

Outreach work as a professional social work discipline

Walter Lorenz

Outreach asserts core social work principles

- Immediacy of service user contact
- Sceptical of institutional solutions
- Refusal to label
- Interdisciplinary / inter-professional orientation
- Social policy consciousness
- Sustaining contradictory demands
 - Care vs. control
 - Subjectivity vs. objectivity
 - Analytical clarity vs. informality

Ambiguity of professionalization

- Increase in prestige and recognition
- ‘danger’ of incorporation into welfare regimes
 - Activities become office-bound
 - Role dependent (difference to other professions)
 - Methodological specialisation
 - Risk elimination

Concept of 'profession' currently in crisis

- Lack of accountability (*'we know what we are doing'*-syndrome)
- Monopoly of knowledge challenged through knowledge diffusion
- User participation movement
- Commercialisation of public services (*'marketisation'*)
- Rights based approaches (power equilibrium)

Outreach as model for 'new professionalism' characterised by

- Emphasis on human rights, ethical orientation
- Empowerment and advocacy
- Interdisciplinarity
- Constructive risk taking
- Immediacy to service users
- Policy-making responsibility

Implications for training (1)

Outreach principles and methods need to 'penetrate' **generic under-graduate** study programmes:

- Centrality of listening skills
- Dealing with complexity
- Social policy analysis
- Civil rights orientation
- Rapid assessment skills

Implications for training (2)

Opportunities for specialisation at **post-graduate** level:

- Decision-making in complex situations
- Management of multi-disciplinary teams / inter-professional coopeation
- Synthetic knowledge production from
 - Psychology / psychiatry / epidemiology
 - Criminology
 - Social geography anthropology
 - Community education / development
 - Systemic therapy