

Professional Education for the Jewish Component in Casework Practice*

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"Schools such as ours hope that communal workers will encompass psychological concern for individual Jews within a social psychological understanding of the Jewish condition in demographic, political, and cultural terms. We hope the students will develop a concern for Jewish ecology as sensitive as they often have for general ecology. Jewish ecology to me encompasses issues related to Jewish waste, misuse of Jewish resources and the like."

Context in Education

THERE are a number of components to any educational process. Professional education at its best transmits knowledge, methods and skills. One hopes that it also transmits a value system for those who engage in learning. Our difficulties arise when we must decide just what knowledge is to be imparted and what minimal methods and skills are needed to establish professional competency. After those matters are resolved, assuming they are less abstract and ephemeral, one enters the field of values, and, of course, even more contentious opinions abound. Which values are to be imparted? Do we even know, how, if we know which?

The literature is replete with articles which have dealt with this subject. Most of them are hortatory in their nature. By far the greatest number of writers in the past have been the consumers—the people in the field who prescribed what they hoped would be the components of education for a Jewish communal worker. Too few of us who are the producers of Jewish communal workers have had the opportu-

* The William Posner Memorial Lecture, Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Grossinger, New York, June 9, 1975.

ity to describe what is being done, which is what I propose to do in this article.

I will not discuss skills and methods needed by the worker in any depth for I perceive these to be generic and not of specifically Jewish concern. Interviewing techniques, sensitivity to clients, worker as listener, doer, advocate, change agent, recipient of hostility, synthesizer, reflector, guardian, empathizer and the hundred other components to professional skill are not the sole property of Jewish communal workers. However, I feel it imperative that we understand how knowledge and values can affect practice. The atmosphere, environment, ambience, general and specific, diffused and concrete, of the educational process itself must be Jewish. In turn, the Jewish milieu must be understood and experienced in the larger context of American and world society. Knowledge is imparted with the intention of placing all of these experiences into a historical context. Perspective is hoped for. A sense of proportion is sought.

Everyone is concerned about the Jewish component in professional education; about what can be taught to a student in a 24-month period distilled from a 5000-year-long experience. Obviously, Jews who are serious about Jewish learning spend some time of

every waking day to learn. Social work educators cannot claim to produce Jewish scholars.

I suggest the following: how one plans an environment operates as a cue to people. It demonstrates in a non-verbal way one's intentions, emphases, and priorities of concern. The Jewishness of the physical environment on a year-round basis thus becomes a beginning tool of education. The specifics will vary depending on who creates the environment. At our school, new students are met when they come into town. If they are setting up housekeeping, bread and salt and a *mezuzah* await them.

Friday night hospitality is assured their first Shabbat in Los Angeles. Brunches are arranged for the first weekend. We know in advance who keeps kosher, who observes the Sabbath and we arrange for housing accordingly. A message is sent subliminally—this is a Jewish school for Jewish communal service and it is a school for all kinds of Jews.

Classrooms have posters and pictures with Jewish motifs. The Jewish calendar intrudes itself into the rhythm of the school. There are opportunities for various approaches and experiments to prayer. Students discuss feelings and ambivalences in and out of class.

All that we do in school is transferable to an agency and its dealings with its own personnel, board and clients. The education process begins with the environment. It is a statement of tone, taste and expectation. It is an opportunity for engagement and involvement. It challenges, titillates, and asks questions of those exposed to that environment: What do you need to know as a Jewish communal worker? What do you need to feel? How do you need to behave? Is there anything you need to believe?

The Focus of Content

When we discuss Jewish families or the Jewish community of Jewish contemporary issues or Israel-Diaspora relations, we do so in a context of appreciation that the Jew represents less than one-half of one percent of the world's population. We try to sensitize our students to the inter-dependence of Jewish potentiality and humankind's reality. We do this, however, out of a Jewish context which provides Jewish lenses through which to view the human condition.

