

Sowers, Karen M. and Dulmus, Catherine, N. (eds.) (2008). *The Comprehensive Handbook of Social Work and Social Welfare* (4 volumes). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. Reviewed by: Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., senior editor, and Ashley N. Bunnell, BSW candidate University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Upon first seeing *The Comprehensive Handbook of Social Work and Social Welfare* for the first time, one will be immediately struck with two reactions. First, one will be overwhelmed with its mass. *The Handbook* includes four hefty volumes. Second, since it was published the same year as *The Encyclopedia of Social Work*, a question will emerge: Was the *Handbook* published in order to compete with the *Encyclopedia*?¹The first part of this review includes a comparison between the works. The second part will examine the content.

Table 1 illustrates a quantitative comparison. Overall, the size, measured in page numbers, illustrates little difference. The

Handbook has slightly more pages, but not significantly. The major quantitative differences exist in number of authors and chapters. Clearly, the *Encyclopedia*

Characteristics	Handbook	Encyclopedia
Authors	119	569
Unique Authors	78	538
Shared Authors	31	
Pages	2,191	2,153
Chapters	114	296 ²

has significantly more authors and chapters. Our analysis shows that 31 authors are shared, but the content written by these 31 authors is not repeated. Thus, both the *Handbook* and *Encyclopedia* offer unique contributions.

If one opens both works, two aspects are immediately apparent. First, the font size within the *Encyclopedia* is slightly smaller. Second, the pages within the *Encyclopedia* have a slight tan tint, whereas the pages of the *Handbook* are a purer white. Both reviewers independently concluded that the *Handbook* would be easier on the eyes over a long period of reading. These differences provide insight into the mission and nature of these two works. Clearly, the publishers did not intend to have competing works.

The *Encyclopedia* is available in an electronic version. The last edition of the *Encyclopedia* was not particularly user friendly; the current version has made the hard copy nearly obsolete and rarely used. During the writing of this book review, the *Handbook* was not offered in an electronic

¹ See Marson, S. M. & Dovyak, P. (2008). A book review of *The Encyclopedia of Social Work*, in *The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 5 (2): online at <http://www.socialworker.com/jswve/content/view/89/65/>

² This excludes biographies published in the *Encyclopedia*.

version. Just prior to publication of this review, an electronic version became available and information can be found at:

<http://mrw.interscience.wiley.com/emrw/9780470373705/home/Order.html>.

We have not had an opportunity to review the electronic version. The mentality of social work students and junior faculty has radically changed. They prefer electronic versions to hard copies.

Although difficult to uncover, the missions of the two works are quite different. The primary mission of the *Handbook* is:

...to focus on evidence supporting our theoretical underpinnings and our practice interventions across multiple systems. Content was designed to explore areas *critically* [italics added] and to present the best available knowledge impacting the well-being of social systems, organizations, individuals, families, groups, and communities. The content is contemporaneous and is reflective of demographic, social, political, and economic current and *emerging trends* [italics added] (page xi).

The emphasis placed on the words *critically* and *emerging trends* reflects the major difference between the *Handbook* and *Encyclopedia*. The style and content of these two volumes are quite different.

The Profession of Social Work Volume 1 is primarily an introduction to the profession. Entry level students are initially troubled by the expansiveness of client, target and action system.

Volume 1 offers an unambiguous conceptualization of social work that helps clarify the multi-dimensions of contemporary social work practice. Although the volume creates an accurate picture of the expansiveness of contemporary social work practice, simultaneously it demonstrates that this vastness of practice is manageable. This is a great volume for entry level BSW and MSW students.

The chapter written by Elizabeth DePoy and Stephen Gilson entitled, "Healing the Disjuncture: Social Work Disability Practice" offers a slightly different theme from the other chapters within volume 1. Although they begin their work with a traditional social work focus, they go off the beaten path and offer a different and refreshing alternative for the delivery of disability services. After reading their work, we are not sure that the term "disability" is proper or appropriate nomenclature.

