

# Editorial

## Building on Our Foundations

*"The assumption is that the situation presented involves one person or one family on a desert island, whereas each of us is surrounded by a network of relationships"*

~ Mary Richmond, *What is Social Casework*, 1922 (p. 137)

Those of you who have read previous volumes of *Praxis* are aware that last Fall Marian Sharkey stepped down as Editor-in-Chief after four outstanding years at the helm. Having just completed a year as the new editor, I appreciate the magnitude of what Marian accomplished in assembling the inaugural volume of *Praxis* and the subsequent three volumes. I have been humbled by the opportunity to follow in her footsteps. Being involved with *Praxis* has been a wonderful learning experience for me in a number of ways that I think are in keeping with the practice and values of the social work profession. I'd like to share a bit of what the view from the inside has taught me.

*Those who go before us lay a foundation for our work.* As a profession we recognize our indebtedness to the pioneers of our field. Who among us has not been told of Mary Richmond's devotion to teaching and researching the practice of social work, and the needed credibility her work lent the field? Or who has not heard of Jane Addams' legendary work at Hull House? Her passion for addressing social injustices via community intervention and legislation form the basis for social work's commitment to intervening on behalf of our clients at the micro, mezzo and macro levels simultaneously. I've heard a rumor that students write so frequently about Richmond and Addams that professors tire of reading about them! While this is a testament to the greatness of those individuals, it also suggests we may benefit from broadening our focus as we look to those who precede us. I, for one, have become aware of how indebted *Praxis* and I are to Marian, as well as to those who supported her. Because she established a community of people who are committed to the mission of the journal (to say nothing of the structure she put into place to facilitate the journal's production), I was able to begin this year with a core group of students and alumnae whose experience provided a foundation for the assembly of this volume. The house on the rock stands firm, so to speak. This principle is true clinically, as well. Every time we meet a client who has encountered another social

worker in therapy, at school, in a hospital or in any of the other settings in which we work, we are building upon a foundation that has been laid, just as we are laying the foundation for those who follow us. Our interconnectedness is undeniable, and our collaborative approach a strength of our profession.

*Our dependence on one another is a central ingredient in all we accomplish.* This concept is not unrelated to the previous one. D.W. Winnicott's famous statement, "There is no such thing as an infant!" (in Winnicott, 1960, p. 39) comes to mind. Winnicott, of course, was speaking of the unit formed by a dependent infant and a caregiving mother; neither of them can exist without the other. An infant needs an adult's care, and an adult cannot be a parent without an infant. The same mother who cares for the infant is part of a family, which is part of a neighborhood that belongs to a community, which belongs to a municipality that on a larger scale is part of a government. The ecological perspective teaches us to recognize our and clients' embeddedness within larger systems and environments; social work theory is laced with the message that not one of us is an island. This is the case for *Praxis*, as well. I have come in this year to respect the process by which the journal is created. I am reminded of bees that labor together to sustain a community. Each completes a given task, and in that way the needs of the hive are met. Students write papers that they courageously submit for review. Each article is carefully reviewed by three reviewers who provide thoughtful feedback to assist authors in strengthening their work. Articles that are accepted for publication are revised by authors and then copyedited by two editors, who work with authors to clarify and improve each piece. And you, the readers, further add to what is offered by your reflections on and extension of the material. To use another analogy, each step in this process – each act by an author or reviewer or editor or reader – is like a thread woven into a tapestry. *Praxis* truly is an accomplishment made possible by the unique workings together of a surprising number of devoted people.

*As we recognize our interdependence, we also honor the dignity and worth of each individual.* Have you ever sat as a lone adult with a group of first graders? Each six year-old clamors for attention, as though s/he is shouting from a bullhorn, "I want to be the most special!" We have a tendency as humans to see belonging to a group and being special as mutually exclusive, though social workers have understood for some time that this is not the case. Just as we acknowledge the strength to be found in our collaboration and our existence within systems that extend far beyond us, we also affirm that all individuals are imbued with unique value that is to be respected. This was perhaps most evident to me as I read each article that was submitted to *Praxis* for review and possible publication. While some articles were more polished than others or conformed better to typical scholarly standards, I saw value in everything I read. Even in rough papers, each student's passion for his/her subject was evident – and tremendously encouraging. The initiative students take in submitting their writing is a testament to the energy they bring to their work with clients and to the field, which is cause for hope, indeed.

It seems fitting that four of the articles chosen for publication in this fifth volume of *Praxis* are themselves, in some ways, illustrations of the points I have highlighted thus far. Without setting out to do so, the Editorial Board selected for publication four articles whose primary subject is adolescence – an almost uncanny example of our interdependence. Jessica L. Goodwin and Jeffrey T. Bondora review the literature surrounding adolescent responses to representations of suicide in television and in doing so reach some tentative conclusions about the impact media have not just in the well-researched area of violence but also in the portrayal of suicide. Shipra Parikh conducts a policy analysis of teen fatherhood, demonstrating how this underserved population could be helped by policy initiatives to more fully assume their roles as fathers. Lauren Carlson, Stacy M. DeGeer, Chassity Deur, and Kristen Sweas Fenton present their original research on teachers' knowledge of self-cutting behavior

among teens, making a case for the need for teachers to be trained to recognize and respond to teens engaging in this type of self injury. And Nakeyshaey M. Tillie Allen extends our clinical repertoire by exploring the use of Hip-Hop Therapy to engage at-risk adolescents in the therapeutic process. In keeping with the principles mentioned earlier, these authors have demonstrated their uniqueness and creativity in the diversity of their topics at the same time as they have, together, accomplished more than would have been possible alone: they have in essence created a special section on adolescence.

And still there's more! Three other excellent articles also appear in this volume of *Praxis*. Blake Witter, Stephanie Bunting, Rachel H. Katz and Nina Mannertorp share their findings from a study of homosexual and heterosexual male personal advertisements. Jessica L. Goodwin discusses the ideas of postmodern theorists Donnel Stern and Irwin Hoffman as they apply to three psychoanalytic models of therapeutic action. And Aileen Philips Schloerb explains how a nonverbal learning disability may affect development in infancy and toddlerhood, as well as how social workers can intervene on behalf of clients struggling with one of these disorders.

I continue to marvel at what a life of its own this process of creating *Praxis* has. And now that process will continue as you turn the page and add your own unique perspectives to what you encounter. I hope what you find here enriches you and reminds you of how much we have to offer one another.

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## References

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