

Book Reviews

Mizrahi, T., & Davis, L. E. (Eds.). (2008). *Encyclopedia of Social Work, 20th Edition*. Co-published: Washington, DC: NASW and NY: Oxford University Press. Reviewed by Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., Senior Editor, and Paul Dovyak, Board Member, *Journal of Social Work Values & Ethics*.

While a graduate student at Ohio State University in 1974-1976, I purchased the edition of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. My professors had assigned such a large number of readings from this work that it was cost effective to purchase it rather than photocopy the sections that were required. In addition, I used the *Encyclopedia* as a springboard for composing, formulating, and organizing the large number of assigned term papers and other projects. I have purchased every edition of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* since my MSW experience. Based on casual comments from other professors, my experience with the *Encyclopedia* fits the norm. With the advent of the 20th edition, we will see a change in the norm. Although the price varies a great deal from \$240.62 to \$495 (see Figure 1), even used copies are out of reach for the typical BSW/MSW student.

Figure 1



In a discussion with an Oxford University Press sales representative, I found that the electronic version is available to universities and addresses student access. I experimented with the library/electronic version. It is much more user-friendly (ease of following directions) and intuitive (ease of using without directions) than the CD version of the 19th edition [see: *Social Work*, 42(2), 210-211, 1997]. Because of this ease, I suspect that many students will never see the print version. The library/electronic version resolves the student access issue. However, practitioners will have a problem. The print version is too costly for practitioners, and academic

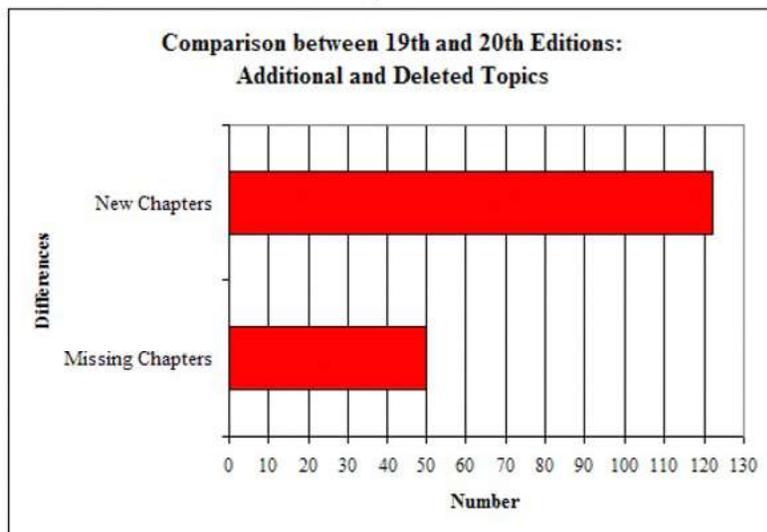
libraries are generally not accessible to them. I hope local chapters of NASW can make the electronic version available to their membership.

The 20th edition does preserve the continuity of organizing knowledge about the social work profession at a fixed point in time. The four-volume set, however, is a compromise of the dilemma of the information age. The content reasonably attempts to record the history of the social service response to persistent social problems (i.e., poverty, health care) AND project emerging practice trends in expanded fields (i.e., genetics, immigration). For the purposes of further study and evolution of information in the field, the electronic version will be preferred. Many entries have Web sites embedded in the narrative.

Nearly 400 entries by 437 authors provide a thumbnail summary of topical content that “infuses” history, contemporary and multicultural dimensions, theory and research findings, and emerging trends. The contributors reflect their contemporary topic expertise and are generally judicious in projecting developments for the future. The 20th edition expands from nine to thirty-nine the number of overview entries to explain more comprehensive content areas (i.e., “Lifespan” reviews eight stages). Beyond the list of entries noted in Volume 1, an index in Volume 4 provides reference to several hundred more detailed topics. Therefore, while “Compulsive Behaviors” is listed as a main topic area, “schizophrenia” is presented as embedded content in four citations.

