

BOOK REVIEW

MIDGLEY, J. & CONLEY, A. (eds) 2010. *Social Work and Social Development: Theories and Skills for Developmental Social Work*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-973232-6 1

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Social Work and Social Development: Theories and Skills for Developmental Social Work discusses developmental social work as a distinctive approach to professional social work.

According to editors Midgley and Conley, despite a growing awareness of the potential of developmental social work (also known as the social development approach to social work) and an increasing number of social workers throughout the world who believe that developmental ideas have relevance, there is still uncertainty about exactly what the approach involves. This book is a successful and valuable response to the need to illustrate developmental social work in tangible, practice terms.

Although written from a USA perspective, *Social Work and Social Development* includes contributions from the West and South, particularly South Africa, whose contributions to developmental social work are acknowledged as both pioneering and inspiring.

The book is a collaborative effort that was inspired by many people, and includes contributions from experts drawing on a wealth of information and experiences from across the globe, making it applicable across different contexts and countries.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I serves as an introduction and provides an overview of the historical evolution of developmental social work, its principles and practice approaches, and discusses the major investment strategies used in the field. It argues that developmental social work transcends conventional remedial and maintenance practice approaches through adopting social investment strategies that build on peoples' capability to be productive citizens and lead normal and fulfilling lives.

The basis of the argument is that developmental social work goes beyond emphasising client strengths and the importance of empowerment, and requires that social workers be provided with tangible social investments – such as job training, employment placement, childcare, adult literacy, micro-enterprise, and asset savings accounts – that enhance their capabilities and facilitate their participation in both community life and the productive economy. It incorporates all the social work functions and can be applied across the three core methods, and brings social work closer to its social change function where it facilitates improvements in people's well-being and in wider social conditions.

Part I emphasises the integration of social and economic development in building peoples' capabilities, as well as the role of government in the tangible social investments mentioned above. It shows that the principles and practice interventions used in developmental social work can be applied in mainstream social work practice with service users who have traditionally been served by social workers, and challenges their ongoing maintenance relationship with

service providers while recognising their strengths and promoting self-determination and meaningful participation in community life.

It also articulates the generalist knowledge, skills and value base for developmental social work, which informs the application of social investment/productivist approaches and strategies (discussed in Part II). These features include: commitment to a rights-based approach; equality; social justice; social investments and social rights; social inclusion and participation. Investment strategies include the adoption of community-based, participatory, and rights-based interventions; mobilisation of human and social capital; facilitating of employment and self-employment; promotion of asset accumulation; other ways of bringing about significant improvements in the material welfare of individuals, families, and communities; partnerships; and, amongst many skills that are highlighted in the book, lobbying and advocacy skills to contribute to the achievements of these ideals. Developmental social work requires concrete investments in the form of resources and services. Approaches to social development can be synthesized into a holistic model in which the role of the state, community, and market are integrated. Within a developmental approach, welfare expenditures are regarded as investment in the future functioning of people.

Part II of *Social Work and Social Development* shows how the features of developmental social work can be adopted by social workers in their daily practice, and how social investment strategies can be utilised in various specialised fields – child welfare, productive aging, mental health, poverty and social assistance, crime and correctional social work, homeless youth and community practice – each with its own a chapter¹ highlighting a few of its core aspects in relation to developmental social work.

A developmental approach in child welfare advocates proactive services and strategies to support and empower families to take responsibility for caring for their children in their communities and prevent families from reaching a state of crisis. The chapter highlights an often-overlooked aspect of child welfare, namely strategies to address the challenges facing those youth from poor and disadvantaged communities – or exiting foster or institutional care – in achieving positive life outcomes in the face of obstacles that perpetuate their dependency on welfare. Harnessing social support networks in the extended family and the community is an important component of a developmental approach, especially for at-risk families.

From a developmental perspective, gerontological social services go beyond care services that enable older persons to remain productive and add economic value to society, as well as to engage in social or civic contributions. This chapter proposes four strategies to achieve social development through gerontological social services: employment and retirement initiatives, volunteerism and civic engagement, long term caregiving, and cross-sector planning efforts.

The chapter on mental health focuses on the opportunities for social inclusion a developmental approach affords for some of the most marginalised people in society, providing them with a platform for empowerment that allows them to overcome the isolation and stigma that are often the most devastating effects of mental illness. The chapter on people with disabilities

¹Academic and practitioners who commented on chapters in Part II of the book are acknowledged, namely: Dr M. Booyens; Dr L. Le Roux; Ms N. Billa; Dr L.S. Geyer; Ms J. May and SAVF practitioners.

emphasises building on the techniques and leadership of people with physical disabilities and their campaigning for the right to self-determination and to be protected against discrimination. A focus on community living seeks to normalise the living arrangements of people with disabilities, while social capital and peer support affirm the importance of community involvement, and engagement in social enterprise using a market-driven business model can break down social isolation and exclusion. A developmental approach offers people with disabilities and those affected by mental health issues opportunities to gain social, psychological and practical skills in supportive working environments, as well as building social capital, facilitating economic integration, addressing stigma and bringing great promise to the promotion of mental health in society.