Human Behavior in the Social Environment Volume 2 is reminiscent of Francis J. Turner's seminal work entitled *Social Work Treatment*. Although Turner is not the editor of this volume, he is one of the contributors. Like Turner's work, this volume offers a large variety of theories dealing with social, psychological, biological, and cultural factors linked with the individual and group development as it applies to the social work profession. Volume two also focuses on the study of behavior and life cycle development. It also addresses sub-systems within each theory within the context of the culture, organization, community, society family, and the individual. However, since the last edition of Turner's work was published in 1996, the second volume of the *Handbook* is a necessary adoption for all social work libraries. Students, BSW, MSW and Ph.D., will find this volume an invaluable asset to their learning.

One particular chapter that is *not* reminiscent of Turner's work is Bruce Thyer's contribution entitled, "The Potential Harmful Effects of Theory in Social Work." Thyer's reputation as a maverick blossoms forth in these pages. For a period of three days after reading it, we were totally preoccupied with his presentation. His views are a radical departure from the norm. We think that all professors need to read this work. Thyer's insights will guide professors to be better in the instruction of theory – particularly theory found in the HBSE courses. However, we have placed it on our blacklist for BSW students. The major problem with Thyer's contribution is not immediately obvious. Students, BSW and MSW, will conclude that they should not expend their energy on learning theory. Thyer is a real paradox. On one hand, for readers who are well versed in theory construction, his contribution is incredibly profound. For those readers who are untutored or lacking theoretical sophistication, comments like, "I want to be theory-free in my social work practice," are likely to emerge.

Social Work Practice Volume 3 consists of the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques in a micro, mezzo, and macro scope. Factors of assessment, intervention, and specific populations are described. Individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations are the overview of each chapter. Volume 3 would be useful to one who wants to know what exactly the social work practice requires; this volume offers a full knowledge of the human behavior and development, through social, cultural, and economic factors.

A contribution, typified within Volume 3, is the work Mart C. Ruffolo and Paula Allen-Meares entitled "Intervention with Children." Here the authors assist the reader to appreciate

various styles of practices for children at risk. On a micro level, the chapter offers details of the application for three types of empirically supported interventions, including cognitive behavior, multisystemic, and brief strategic therapy. As with the theme of the entire handbook, the authors go beyond micro. They include a refreshing and even-balanced examination of mezzo and macro intervention. The macro presentation is particularly inspiring, because the presentation is conceptually linked to the micro and mezzo sections. The authors demonstrate a rare creative ability to seamlessly link different levels of intervention (micro, mezzo and macro) into a unifying framework. This is an extremely difficult writing task that the authors execute flawlessly. As with the other chapters within this volume, the authors offer an analysis and plan that is rare in the social work literature.

Social Policy and Policy Practice Volume 4 provides two different views of policy. The first view is the traditional policy perspective that dominated social work education from the 60s to the first edition of Jansson's *Social Welfare Policy: From Theory to Practice* in 1990. Approximately a third of the chapters embrace a perspective that perceives social policy as an activity of great people making great decisions for the great masses. Although there is an important place for great ideas, this perception has greatly impeded the acceptance of BSW generalists and clinical social workers from accepting social policies as a relevant component of their social work education. MSWs who are or have focused on management, administration, and policy construction find this perspective energizing, while others quietly think the study of social policy is irrelevant.

Ira Colby, the editor of this volume, understands that the dynamics of social policy are critical components of service delivery. Thus, he made sure the presentation of social policy is comprehensive and palatable to those who do not specialize in policy, such as generalists and clinicians. Two particular chapters stand out: "Policy Practice" by Rodney Ellis and "Social Welfare Policy and Politics" by Richard Hoefler. These authors emphasize and introduce policy as *more* than an activity of "great thinkers" and "great ideas." Both of these chapters are intended to introduce their respective sections. However, the emphasis is clearly focused on readers who do not have a passion for policy. One weakness of instruction of social policy in higher education is the perceived lack of relevance to those who do not specialize in policy. If the publication of this

Handbook does nothing else except make social policy more palatable to the readers, it has made a significant contribution to the social work literature.

The Comprehensive Handbook of Social Work and Social Welfare is an outstanding contribution to social work literature. Although its initial appearance is that of an encyclopedia, it is nothing like *The Encyclopedia of Social Work*. *The Handbook* offers a unique and practical view of social work. We recommend that all academic libraries adopt this volume. Social work professors need to review it. These volumes will make significant contributions to student learning.