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Book Review: Community Practice Textbook Is Oriented Toward Graduate Study

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Community Practice Textbook Is Oriented Toward Graduate Study

Reviewed by David J. Edelman

Dorothy N. Gamble and Marie Weil, *Community Practice Skills: Local to Global Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 482 pages. ISBN 978-0-231-11002-0

Community Practice Skills: Local to Global Perspectives is a textbook aimed primarily at graduate students in community practice social work. Consequently, it is not for a general readership but provides a basis to community practice. It is also not the kind of book one reads through quickly, but rather a scholarly work with the roots of community practice and the historical development of its ideas presented in detail. It is not a handbook of actions to be taken by social workers. Although it has many positive qualities as a text, its thoroughness, for example, the format does not promote active engagement. A less dense presentation with more graphics and photographs would be very helpful.

The book is divided into 2 parts. Part I: Community Practice: Purpose and Knowledge Base, provides the basis for the analysis presented in the second part. This includes chapters discussing the meaning of community, processes associated with community practice, and social justice and human rights; presenting the eight models of community practice; discussing guiding values and the evolution of the purposes and approaches to community practice, and providing an overview of the concepts, theories, knowledge, and perspectives that guide community practice. Part II: Eight Models of Community Practice for the Twenty-First Century, centers on the scope of concern, basic processes, conceptual understanding and roles and skills important for practice in each model (p. xvi).

The focus of the book, then, is a framework of eight models of community practice placed within a local to global context, recognizing that globalization affects the way community practice social workers will practice in the future. Promoting social justice is a major theme throughout the book. Thus, understanding the framework and context are essential for students. The eight models: neighborhood and community organizing; organizational functional communities; social, economic and sustainable development; inclusive program development; social planning; coalitions; political and social action, and movements for progressive change are discussed in detail in separate chapters. Table 2.1: Eight Models of Community Practice with Twenty-first Century Contexts (pp. 26, 27), nicely summarizes the models, covering desired outcome, systems targeted for change, primary constituency, scope of concern and social work/community practice roles. A student would be thankful for this as keeping all the characteristics of each model in mind without this summary would be a daunting task.

Consequently, as a text, it would be useful to have bullets of five or six main ideas listed at the start of each chapter with the main ideas presented clearly and graphically once again at the end of each chapter. A book such as this has tremendous value as a handy reference for students and practitioners, and making the main points accessible some time after reading the book would make it more useful.

Graphics such as Table 2.2: Primary and Related Roles for Social Workers/Community Practice Workers in the Eight Models (pp. 40–44), Table 4.1: Reed's Illustrative Types of Explanatory Theories about Society and Social Change (pp. 88 and 89), and Table 4.2: Theoretical Framework for Community Practice—Macro to Micro Scale (p. 94) are very instructive and useful for students and practitioners alike and make the book more meaningful for those interested in community engagement who are not social workers.

An excellent aspect of the book is the use of case studies to illustrate most of the eight models. These are very informative and are where the global context really comes to the forefront. They also provide the most interesting reading of the volume. Case studies are taken from Eastern Cape Province, South Africa; Santa Fe, New Mexico; an unspecified sub-Saharan African country; Robeson County, North Carolina; and Durham, North Carolina. There are also frequent references to other examples in the main body of the text.

Community Practice Skills: Local to Global Perspectives is of interest to a sizable segment of *JCES* readers. While it is aimed at community practice social workers, there is much that is useful for others involved in community engagement as it "...presents a comprehensive guide to skills for community engagement with a knowledge base drawn from the values, purposes, and theories that form the foundation for work with communities" (p. xv). While reading it thoroughly may take some time, it deserves a place on the reference shelf of any person seriously involved in community engagement.

About the Reviewer

David J. Edelman is a professor of planning in the School of Planning at the University of Cincinnati. Professor Edelman is a member of the *JCES* editorial board.