

The Training of Community Center Directors in Israel: Integrating Direct-Service and Administrative Content*

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In order to achieve an integrated approach, it is necessary to view the administrative component, with its unique knowledge base and skills, not as a distinct discipline, but as a method and a process, related to and dependent upon the substantive issues with which . . . the community centers are concerned.

A major innovation on Israel's social welfare scene in the past decade has been the establishment and development of a network of community centers (*matnassim*). One can find Centers presently numbering over 120 and steadily increasing in all Development Towns as well as in numerous neighborhoods in most cities and towns.¹

The *Matnass* is a multi-purpose Center whose major goals are to "improve the quality of life and narrow the social and educational gaps within the Israeli society."² Its roots are in the Israeli Youth Club and Cultural House on the one hand, and the American settlement house and Jewish community center on the other. "The *Matnass* is the focus of social, educational, cultural and recreational activities for the entire community which it serves. It is open most of the day for all age-groups, from toddlers to older adults. It offers a variety of programs . . . and

community activities in accordance with the needs and wishes of the residents."³ While each *Matnass* program is unique, all Centers share the common view that the *Matnass* must "serve as a model, both in content and in form, of the values which it seeks to inculcate."⁴ It therefore "strives to attain maximum citizen participation in the planning and operation of the Center program."⁵

In the Israel of the 1970's and 1980's the *Matnass* has filled the important role, heretofore non-existent, of undertaking to improve the quality of life at the community-level. This task requires the existence of a flexible organizational structure that is sensitive and responsive to changing community needs and that can create and implement appropriate new services. The flexibility and responsiveness of each *Matnass* is assured by the following structural characteristics:

Each Center is a separate legal entity that has its own board of directors which is responsible for the formulation and implementation of its policies as well as the financial management of the *Matnass*.

The boards are structured so as to ensure that people from the local community comprise a majority of board membership. In Israel, where social service bureaucracies are basically centralistic in structure, the *Matnass* stands out as an example of a

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¹ See also: D. Macarov and U. Yanai, "Some Preliminary Findings Concerning Community Centers in Israel," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, LI, (4) (1975), pp. 332-39.

² "What is a *Matnass*?" Israel Association of Community Centers, Jerusalem, 1981.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

community-based and community-run agency.

Although the board is legally responsible, the actual day-to-day management of the Center falls on the shoulders of its director and his/her staff. The composition of the center's senior staff reflects the professional disciplines needed to fulfill its main functions, social work and informal education. Thus, one may find on the senior staff of a typical Center a social caseworker who runs a senior adults' program, a social group worker, who runs the youth department, a community worker who is in charge of community planning and community development, an early childhood educator who runs the early childhood program, an adult educator who is in charge of the adult department, a physical education specialist, an art specialist, and so forth.

The director's function is to manage this complex system within the context of a specific community. His then is a social administrator's job.

This article addresses itself to some issues in the training of community center directors for their job. It draws on the experience of the author as a director of a specialized training program for community center directors (the Schwartz Program) at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

One of the basic questions in shaping the curriculum of a training program for social administrators is the question of its focus. Should the major emphasis of the curriculum be on education for professional direct-service practice? On administrative know-how and skills? Or possibly some combination of the two?

These curricular issues raise wider questions as to the nature of the future role of the community center director and the type of tasks he/she will be expected to fulfill. The role of the Center director, in turn, is influenced by developments in the structure and functions of other social services on the community level. One has to analyze the

question of curriculum content within this broader framework.

Projected Future Trends of the Israeli Social Services

Although it is not possible to forecast the future, it is agreed among experts that during the next decade several trends that began in the mid 1970's will continue and will shape the character of social services provided on the community level in the mid 1980's.

1. *Shrinking Resources.* While the 1960's and early 1970's were years of expansion and growth of the social services, we see now that the trend has been reversed. There are serious pressures to cut budgets, to reduce services, to curb manpower and to find new ways to economize. As a result of these shrinking resources, policy-makers will be more concerned than before with accountability by service providers and there will be more competition among agencies for fewer funds. These developments will put pressure on the directors of agencies to (1) base decisions about starting or continuing a program on economic considerations more than ever before, and (2) to spend a greater part of their time on fund-raising or on fund-cutting prevention.

2. *Decentralization of Services.* The centralized-bureaucratic nature of the Israeli social services is beginning to undergo changes. In the past, social services based in the community such as schools, welfare offices, youth clubs and clinics were merely extensions of government ministries carrying out uniform policies formed at the top; lines of communication were vertical to the ministry and not horizontal to other agencies in the community; policy decisions were more dependent on personnel or party changes in the ministry than on data reporting changes and needs in the field.

It is evident today that social services cannot be effectively delivered in such a centralized organizational structure.

