

"Hopes and Challenges for Social Pedagogy in the USA"

US Social Welfare and Concentration in Human Services Context Handout



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PRESENTERS:

Mette Christiansen, PhD, LMSW, christim@newpaltz.edu

Katherine Raynor, LMSW, raynork@newpaltz.edu

Kathryn Hunter, LCSW, hunterk@newpaltz.edu

The US Social Welfare System:

The formal US social welfare system began in 1935 and is credited to Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or FDR, and his administration. At a time where the Western world lived with the consequences of the 1929 financial crash and the changing politics in Europe, FDR's administration saw the need for change and for government interventions. This resulted in the Social Security Act of 1935, also called the New Deal.

- The Act included Old Age Insurance, or Social Security, programs for **some groups** of people with disabilities, unemployment compensation, maternal and child health care, and public assistance, meaning cash assistance, to **selected** groups of poor and vulnerable people.
- However, racism and sexism were embedded in the Social Security Act. For example, only **"deserving"** and those "truly in need" were included. People of Color, especially Black people, were excluded from many of the programs and, regardless of race, many women, who had children out-of-wedlock and were not married, were excluded.
- **"The Principle of Less Eligibility"**: Cash assistance provided to those in need must always be less than the lowest poverty level and the living conditions of the lowest-paid, self-sufficient members of society.

The Last Major Expansion of the Social Welfare System in 1960s:

- Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, which included the War on Poverty, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racial and economic justice initiatives, healthcare for disabled, poor people, and the elderly, and "an opportunity for every child".

The New Welfare Reform Era during the 1980s and 1990s:

- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 signed into law by Democratic President Bill Clinton.
- Main focuses: personal responsibility, work requirements, and temporary and time-limited services as seen, e.g., in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families policy, which is the current policy for vulnerable families and children.
- Subtle and not so subtle racist and sexist underpinnings have continued in **all subsequent social welfare policies**. These underpinnings are based in the US national character and philosophy: You are expected to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. But, as many people often ask, "What do you do when you don't have boots?"

History of the Concentration in Human Services at the State University of New York at New Paltz

- In the Mid-Hudson-Valley two hours north of New York City, administrators and staff in residential agencies identified a direct support workforce crisis.
- Social pedagogues from Europe were invited to share practice experiences while working as direct support workers alongside US colleagues.
- After the first year, 1988-1989, a study trip was arranged for agency directors, university professors, and New York State government representatives to visit Denmark and explore the education and practices of social pedagogues.
- In 1990, these representatives established the Mid-Hudson Coalition for the Development of Direct Care Practice (MHC).
- The MHC collaborated with academic faculty in the Department of Sociology at the State University of New York at New Paltz.
- In 1992, the Concentration in Direct Care Practice was established in the Department of Sociology. It changed its name in 2003 to the Concentration in Human Services (CHS) to be more inclusive and to align with the term "human services" used nationally.
- The CHS is founded on and developed from the Danish social pedagogy education integrating social pedagogical theory, internship practice, the creative arts, and the use of a student cohort that stays together throughout the CHS.
- Since its inception, approximately 1000 students have graduated from the CHS.