These lenses may correct for a vision blurred or crossed by essentially non-Jewish influences. When for example, we discuss intake in a course on the Jewish component in practice we review the origins of the Elizabethan poor laws and the impact they have on social agency policy today. We also discuss the Jewish community's attitudes to serving the poor throughout history, giving examples of the different value systems which were at work (e.g. the doctrine of lesser eligibility or Hillel's stricture to treat the poor man in a manner in keeping with his past station in life even to the point of providing him with a horse and servant so that his dignity and integrity as a human being is maintained).

We feel a Jewish communal worker should know some history so that he can appreciate the changes and the continuities that influenced the Jewish people. We want the student to understand community structures and leadership styles; decision-making processes and the place and importance of difference and argument; we want him to taste of the literature of his people so he can appreciate esthetics, beauty, pain, wisdom, anger, grief, death, life, hope and continuity through the words, imagery, memory and recall of his people. We want him to see Israel and Diaspora for what they are in reality, without panic and pretense, terror and guilt; we want him to feel free to differ with faculty and evolve a frame of reference for further learning. We

want him to be a change agent on behalf of Jewish life even as he may be helping Jewish lives.

In my class on Jewish identity I often begin with a story out of our own family's life. We were in Europe in 1967. The war was on. No one knew those first dark days whether Israel would live or be destroyed. Anxiety-ridden, we who were on our way to Israel didn't know what to do. And then almost as quickly as it began, the war was over. Hundreds upon hundreds were dead or wounded, but an unbellicose Israel had a re-unified Jerusalem. The Golan was safe. Youngsters in the Galil could sleep in their own beds at night and not in bomb shelters.

We found ourselves in Rome. We saw the Forum, the Coliseum, the Sistine Chapel, the Museum, the Victor Emanuel Memorial. After all weren't we American tourists? But we also walked through the Arch of Titus. The self-same arch dedicated to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. The friezes on the inner arch wall speak for themselves in showing the sacking of Jerusalem, the plundering of the Temple treasure. And across the frieze a sentence is etched which in effect says, "Jerusalem is destroyed. No Jew will walk under this arch." And not quite 1900 years later we, our family, walked through the arch. Jerusalem was in the hands of the Jews. Prayer was possible at the western wall of the temple for all Jews and where were the Roman Legions and the Roman Empire?

I use this story to discuss and dissect the nature of Jewish identity, the place of interdependence of fate and mutual responsibility. No Jewish communal worker can truly be a communal worker if he does not understand and appreciate the implications of these social psychological principles and, more important, their application in practice.

Hopefully through our curriculum the student comes to appreciate the true meaning of diversity in Jewish life. We revere difference. We thrive on various Jewish life styles and ideologies. We challenge all students to understand that which binds them even as they differ one with the other. We want these attitudes carried into practice.

The Jewish knowledge component, then, must be apprehended at many levels. There is the cognitive, the facts, the specific, concrete. A caseworker counseling with pre- and post-divorced Jews should know about Jewish law relating to divorce. The Jewish laws of bastardy should be part of social work knowledge for those who engage in adoption work with Jewish couples. And so on.

Integration

There are other equally important components to education, as the affective or emotional. There comes a point when talking and reading and hearing ceases and doing begins. When the doing—the experiential—can combine knowledge—the cognitive, with feeling, the most serious and important learning takes place. That is why field work is so important. That's why we try constantly to provide those opportunities to make the bridge from the abstraction to the specific.

It isn't easy to begin with. It's even harder when field work instructors don't have the knowledge themselves to help a student in practice.