The past decade has witnessed efforts on the part of all government ministries providing human services to decentralize their activities. This means that a greater share of the decisions in the future will be made by the director of the community-based agency and his/her staff. These will be decisions regarding the type of programs the agency will engage in, the hiring and firing practices, the extent and nature of collaboration with other agencies in the community, and so forth. Thus, directors of community-based agencies will not be merely clerks or bureaucrats with limited responsibility, but decision-makers whose judgment and initiative are their major asset. A director of an agency will be evaluated on his ability to formulate the right policy for his agency as it applies to his particular community, on his ability to convince both political leaders and other agencies to cooperate with him and on his ability to implement that policy by effectively managing his staff.

The fact that other community-based agencies will be decentralized means that more inter-agency negotiation and decision-making will take place on the community level.

3. *Community Involvement and Community Control.* Closely related to the issue of centralization of social services is the issue of community involvement and community control. The notion that service recipients or their representatives should be involved in various aspects of the provision of services, from decision-making to actual delivery of service, is being heard more and more today. Both for ideological and practical reasons, human service agencies are looking for ways to involve their service recipients much more than a decade ago. The patterns vary, but the trend definitely exists. This means that the director of the community based agency will have to strengthen the links to his agency's client-system, be more sensitive to particular client needs, and create struc-

tures which will enable the Center to involve them in its work in a meaningful way.

The Nature of the Director's Role

These recent developments in Israeli social services clearly emphasize the administrative-managerial aspects of the Center director's role, such as: responsibility for the budgetary process, formulation of new programs, supervision of staff, negotiation with politicians, public relations, and inter-agency cooperation. Such an administrative emphasis leaves very little time, if any, for "professional direct-service practice" such as running groups, consulting with service recipients, or doing neighborhood work. Preliminary findings of a job analysis of ten Israeli community center directors performed by the Israeli Institute of Productivity in April 1981 indicate that the directors spend most of their time in administrative tasks such as those already mentioned.

Therefore, if the tasks of the community center director are primarily administrative in nature, should administration be the basis of his practice? Do we, for example, believe that a successful administrator from any field could become a successful community center director after receiving a brief orientation to the field? If not, how can we clearly define the unique practice base of the community center director, the value-base, and the requisite knowledge and skills?

Writing about social administration, Slavin⁶ puts forward the view that social administration is a unique and distinct aspect of professional practice, combining the orientations of both the administrator and the professional. He sees the administrator's main task as that of "orchestrating" three essential elements in the

⁶ Simon Slavin, "A Theoretical Framework for Social Administration" in Felice Davidson Perlmutter and Simon Slavin (eds.), *Leadership in Social Administration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980, pp. 3-21.

social services, namely the client/consumer, the practitioner or provider of service and the service agency, with their differing and often conflicting interests and needs. Yet Slavin stresses that in his practice, the social administrator is *not value-free*; he carries an essential *client-bias*, guided by a service ethic that is rooted in the value-system of the profession. The social administrator then is seen as an *advocate*, yet his is not just client-advocacy, but also *program-advocacy* and *policy-advocacy*. Slavin further suggests that "program-advocacy gives the administrator responsibility for developing initiatives for organizational growth and responsiveness to changing needs and developing technology . . . Policy-advocacy demands familiarity with social trends, problem analysis and policy initiatives in legislative planning bodies and a willingness to risk involvement in the political process." (p. 17-18).

In fact Slavin suggests that social administration is a distinct occupation different from both public and business administration and direct social work practice, drawing on both these worlds, but creating a unique blend. The role of the community center director in Israel would fit into that category. While his day-to-day activities are administrative in nature, what distinguishes the Center director from other administrators is his "client-orientation," which enables him to bring about change in the community in light of the community center's mission. His background and training should reflect this unique blend.

The Training of Community Center Directors

How can this blend be created in a training program? The defining of the curriculum is not only a function of the views of the school director and faculty but also of the student body, their background and their previous experience.

There are three main approaches to recruiting candidates, and defining curriculum for potential center directors:

1. *Seek successful administrators from other fields and provide them with a professional orientation.* Sarri,⁷ when writing about such an approach in relation to social work administrators, suggests that one must *acquire*, not simply *know about* social work values and ethics in order to administer a social work agency, which could suggest, in effect, a full professional training, a prospect which makes that option of limited utility.

2. *Train social service professionals in administration.* This is the more traditional approach. It is preferable to the first option because it builds the administrative component on top of the professional one, a sequence which is more logical. However, experience has shown that such a sequence brings into the field professionals who were good direct-service practitioners but not necessarily suitable for administrative roles. Thus, such an option is dependent on a careful selection process.

3. Finally, there is the option of setting up a *specialized training course for social administrators*. From the author's experience it seems important that such a course should (a) explicitly be named a directors' course, thus setting a specific role expectation; (b) select students with managerial potential and with at least some professional direct-service experience (but not necessarily in community centers); and (c) establish a double focus in the curriculum: professional⁸ and administrative.