In addition to topical content, a large portion of Volume 4 includes four indices, two of

Figure 2



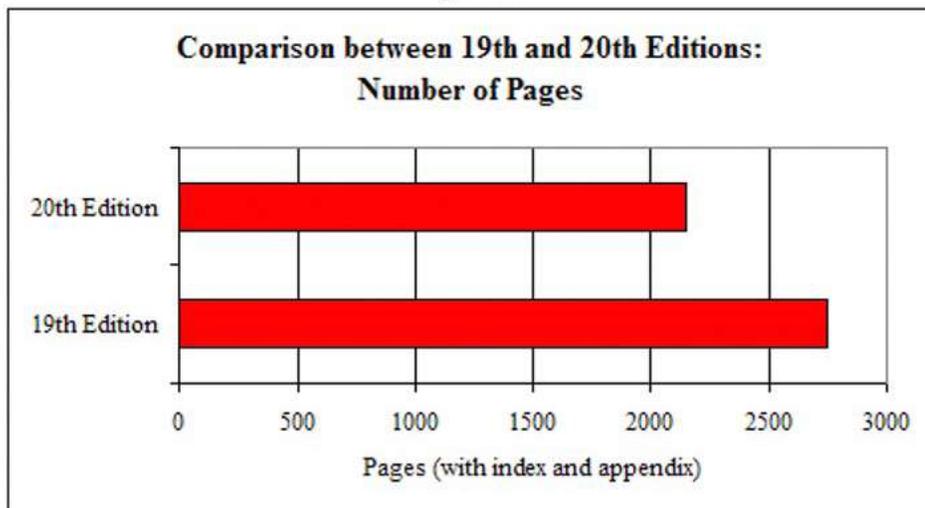
substantial length. The first presents a biographical sketch of nearly 200 persons who have contributed significantly to the profession. The third describes “*Distinctive Dates in Social Welfare History.*” These two indices provide an excellent context to guide the study of history in the profession. Two other issues of comparing the 19th

and 20th editions are relevant. First, the 20th edition includes significantly more topics (see Figure

2). pproximately 50 topics have been deleted. Many of these topics had to be deleted. For example, there is no need for the 20th edition to include a chapter on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Other deleted chapters were absorbed into broader topics. For example, “Brief Task-Centered Practice” from the 19th edition is included in “Brief Therapies” in the 20th edition. Although I have a personal attachment to Task Centered Casework, from an editorial perspective, it seems best to make this change in the 20th edition.

Second, the outward appearance of the *Encyclopedia* has changed. The 19th edition was three volumes, while the 20th edition is four. Initially I thought that the increase of 72 topics was the cause of the additional volume. However, the 20th edition actually has fewer pages than the 19th edition (see Figure 3).

Figure 3



The explanation for fewer pages with a greater number of chapters is explained by the change in the font size. In the 19th edition, the font is 10 pt condensed .3. The 20th edition is 8.5 pt condensed by .5. The significant reduction in the font size enabled the authors and editors to pack more information into each page. However, with fewer pages in the 20th edition, one might expect it possible to pack the *Encyclopedia* into three volumes rather than four. Having four volumes rather than three might have an impact on the cost.

One minor substantive change is the movement from the use of the term Hispanic (19th edition) to Latino (20th edition). Although Latino is very close in meaning to Hispanic, Latino is more of a generic term. For example, *Latino* would include persons from Brazil, whereas the term *Hispanic* would not. Thus, Latino includes peoples whose countries are predominated by the Romance languages. From an editor’s perspective, it would be best to employ the most generic term.

Rather than being a primary source, the purpose of the Encyclopedia is to offer direction for research. As a complement to extensive electronic and Web-based search activities, the 20th edition is a good starting platform. For the student of social work, it represents an excellent bridge for blending history and progress in the field.