective, drawing principles and values from an understanding of one's own experience as a practitioner. Both types of integration must take place if the student is to develop the judgment and proficiency of even the beginning practitioner. The process places different demands on each degree-level curriculum and each student. These differences

-the level of practice expected, the particular mission of the school, etc.– give form to each curriculum and the form of the curriculum, in turn, affects the student's learning processes. The purposes of each degree level have, in this respect, a direct relation to the structure and content of curriculum, to the use the student will make of the professional curriculum, and to practice outcomes.

## 10. Practice Integration

Learning objectives at each level should be geared to the student's integration of content. The professional foundation is characteristically generic, the sine qua non of professional practice. Yet there is no generic practice. There are only generic principles of practice. Practice, building on generic principles, is always specific. The beginning level of practice has practice outcomes which emphasize direct services to individuals, families and groups, and involvement with service organizations. At this level professional judgment and proficiency are expected, but the social worker also needs professional supervision. For example social workers in child welfare agencies may work with foster children, natural parents and foster parents as individuals or in groups, and with their own agency, and with organizations in the community, such as schools, courts and health care settings.

The foundation courses deal with an understanding of persons, families and environments, the operation of welfare policy at local, institutional and national levels. These courses are applicable to all areas of practice. The first level field experience is geared , not so much to learning a particular area, but to learning and applying principles of practice which will be useful in all areas and to learning about one's self as a helper and service provider. The advanced level builds on foundation content, but is also more involved in the creative edge of practice in a particular area. Assuming that the student has a transferable body of knowledge, values and skills, it focuses on a concentration of study in a particular area. The student returns to themes that were addressed before, but at a different level and with a different purpose. The student's practice is not simply geared toward a more complex delivery of services, but one more precisely geared toward greater complexity of problem and range of method. The specialized practitioner may develop programs and influence the institutional context where he or she works. From our experience to date this level of advanced practice integration is not necessarily achieved by multiplying courses, but by carefully attending to the way students integrate content in their more challenging practice. Paradoxically the focus on a particular area should not narrow, but broaden the focus as the student finds a higher level of application of methods of intervention and as the student finds ways to work creatively with and influence the organizational and institutional context.

## 11. Advanced Education: The Example of School Social Work

I have spent two decades developing specialized programs in school social work, first at the University of Illinois and later at Loyola University. School social work is well developed in our area and very attractive to students. This high development of practice in the field influences the university program, but the universities are also actively engaged with and influencing the field. After twenty years where students have been required by school law to have specialized preparation if they were to enter the field at all, virtually every school social worker in Illinois has now had this preparation. There are now profound differences in the resulting practice. The social worker in school is responsible for

working with school pupils and parents, teachers and school administrators, assisting the school (and in a concrete sense teachers and school administrators) to develop learning environments where all children, even the most handicapped, can learn They assist parents to support the developmental progress and learning of their children, and assist children to use the opportunities in this changed environment to take action on their own appropriate developmental tasks and learn. Education is universally seen within our culture as a principle instrument in helping the child to adjust normally to his environment. The school social worker has a key role in carrying out this societal goal wherever the situation - the child's needs and limitations, family experiences, peer relations, school programs themselves, etc. make that goal elusive and difficult Studies of school social work practice find the most important focus of school social work practice is consultation and assessment of the transactions of the child in school. The next most important focus is on direct work with parents and children (as individuals and in groups). And finally the focus rests on program and policy development in schools. Each school social worker develops his or her own program in schools and fits the program to the needs of the mondo vitale of school, neighborhood, and families, the school community.

## 12. The Field Experience and the Integrative Seminar

Learning this highly professional role in the field and in the class is a focus for much of the student's second year in the classroom and in the field at the Masters Degree level at Loyola and at the University of Illinois. During this year the student addresses education policy and organization, along with research and school program development for handicapped children. But the most important part of the program is the course on school social work practice and the one-year advanced field experience in a school. An integrative seminar which focuses on the student's integration of all of the aspects of the role of the school social worker needs to be taken at the same time as the field placement.

The focus of the seminar is on integration of theory into school social work practice, and so a mixture of theory and discussion of the student's actual practice is utilized. In the seminar we first of all focus on the constellation of the child in school, the family and the teacher, within an ecological systems perspective. The school social worker for example needs to be able to have the sense of family dynamics of a good family therapist in working with parents toward developing partnerships with the school, and also needs to understand the dynamics of classroom interaction in providing consultation to the teacher. At other levels of intervention, with school and with community, there must be an understanding of institutional and community dynamics. From an initial focus on direct practice with families and children, we move to consultation processes with teachers and school administrators, through developing networks of resources and supportive people in the school, to developing networks of resources with other agencies and with the community. Only an integrative focus in class and the field on different theory bases for different methods, such as consultation or policy development, and on the practitioner as a learner and integrator of all this can make learning possible.

## 13. Conclusion

It is difficult and inappropriate for me to speak to the Italian university situation in social work

education. What I can best hope for is to outline a number of concepts which may be useful in the long-term growth and development of social work and social work education which meets the needs of Italy and of the European Union. Some of these, coming out of the crises of social work in my country, may be useful in yours. We are still in the process of developing an autonomous social work profession, a libera professione. This should be a profession which not only helps persons seek personal betterment and to achieve their goals, concepts wedded to a century of Anglo-Saxon social work practice. It should be a profession which reaches down to our common relational roots, our traditions of helping others, our traditions of family solidarity, our common relational roots to develop a practice which deals with our commitments to each other, particularly in family units. Italian culture possesses many millennia of experience in living together. There is latent in the culture a concept of the necessity for family and community solidarity in difficult conditions. These morally-charged relations of ordinary life provide a path to the eventual solutions of life's expected difficulties and tragedies. Your rich and complex sense of the mondo vitale and of the family can make a profound contribution to social work and to human solidarity among the often contradictory cultural conditions of a postmodern world, often forgetful of our obligations to others and of the means to construct situations where caring and respect for human worth and dignity can take place. ∎

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