While this last option seems to be the most desirable one in the long run, it poses many questions when planning a curriculum for such a training course. For example, how is a curriculum with a "double focus" created? Is it possible to build a client-

⁷ Rosemary C. Sarri, "Effective Social Work Intervention in Administrative and Planning Roles: Implications for Education" in Scott Briar et al., *Facing the Challenge*. New York: Council of Social Work Education, 1973, pp. 31-48.

⁸ In the case of Israeli community centers, this entails some combination of social work and education content.

orientation and a management-orientation at the same time? What exactly is the community center director's value-base and knowledge-base and what skills does he need? There are no clear answers to these questions in the literature. What is generally agreed is that the value and knowledge-base of social administrators should be that of social work,⁹ and that social administrators should identify with social work goals.¹⁰ It is argued that such a base enables Center directors to approach policy goals from a perspective of human needs,¹¹ or in Slavin's words, "policy- and program-advocacy."

Having identified the importance of a professional orientation in the training of community center directors the question arises as to how an administrative orientation, which, as previously noted, is also important for the Center director, can be incorporated in the curriculum.

The literature on teaching administration to social workers generally considers the administration component of the curriculum as separate and distinct from the "professional" component. Courses in this sequence typically include: fiscal management, personnel management, information-systems, organizational decision-making, environmental influences, and so forth.¹² Another question raised in the literature is whether administration in the social ser-

vices differs from public or business administration, and should (therefore), be taught by social workers.¹³ The literature does not deal with the question of an integration between the administrative and professional contents in a specialized training course for social service administrators. Yet, such an integration would be necessary, if one takes the position that there is a difference between administering in a social service agency on the one hand and public or business administration on the other, and that social administration is in fact a distinct type of professional practice.

In order to achieve an integrated approach, it is necessary to view the administrative component, with its unique knowledge base and skills, not as a distinct discipline, but as a *method* and a *process*, related to and dependent upon the *substantive issues* with which (in our case) the community centers are concerned. Such an approach is justified because administration of a community center has no independent goals in and of itself but is seen as a means to achieve the social and educational goals of the Center. Accordingly, it follows that administration should be presented in the context of professional issues and practice, and also that professional issues should be presented from an administrator's point of view. This approach makes it possible to build a curriculum which integrates administrative and professional perspectives. Although the curriculum is formally divided into two parts, reflecting the double focus

⁹ Frances Lomas Feldman, "The Social Worker as Administrator," *Social Work Papers*, 14, (Jan. 1978), pp. 1-9.

¹⁰ Rex A. Skidmore, "Administrative Content for All Social Work Graduate Students," *Administration in Social Work*, 2 (1), 1978, pp. 59-73.

¹¹ Monica Shapira, "Reflections on the Preparations of Social Workers for Executive Positions," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, Winter 1971, pp. 56-68.

¹² K.J. Kazmerski and D. Macarov, *Administration in Social Work Curriculum*. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1976. B. Gummer: "A Framework for Curriculum Planning in Social Welfare Administration," *Administration in Social Work* 3 (4), Winter 1979, pp. 385-95.

¹³ Michael A. Murray: "Comparing Public and Private Management: An Exploratory Essay," *Public Administration Review*, 35 (4), 1975, pp. 364-71. H. Lewis: "Management in Non-Profit Social Service Organizations," *Child Welfare*, 54 (0), 1975; pp. 615-23. Charles T. O'Reilly: "A Strategy for Management Education in Schools of Social Work" and David Macarov: "Management in the Social Work Curriculum, *Seminar on Curriculum Development: Management and Administration of Social Welfare Organizations*. New York: State Association of Deans of Social Work Schools, 1976, pp. 1-13, 114-152, respectively.

discussed earlier, the issues raised in the courses as well as in the lab and field are dealt with *from the perspective of a community center director*. So for example, in the course on "The Community and Community Work," while concepts are taught that could be found in similar courses geared to social work practitioners, the curriculum for center directors relates these concepts to the specific world of community centers and to the function of the director. Class discussion, case materials or student assignments focus on forms of community control or social action that take place within the context of community centers and explore the director's repertoire of roles in influencing these processes. The same concepts are again encountered by

the students in the "Skill Development Laboratory" and in fieldwork where they are translated into concrete professional and managerial skills.

Similarly, the course on "Administration and Leadership" adapts relevant concepts in administration to the world of community centers and the role of the director, and addresses the tensions between administrative and professional considerations.

In conclusion, an approach to curriculum building which integrates a professional orientation with administrative knowledge and skill, such as developed at the Schwartz Program, is an important step forward in the process of recognizing the unique professional specialization and role of the Israeli community center director.