At school, simulations, video tape presentations, games, projects, and role playing are used as ways to break through to "real life" Jewish experiences. We go to camp together as a student body. We experiment with Shabbat celebration. We engage in exploration on many levels to understand within ourselves the multi-di-

mensional possibilities available to our Jewish selves. (These same approaches to modifying attitudes with a view to shaping behavior can be used successfully with board, staff, and clients). We hope this emphasis leads to an understanding by our students of the full meaning of the word "community" which unifies without homogenizing. "Community" further suggests that social workers must concern themselves with their clients, but not their clients alone. The worker represents values—the values of a community—the expectations and possibilities, demands and opportunities, open to them as members of that community. At the 1974 meeting of this Conference, I described a number of emerging family life styles being practiced by Jews. It is true that there is no longer one norm for Jewish family life. Does the social worker present anything to a client other than a search for adjustment? Communal obligations and expectations are as much a part of reality orientation as helping a one-legged person adjust to using an artificial leg.

The communal worker often doesn't see himself as a representative of the community. The opportunity is often not utilized to join the issue of what a Jewish community which is providing service to an individual Jew may expect from that Jew: a client doesn't want children. The Jewish community has less children under the age of 5 than any other ethnic group in the world. Does a Jewish family service have a responsibility as an instrument of the Jewish community to encourage more births to decelerate the shrinkage of the world Jewish population?

Jews live longer than other ethnic and religious groups in America. They now inter-marry at a rate in excess of 30 percent. Over 75 percent of males, age 25-29, have a Bachelor's degree. Jews are increasingly mobile. They are

middle-class with a larger percentage of poor than heretofore thought to be the case.

I suggest that each of these sociological realities (and many more not mentioned) are a context for practice. They must effect social planning, service priorities, the major foci of practice concern.

The proportion of time for counseling the pained and the troubled must be judged against the longer range concerns of Jewish continuity. An agency and a social worker in that agency who develops a historical perspective may evolve service strategies which are more focused on preventative and maintenance aspects of practice than heretofore was the case. Re-ordering of priorities could result in more resources being diverted to Marriage Encounters, Family Retreats, Resource persons for *Havurot*, Family Life Education, all of which have a Jewish component to them.

Sensitizing a student to these potentialities can produce more consideration and concern for the therapeutic aspects of ritual, Jewish practice and concern in child care institutions, in big brother service, in foster care, and in other counseling settings.

Women interested in consciousness raising as women should be helped to make a connection to Jewish possibilities.

Jewish lesbians and homosexuals have recourse to counseling. The Jewish tradition is clear in viewing both as abominations. Yet, the Reform movement has admitted 3 homophilic congregations into membership. At least one Jewish federation council has done the same. Do these homosexuals have Jewish concerns? It would seem so. Do social workers see themselves as conveyors of Jewish attitudes in some cases and not in others? Placing the questions on a staff agenda and utilizing

literature and Jewish authorities are as important an input as are Freud's thinking and the latest conclusions of the American Psychiatric Association. We try to anticipate issues. We have our students engaged in the search for answers and the questions for more answers.

These and many other issues become the content for discussion in class and seminar. They must become part of the professional agenda of agencies and boards. There are no facile answers possible. The awareness of the propriety of the issue suggests that Jewish content can be seen in the broadest and yet most fundamental way.

Our Educational Intentions

The intent of this educational process is to engage in a Jewish consciousness raising enterprise. It should not be done in tribalistic and xenophobic ways. The H.U.C. faculty is as diverse in its ideologies and practice as is the student body. Judah Shapiro, many years ago, described the process as an attempt to push life through a Jewish sieve, and this indeed is our goal.

The Jew at his best has at hand an idiom, a texturing, an approach to problem solving and creative and purposeful living which has worked for Jews in the past. This is not to overromanticize history or to suggest that all we *call* Jewish is automatically good. It is to suggest that communal workers called Jewish or who work in Jewish agencies have a goal over and above the service of a client. That goal is Jewish continuity.

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sensitive as they often have for general ecology. Jewish ecology to me encompasses issues related to Jewish waste, misuse of Jewish resources and the like.

Much of what I have described to this moment is based upon the self-perception the worker has of his role. The intent of education for Jewish communal service must include a valuing of the self as a professional person. The ethics, competency and knowledge of the professional must equip him to see that he can and must help in the shaping of Jewish life and in the setting of priorities for the directions Jewish life must take.

