

BOOK REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives for Direct Social Work Practice - A Generalist-Eclectic Approach (Third Edition)

Nick Cody and Peter Lehmann (Eds.)
Springer Publishing, New York 2016
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This social work practice text is targeted at all students of social work and related fields such as counselling and psychotherapy. It endorses the eclectic use of theory using a problem-solving approach (p. 61) and draws heavily on recent research.

A comprehensive book edited by well-known authors, Professors Nick Cody and Peter Lehmann, it is a detailed and in-depth publication. Revised and updated, the book includes a new section on critical theories, and a chapter on empowerment theory. Strengths-based social work has been added to the section on meta-theories and there are new chapters on emotion-focused and collaborative therapies.

As a USA book, there are some differences in language and, of course, practice context that come to the reader's notice; however, this is not intrusive. Careful attention has been paid to the critique of all topics, drawing from extensive literature. Endorsement of the 'helping relationship' and a 'common factors model' was, for this reader, very reassuring (pp. 26, 61-77). All the content, I believe, is relevant to current explorations and practice experience here in Aotearoa New Zealand and, I strongly suspect, in Australia.

The book is divided into four parts: Part 1, The Generalist-Eclectic Approach. Part 2, Metatheories for Direct Social Work Practice. Part 3, Mid-level Theories for direct social work practice, with Part 4 containing the Summary and Conclusion. Part 3 is further divided into subsections A–E– Section A: Psychodynamic Theories; Section B: Cognitive Behavioral Theories; Section C: Humanistic Theories; Section D: Critical Theories; Section E: Postmodern Theories. Within subsections A-E, 14 specific models and therapies are addressed by a wide range of contributors with relevant expertise from across the USA and Canada. Part 4 is a summary and conclusion revisiting the generalist-eclectic approach. A feature I appreciated was the application of theory to the four phases of helping and the inclusion of case examples in most chapters.

As it would be impossible to attempt to do justice to the entire book in this review, I have selected two chapters (6 and 16) that were of particular interest to me, to discuss in more detail.

Chapter 6 (Strengths-based Social Work: A Social Work Metatheory to Guide the Profession): Here four social work educator/practitioners give an overview of Strengths Based Practice (SBP) and connect to the writing of Jane Addams (1902) and beyond to Aristotle, Greek and Roman philosophy, Christian and Buddhist scholarship, Yoga and Chinese medicine.

The chapter looks at compatibility with the generalist-eclectic approach and the USA NASW code of ethics. The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Social Workers Registration Board Code of Conduct compare favourably as they too draw from a strengths approach.

Aspects of modern psychology from early practitioners such as James (1902), Buhler (1935), Jung (1993), Frankl (1967), Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1961) are discussed. Human capacity-building, constructive growth experiences, positive reinforcement and many others, seen as leading to a strengths and skills building model are additionally discussed. Strengths principles originally created by Saleebey (1992) and the strengths standards created by Rapp et al. (2005) have been combined by Manthey, Knowles, Asher, and Wahap (2011) and expressed (pp. 136-137) as:

1. SBSW is goal orientated. 2. SBSW contains a systematic means of assessing strengths. 3. SBSW sees the environment as rich in resources and explicit methods are used to leverage client and environmental strengths for goal attainment. 4. The SBSW relationship is hope inducing. 5. In SBSW the provision of meaningful choices is central and individuals have the authority to choose. 6. Strengths-based practice assumes that we best serve clients by collaborating with them. 7. SBSW assumes that trauma, abuse illness, and struggle may be harmful but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity. 8. SBSW assumes that the worker does not know the upper limits of individuals' capacity to grow and change.

SBSW is then applied to the phases of helping – Engagement, Assessment, Intervention and Progress Monitoring, Evaluation and Termination. A relevant case example covering all phases is given, along with a succinct critique of SBSW before the summary concludes, “Viewing SBSW as a metatheory reflects the central importance of its values, assumptions, and principles for all social work practice, and this will be useful in moving the field forward.” (p. 150).

The second chapter (16) I would like to highlight in this book is by Sarah Todd, an associate professor at Canada's Carleton University. Sarah gives a succinct overview of feminist theory, its constructs, historical development and connection to social work.

The theory is applied to the phases of helping and its significant application to family and group work is explored. The limitations and strengths of feminist approaches to social work are identified and people and their situations most suited to the application and integration of feminist theory discussed.

The case example of a student with an unplanned pregnancy enables a range of feminist approaches to be highlighted and the compatibility with the generalist-eclectic framework demonstrated. Applying a feminist analysis that attends to issues of diversity and empowerment ensures social justice is at the core of all work done. Feminist social work is presented as able to use a wide range of theories depending upon the client, the presenting problem, and clinical setting.

I found this book was best approached in small instalments (one chapter at a time), allowing plenty of time for digestion, reflection and introspection as it led me to explore and challenge my own philosophical and personal practice framework and some individual experiences of case work within it.

I would recommend this book for its intended student audience and for all social work educators and field educators/supervisors who want to support their own and help develop their colleagues' practice. Resources for instructors, including an Instructor's Manual and PowerPoint slides have been developed and are available from the publisher.

Cherie Appleton MSW,

Director of Field Work at the School of Counselling,

Human Services and Social Work

The University of Auckland.