

Worldviews - exploring different ones

TINTED SPECTACLES

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The reasons why people come into social work are numerous. Some have clear, well-rehearsed positions and others have difficulty identifying their motives and beliefs. Some subscribe to an -ism or two, and others have muddled views with no obvious guiding principles. We all have some kind of personal philosophy - ways of looking at the world and explaining it - but are we aware of what these are? The purpose of this activity is to help students get a better understanding of how the way they view the world influences their work; in other words, how beliefs interact with actions.

Method

This activity is best done by a student and practice teacher jointly. Give a clear explanation of the purpose of the exercise, emphasizing the exploratory aspects and making sure the student knows that there is no pressure to take up any particular position.

The student reads the three statements (A, B, C) in *Tinted spectacles* and the accompanying critiques. Arrange a time when you can exchange comments (probably the next practice tutorial) and suggest that the student makes a few notes in their practice file ready for this discussion.

Encourage the student to enter a dialogue about the statements and your mutual preferences. It is important to avoid preaching or trying to enforce a consensus; the discussion is an opportunity to share the ways you each view the world, and if these are not clear, an attempt to articulate previously unspoken worldviews.

Help the student to relate worldviews to social work practice. How do different beliefs affect the choices social workers make about what they do? (About one hour in total).

Variations

There are as many worldviews as there are people to hold them. What we know as 'isms' (socialism, feminism, etc.) are such cogent worldviews that we often refer to them as theories. A theory is a coherent explanation of why the world is like it is; we might describe it as a particular shade of spectacles to look at the world, rather than a prism of assorted beliefs. The three pairs of "spectacles" in this activity could easily be substituted for different kinds (e.g. feminist, Moslem, humanist). In many respects, it is irrelevant which particular spectacles you try on with the student; the purpose of the activity is to become aware of your own spectacles, by taking them off and trying others on.

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Three views of social work:

A's statement

Clients approach us with presenting problems, which are expressions of real difficulties in coping at deeper levels (see B1 and C1). The symptom may be an almost conscious plea for help, or it may be the consequence of conflicts in early life which have been unresolved; converting these conflicts into requests for material help may make the problem more acceptable (B2, C2). The caseworker should help the client develop insight into these conflicts, otherwise we just see clients being re-referred with new presenting problems. It is a lengthy process and the use of the relationship is the key to success (B3, C3).

B's statement

Users' own definitions of problems are important, but these individual problems are just the expression of cultural and social conflicts (A1, C4). The economic system creates scapegoats, oppressing certain classes and then attempting to disguise the fact by shedding moral blame on them. A system which deliberately restricts resources (housing, jobs) leads to competition and the creation of an alienated client class (A2, C5). Social workers should use their power to challenge the socio-economic system and mobilize individuals into groups to strike at the structural problems in society by a process of political consciousness raising (A3, C6).

C's statement

There are many reasons why people get involved with social workers. Often there are problems which stem from learning difficulties, but what is most important is the *Here and Now* (A4, B4). Certain behaviours are unacceptable, and the person finds him/herself unable to cope with society's demands and those of the family. Interventions should be short-term and focused on small changes in behaviour and situation (A5, B5). Working within the framework of relevant legislation and the agency's policies, the social worker's task is to help people to adapt their behaviour, so they can make successful choices (A6, B6).

A's critique of B & C

- A1 the individual matters above all; society is made up of individuals
- A2 explain why individuals from same class or family do so differently
- A3 fighting v. society is aggression misdirected from poor relationships
- A4 the here and now is important only as basis for deeper involvement
- A5 short-term work produces short-term change; no radical change
- A6 clients make real choices when attitudes change - not behaviours

B's critique of A & C

- B1 proof of the relevance or existence of these "deeper" levels?
- B2 there is no "conversion" - the presenting problems are real
- B3 they return because welfare only alleviates structural problems
- B4 users must not be taken out of their proper historical context
- B5 perpetuates power inequalities, scapegoating; no radical change
- B6 changes happen when people step outside society's rules

C's critique of A & B

- C1 proof of the relevance or existence of these "deeper" levels?
- C2 our major concern should be the present day dysfunctions
- C3 this goal is too global - what does "insight" mean in practice?
- C4 the here and now is the most important; nothing else amenable to change
- C5 society is harsh towards some people; welfare helps iron this out
- C6 this goal is too global - what's conscientization mean in practice?