A family service worker influences committee and board members, friends, congressmen, fellow professionals and citizens if the self-image of being a professional includes the full potentiality of roles available to the worker. Performance in these roles is also Jewish content.

Professionals, individually and in concert, in an agency, a community, a country, must contribute to the Jewish dialogue which shapes Jewish future. Do family workers have any less concern for Jewish family life than rabbis? Is there a common agenda of concern for joint action? The New York experience is one answer to rabbinic-social worker dialogue and cooperation. I am also aware of the attitudes of many which results in a minimization of the contributions family service workers have to make to agenda building in Jewish life.

We try in our school to sensitize rabbinic and communal service students to each other's perspectives, strengths and roles. We see the professionals' roles in the broadest of contexts built upon a sense of capacity born of knowledge and positive professional self-image. The Jewish competent worker is looked to for guidance

and input over and above the client system.

We hope our students understand the processes which shape the shadings and varying emphases in Jewish life. It is for the worker to sort out and appreciate the place and propriety of the universal and the ethnic, the assimilatory and the acculturative.

A broadly gauged family service has a family life education program encompassing preparation for parenthood. It covers natural childbirth, and dressing the navel and nursing on demand, and jealousies of the other sibs and roles of grandparents. But it also helps a Jewish couple understand *Brit Millah* and *Pidyan ha-Ben*. And it reviews Jewish names and the concepts underlying continuity. And it helps couples who rightfully feel that girls are short-changed to develop ceremonies for girls which are equivalent in importance to *Brit Millah* and *Pidyan ha-Ben*.

And then maybe in concert with a Center a family learns what a Jewish wimple* is and makes one to demonstrate the relatedness to past and future as Jews.

A colleague (Rabbi William Cutter) recently cautioned an audience he was addressing about the "idolatry of innovation". Change for change's sake is to be avoided and abhorred. It is a tough message to sell in a society oriented to the new. Judaism is not General Motors. Our assembly line is long and venerable but the evolution of our new models is gradual and time-tempered.

So it must be with the educational components necessary in this process I describe. The average family service worker is a product of an American

* In Jewish custom, a wimple is a binder which was traditionally embroidered with aphorism or other appropriate quotations. It was used to bind the navel of the newborn and then upon the occasion of Bar Mitzvah, used to bind the torah. It became a symbol of continuity and hope.

Jewish assembly line which engaged in radical product change. The Jewish components were discarded in a search for the new and the modern.

A review of those too often discarded components reveals some non-rusting and long trusted guides to sound living as humans and Jews. The collective wisdom of a people has a place in practice and performance. The wisdom is value-based. The guidelines worked well enough to guarantee the presence of Jews in the world today. They must become part of the background to be used by the professional in his practice and his personal life.

I hope a few examples will suffice to make the point. I have pointed out elsewhere that "the Jewish way of life has been an act of seeking, of grasping for life" "In the tradition, acting, being responsible, "*kol yisroael arevim zeh bo-zeh*", all of Israel being responsible one for the other, and yet, not only being interested in Jews. As from the Talmud also, "Poor gentiles should be supported by Jews; the gentile sick should be visited along with the Jewish sick; their dead should be buried as well as the Jewish dead so that true amity between Jew and gentile may grow."

There is a Christological overlay to society and its approach to problem-solving through the individual. We have the Calvinistic infusion, that if a man is poor he is poor because God willed it. We talk of the Protestant ethic and the rugged frontier philosophy that calls for man's bettering his condition through his own efforts . . . to pull himself up by his bootstraps.

