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Family, School, Community Perspective*, by Edith M.
Freeman and Marianne Pennekamp

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Book Reviews

Social Work Practice: Toward a Child, Family, School, Community Perspective

Edith M. Freeman & Marianne Pennekamp
Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2002

Reviewed by Cynthia Bisman

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE is a handsome book. It is rare today to find such beautiful hard cover binding with large, easy to read print. The publisher did not skimp on space or expense. Fifteen years ago, Freeman and Pennekamp produced an impressive piece of work in their first edition of *Social Work Practice: Toward a Child, Family, School, Community Perspective*. At that time, they were among the first to construct an ecological perspective for practice with children and families within the environments of school and community.

In this second edition, the authors leave such a unique conceptualization unchanged. Their multiple-level approach, with a special focus on schools as “universal settings in the lives of children,” remains highly relevant today. The organization of material is also basically unchanged and includes three primary sections, “The Joining Process,” “Reframing Daily Practice: Cases and Programs,” and “Enhancing and Maintaining Oneself as a Resource: Focus on the Worker.” In the first, they build the framework for how to think about multi-faceted practice and devote a chapter to each of the target populations. Section Two emphasizes synthesis of the basic knowledge with a focus on action. Included here are a rich array of practice examples, ecomaps and logs. The final, and briefest, section recommends approaches for workers to use to sustain and strengthen themselves in their continuing professional development. Provocative self-guided learning questions at the end of each chapter challenge readers to integrate the material with their own practice cases.

These authors write well and clearly identify their assumptions. They position the social work role within the natural life-space of children and families and embrace the interface of person and environment as a guide to practice. For them, it is through collaboration and joining that organizational change occurs, as well as change of small client systems. A unique contribution is their distinction between natural and imposed environments. They define the latter as those formal settings with which clients must engage on an involuntary basis, while the natural includes those “regularly occurring” dimensions of the child’s home, school and

community. Although this distinction, at times, seems artificial, what is valuable is their emphasis on understanding and targeting organizations and communities for action.

I especially appreciate the evidence of the authors’ rich practice backgrounds in their approach to cases and their scholarly and historical treatment of the material. At the same time, this work has a somewhat limited contemporary perspective. Most of the chapters have had only a modest update from the first edition and draw primarily from sources earlier than 1987. The addition of the two new chapters, on community development and program administration, are indeed thoughtful and draw from relevant and timely sources. This new edition would have been much strengthened by incorporating into all the other chapters more contributions from the past decade and a half. While it is true that some family issues are timeless, it is also the case that figures from the 1980 US Bureau of the Census about economic pressures on family life are too dated to be of much use.

Furthermore, during this time period, seismic shifts have occurred in family life such as the growth in gay and lesbian and single-parent led families (many led by males and grandparents). Indeed, social and scientific changes have challenged the very meaning of “family”. Schools and communities have also changed (there is no mention of home schooling or of immigration/population shifts, among other changes). In the same vein, there is no mention of recent theoretical attempts (such as postmodern thought) to enhance understanding of systems and family dynamics. This second edition, unfortunately, does not sufficiently expand and update the material beyond the first edition.

Still, the solid conceptual foundation, accompanied by logs and case discussions, might prove useful to those new to school social work (and new to this book) and as a supplemental text for students specializing in Family and Youth. Some will find particularly exciting the journal entries and cognitive maps targeted to help practitioners to evaluate their practice. Ultimately, this book makes a persuasive case for integrative thinking and use of collaboration, and includes many ideas for practitioners to use to provide services to youth and their families along with their schools and communities.

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