In developmental social work, social assistance is recognised as a human right. The chapter on poverty and social assistance looks at the key role social work has to play in formulating and implementing social assistance programmes designed to reduce poverty, such as cash transfers, “welfare to work” programmes and using social assistance to subsidise the incomes of poor families through specific programmes. All these programmes are developmental because they have an investment effect.

In correctional settings the developmental approach shifts punitive rehabilitation services to strength-based social investment programmes. This chapter emphasises the importance of networking with other stakeholders and value-effective integrated social work intervention programmes, including how integrated economic development programmes can promote effective rehabilitation.

The chapter focusing on homeless youth looks at how social investment strategies, when integrated with services to deal with clinical and substance-abuse issues, can provide an alternative to traditional service delivery that promotes the economic- and self-sufficiency of these youth. The point is made that homeless young people need marketable job skills, as well as opportunities to address their mental health issues, and to be successfully engaged and retained in services. The economic and social exclusion of young people is a major societal problem that urgently requires innovative, effective approaches to address it.

Finally, the chapter on developmental social work in communities looks at how it creates an opportunity for social work to utilise economic and social investments to meet the material needs of communities. The developmental approach emphasises that social workers should become directly involved in economic development projects in order to contribute to poverty alleviation. Strategies to engage both directly and indirectly in community economic development provide helpful guidelines to how social work can shift community practice to integrate social and economic programmes.

Part III of *Social Work and Social Development* sums up the prospects and limitations of developmental social work that are discussed in the book, highlighting the challenges and thus the agenda for ongoing debate and research on this topic. Midgley and Conley demonstrate how developmental social work can inform professional practice in core social practice fields, alluding to developmental interventions having brought significant improvements and changes to people and communities. They emphasise that community economic development projects are not narrowly focused on economic activities, but can be integrated with social investment

strategies. It also argues that developmental social workers should engage in an ongoing campaign for human rights and social justice.

They also highlight the limitation and challenges facing developmental social work, particularly issues of implementation. Despite the progress that has already been made, the search for clearer articulation of developmental social work continues. The responsibility and role of government and the state in relation to NGOs remains an ongoing challenge in terms of resources, engaging in social investment strategies and commitment of political leaders. This includes balancing economic growth with decisions about financing priorities, and balancing revenues and expenditure. Politicians and voters, however, should be educated to understand how social investments produce positive rates of return. Professional social work associations should take up their role advocating for the expansion of developmental social services. The shortage of social workers is also a huge challenge, narrowing their roles and allowing other professions to become involved in social work's field of expertise. The counter-side of the argument, however, is equally relevant: Why should social workers not expand their scope in order to stay relevant in the future and contribute to national development? Although social workers are very innovative in community settings, as well as in implementing economic and social investment strategies, such as income-generating projects without formal education, the need for specific education in social investment approaches, and in strategies and research in the field of developmental social work, are important challenges.

Social Work and Social Development demonstrates that developmental social work offers promising prospects for enhancing the well-being of the beneficiaries of social work services. It makes a significant contribution to furthering the debate on developmental social work and in providing tangible examples of application in practice. Furthermore, the book demonstrates that developmental social work is not about *either* micro or macro practice, but rather about both. Developmental social work does not narrow the focus of social work to economic projects. Rather, it is a matter of finding “a balance between social work's remedial, maintenance, preventive, integrative, and developmental functions”, as the editors indicate. Social investment approaches and strategies provide a route towards this end because they can be applied in micro and macro practice, and hence utilise the core social work methods.

The limitations and challenges as highlighted by the editors will doubtless remain, on both an articulation and an implementation level. This, however, is in the interest of further debate and research on developmental social work. A case in point is: Does child protection have to be “dismantled” under a developmental approach? It is a matter of “dismantling the system without having a clearly defined alternative in place [which] could be disastrous”, or is it about adjusting the protective system so as to ensure that families and children get out of the system more quickly and, more importantly, having benefitted from social investment strategies in such a way that they and future family generations will be able to escape the “protective” system, and hence the promotion of tertiary prevention. Primary prevention community-based interventions can also supplement these initiatives.

Social Work and Social Development: Theories and Skills for Developmental Social Work offers well presented arguments written in accessible language. It is a book that social work scholars, practitioners and students must read. Its thought-provoking arguments and discussions demand response and debate from the reader, not only with regard to the developmental social work and social investment strategies in the specialised fields discussed in this book, but also in

other, less familiarised social work fields. The book stimulates social workers to re-think and debate their involvement in poverty alleviation and national development, as well as their scope of practice.

The book's editors and contributors are to be congratulated both on their success in providing answers to burning articulation and implementation issues, and on raising many questions that will ensure that the debate and research on developmental social work will continue.