Bookworm's Corner

Book Review
Tice, C., & Perkins, K., (2002). *The Faces of Social Policy: A Strengths Perspective*. **Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. Reviewed by Donna R. Pittman, MSSW, LCSW**

This paper reviews the social policy text, *The Faces of Social Policy: A Strengths Perspective,* by Tice and Perkins (2002). The authors introduce their text with the intention of telling history from the experience of marginalized people, particularly African Americans and women. Hoping to spark student interest in social policy by "putting a face" on the people who are being served by social work professionals, they include poetry, art, personal narratives, and the texts of historical documents. Tice and Perkins utilize historical analysis to show how modern social welfare policies are based on beliefs rooted in antiquity. The genesis of social work as a profession at the turn of the twentieth century is explored and social reform and social case work models of ameliorating social needs are compared. The authors discuss the dual nature of social work in light of these two models and assert that the dominance of one over the other has fluctuated over time. The authors take effort to exemplify the dangers of reducing social welfare needs to an individual model and warn that this frequently results in pathologizing and blaming the victim. This text is appropriate for BSW required policy courses or as a supplementary text in BSW diversity or history courses.

Tice and Perkins (2002) trace social welfare values and beliefs from antiquity to modern times. They suggest that the beliefs of ancient Rome and Greece linked charity to religious duty and defined recipients as worthy "poor" or unworthy "beggars." The authors show how these values were perpetuated in England's Elizabethan Poor Laws, and although government intervention was the last resort after family, community and church, the State's responsibility for the poor was formalized. These values are traced to early America.

Colonial Americans viewed success as a sign of hard work and high moral character (Tice & Perkins, 2002). Strenuous work was valued and "idleness was considered a sign of

Satan" (p. 37). This work ethic is an overarching principle in the settlement laws of Colonial America. Formalization of social welfare continued with The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 which established precedent for government aid to the poor based on merit. Another milestone occurred toward the end of the Civil War when "Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, known as the Freedman's Bureau. This was the first federal welfare agency" (Trattner as cited in Tice & Perkins, 2002, p. 81). Social Work emerged as a profession in the early 1900s.

By the turn of the twentieth century social problems in the United States were seen as emanating from the moral defects of individuals. Institutions sought to purge these defects (Tice & Perkins, 2002). Two leading reform efforts marked the beginning of the social work profession. The Charity Organization Society (COS) and the settlement house movement. COS was influenced by Social Darwinism and Freudian psychology. The settlement house movement looked toward environmental factors as causes of social problems. Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, felt the COS agents were "cold, unemotional, too impersonal, and stingy … she called the friendly visitors, 'benevolent meddlers,' and accused them of giving the poor nothing but advice" (p. 107). Mary Richmond, a COS leader, remained undaunted and responded that if they were benevolent meddlers, "why not interfere effectively" (p. 107). Tice and Perkins suggest that the social work profession has remained a combination of these two approaches to social welfare and the dominance of one over the other has fluctuated over time and in accordance with societal forces. They recommend a strengths perspective for either model but are pessimistic that casework alone can effectively respond to the poor and needy.

Tice and Perkins (2002) state directly that "the strengths perspective is represented by a collation of ideas and techniques rather than theory or a paradigm" (p. 11). They operationalize social policy from a strengths perspective by suggesting that it should be "infused into the traditional…process of policy development by emphasizing common human needs and barriers to meeting these needs…" (p. 12). They admonish social workers to be active participants in social change yet give little practical advice on how to achieve this goal. Admonitions for social action necessitate strategies for implementation. Nevertheless, their discussion of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is an excellent example of how strengths based policies can positively affect the lives of targeted populations. According to the authors, prior legislation had emphasized the deficits of the individual while the ADA of 1990 mandated equal opportunity for people with disabilities in employment, public accommodation, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunication (Croser as cited in Tice & Perkins, 2002, p. 277).

Because Tice and Perkins (2002) followed no particular theory, they use an historical timeline as an overarching framework. The enormity of this task lends itself to superficiality. For instance when covering the period from antiquity to the era of Colonial America they dismiss women's presence by saying that "women were confined to the home where their work went unnoticed…" (p. 20). No strengths perspective was addressed until the discussion of slavery in early America. In fact, Tice and Perkins state that "it is difficult to analyze Greek and Roman societies from a strengths perspective… as the ruling elite maintained a politic and economic structure of oppression" (p. 24). This seems incongruent. Surely the American era of slavery was a society where the ruling elite maintained a politic and economic structure of oppression, yet the authors recount numerous examples of strengths based initiatives by slaves, freedmen, and abolitionists.

The preponderance of history through the eyes of African Americans serves to highlight the scarcity of content regarding the experience of Mexican Americans, American Indians, and

other disenfranchised minorities. Social changes which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s are presented through the lens of the African American civil rights movement with scant inclusion of the effects of the anti-war movement and protests against materialism and capitalism. The feminist movement is discussed from a "White" perspective and the unique struggles of women of color are overlooked. *The Faces of Social Policy: A Strengths Perspective* contains numerous grammatical errors, spelling errors, and "cut and paste" errors which cause confusion and consternation.

Despite these criticisms, *The Faces of Social Policy: A Strengths Perspective* is an interesting and informative read. It is interesting to follow Tice and Perkins as they trace values passed through the centuries to the emergence of social work as a profession. Though falling somewhat short of addressing three features of the EPAS criteria for Social Welfare Policy and Services, the major themes were adequately explored. The EPAS standards that need attention are: "analyses of international issues in social policy…adequate exposure to methods that would influence and formulate policy consistent with social work values…and planning processes required to deliver social services" (CSWE-EPAS, 2001, 4.4). The poetry, art, personal narratives, and reproductions of historical documents successfully "put a face" on social policy and engage the reader. This text is recommended for BSW level social policy courses and as a supplementary text in BSW diversity or history courses.

References

Council on Social Work Education. (2001). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Council on Social Work Education. [Online]. Retrieved February 15, 2004.

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