Then the "I" serves to the best of its ability and while charity indeed may begin at home, with this philosophy it

'Gerald Bubis, "Jewish Imperatives and Injunctions for Jewish Center Workers." *Viewpoints*, February 1972, p. 7.

often ends at home. This same philosophy has about it the notion of monastic and hermit-like existence at times. Communal workers are asked to take "vows of poverty", ministers must not be paid "too much" money, because that would get in their way of believing in God. Compare this to the Jewish perception. The notion of pluralism in prayer, for example. We have missed the mark for the things that We as a community have not succeeded in doing. When the *Al-chait* list is read, We convene publicly to assume obligation for the omissions of all mankind. We presume communal celebration for the major events in our lives. From the *Brit* to the *Bet Olam*, from circumcision to the cemetery, We assume communal obligation. It is incongruous for a Jew, historically, to think of doing his own thing, if his own thing means not considering the relevance of "one's thing" for one's community. Need I quote Hillel, and remind us that if I am for myself alone, what am I, even though I must be for myself.

The most socialized among us have been shaped by our experiences and education. They magnified the universal lens of our double visioned outlook while minimizing the particularistic or Jewish lens. We see ourselves as free and enlightened. We often do not seem to appreciate that in America we are as free to be Jews as we are to be not Jewish. The choice is up to us but is often colored by inappropriate or inadequate understanding of the potency of Judaism and Jewish values. We often are ambivalent in how we react professionally and personally.

The values we emphasize in our curriculum are predicated on a presumption. Being Jewish is good for Jews and good for the world. There is no need for group suicide as a price for happiness, success and/or adjustment.

Conversely there is much to com-

mend the notion that the marginality of the Jew in the last 2 millenia has had salutary results for Jews and the world.

The question then might be: might social workers not have a responsibility at times to encourage continued marginality if it continues to lead to creative and purposeful dissatisfaction with the world as it exists? We are after all partners with God or good to effectuate the repair of the world. We have the task to remove abominations in the world and thus complete it. That's our part of the partnership. At least it was. Is there still a mission for our people and for us as Jewish professionals who represent and serve that people?

In sum, our education focuses on the following Jewish components:

1. *Demography*—what is happening to the contemporary Jewish families and individuals?

2. *Social issues*—what general events and developments shape us? Which need a Jewish communal response? Where and under what circumstances does the Jewish community respond?

3. *Social psychology*—how is identity shaped? What are the inputs an agency or a worker can make?

4. *History*—what events help explain the Jews' continued existence? Can we shape tomorrow's history?

5. *Contemporary Jewish Issues*—is there indeed a Jewish agenda? Do clients and workers have a say in developing that agenda?

6. *Values*—what are unique to the Jewish condition which are worthy of continuity? How did they evolve? How might they be continued?

7. *Jewish tools*—what should the Jewish social worker know of Jewish rites of passage; birth, death and the steps in between? How is the calendar a tool for Jewish life and future?

8. *Jewish adaptation*—can there be joy in Jewish living? Is the Jewish condition one long bleak memory filled with angst and pain, alienation or indifference? What are strategies for creative continuity?

A Catholic philosopher gave one answer to the question of the meaning of the Jews mission in the world. "Israel (the people) is a kind of mystical body. It is not only a people endowed with a mission which pertained to the very order of redemption of mankind . . . its mission continues in a certain manner . . . because it cannot help being the chosen people. The Jews are still believed because of their fathers. Israel is here to tell the truth; the Jew is not the world but is at the deepest core of the world, to irritate it, to prod it, to move it. The Jew's indestructible hope stimulates the force of history."²

²Jacques Maritain, quoted in Los Angeles Times, Aug. 15, 1971.

I believe that the Jewish component in education for social work must convey this potentiality. This helps the social worker to see himself as an inheritor of responsibility, as a change agent, as a conveyor of competence and a purveyor of values.

Our sages tell us that "*Lo nitnoo ha'mitzvot ella letzoref baken et habriyot*. We were not given the commandments except to strengthen and refine human beings."

It is impossible to continue that philosophy without the people that shaped it. It is just as senseless to continue the people without the philosophy which shaped them.

That is the *raison d'être* for the Jewish component in social work education. This must be the *raison d'être* for the Jewish component in social work practice.