

Conclusion

Whereas the introduction to this book dealt with empowerment as a new concept, the conclusion will be devoted to the meaning of empowering professional practice. Community planning has been redefined according to the principles of the contextual theory of empowerment that was developed in the first part of the book. Community planning methods have been adapted to processes of individual and community empowerment of the people in the planning arena. We have discussed the abilities and skills required of the professional who is interested in achieving the joint goals of empowerment and planning. Likewise, we have proposed a theory of practice that encourages empowerment of others and persists in critical thinking and constant re-evaluation.

In contrast to *pure* theoretical approaches which prefer to focus on theory and leave the practical aspects as recommendations and conclusions for further work, this book has proposed the principles of empowerment and the professional activities that encourage them as a single whole. The connection between reflection and action has been preserved in the structure of the book itself.

The situation in the field, and the little that is being done to encourage empowerment, lead to the almost self-evident conclusion that in order to deal thoroughly with powerlessness, what is needed is an empowering social policy that will create a supporting basis for empowering social plans and practice.

This requires a fundamental change by policy makers and the management of the public social services, because public services that are not aware of their practices and especially of the undesirable by-products of their daily activities are responsible for the chronic powerlessness and the disempowering practices that reinforce it.

In contrast to *the prevalent view*, we have learned that the quiescence of powerless people is not evidence of agreement. Injured people are silent because of despair, because they

are resigned to their hopeless existence. A democratic society with a social contract of mutual human responsibility must refuse to resign itself to the existence of powerlessness among sections of its population. The practical expression of this refusal is the creation of a partnership with the people in whose lives society intervenes. Such a partnership is not a harmonious idyll. It is a stormy reality, which begins with a quest for mutual understanding and a common language, and the creation of an ongoing dialogue. Its next stage is a common quest for suitable solutions which respect the people who need them. The purpose of the partnership is the creation of a society that has a sense of community and encourages greater control by local people over their lives and environment.

The book has outlined several methods of empowering professional practice. In concluding it is important to stress that all these methods have a single common principle—an empowering practice does not seek for easy solutions. The cause of people's distress is not to be sought in the victims. When the problem we have to deal with encompasses entire populations, we have to improve our understanding of an entire social situation. We must not go on contenting ourselves with out-of-context diagnoses of individuals who come to us with their suffering, or continue blaming them for their situation.

This book wants to encourage professionals to shift from the passivity and the objective professionalism of *therapeutic intervention* in the lives of people with *multiple problems* to an active involvement of collaborative work with people who need more control over their lives and environments. The aim is to learn how to improve the situation and the quality of life of all the people living in the planned environment.

The book has also dealt extensively with the limits of power. Its aim has been to convey a message of hope to all those people who do not believe in their ability to change their lives and to have an influence on their world. However, it also contains an explicit warning against the *power intoxication*. We

are all weak and transient. Anyone who, for the sake of the power advantages his role or position affords him, dares to dominate the lives of others, will have to face the inevitable by-products of his actions.

The alternative lies in the understanding that the feeling of being at home in the world is acquired through creativity and action. Devoting effort to creating a community, participating in processes of social change, partnership in making decisions that affect our fate, accord us a sense of ownership of and responsibility for the place we live in. In the course of this process, we discover that the right to realize ourselves as active citizens and equal partners is in fact also an amazing grace, for it rehabilitates injured souls, provides self-respect, adds knowledge, ability and power. The synergy produced by the addition of self-respect, knowledge, ability and power enriches the individuals, creates a community, strengthens the society, and adds most valuable resources to the world: human initiative, social responsibility, and care for others.

Empowerment and Community Planning