



The Brooks/Cole Social Work E-Communicator

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Welcome to the Brooks/Cole Social Work E-Communicator. The goal of our quarterly newsletter is to communicate with you, our valued customer. Our intent is to provide you with informative news, announcements, great ideas in teaching, and an opportunity for you to find out more about us.

Announcements

- Wadsworth-Brooks/Cole is VERY EXCITED to welcome the **F.E. Peacock products and authors** to our family. To request review or desk copies of these products, please contact your local Wadsworth sales representative or visit our website at <http://socialwork.wadsworth.com>
- Congratulations to the winner of our **2003 CSWE APM contest**, **Cynthia Christy Baker of the University of Southern Indiana**. Her 2004 APM registration fee and her 2004 CSWE membership fee is paid for by us!
- Do you have any announcements that you would like us to include in our next edition? Please e-mail Caroline with your announcement by 6/20/03 at caroline.concilla@wadsworth.com

Great Ideas in Teaching

We'd like to highlight and share great ideas in teaching social work... whether it's an activity, a unique lesson, or a self-created web component, we'd love to showcase your great teaching efforts. To submit a "Great Ideas in Teaching" Social Work example, please e-mail Caroline at caroline.concilla@wadsworth.com

Spotlight On

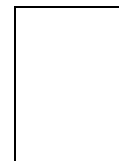
Article by:

Rodney Ellis

Ph.D., Florida International University

Rodney Ellis is an Assistant Professor in the College of Social Work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Dr. Ellis has both teaching and policy advocacy experience.

Brooks/Cole Publications by Rodney Ellis



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Co-author Karen Sowers

Practitioner's Policy Analysis: An New Approach to Analysis and Action

One of the most difficult problems many faculty face in teaching social policy classes is in making the bewildering maze of policy analysis methods meaningful to the practitioner. Students often dread policy classes. Some report that they graduate with a knowledge of general policy principles, but lacking sufficient knowledge of the actual processes of policy analysis and action to engage in policy practice in the real world. *Impacting Social Policy: A Practitioner's Guide to Policy Analysis* provides a tool for teaching policy analysis and action in the classroom and for translating those processes into action after graduation.

Impacting Social Policy combines narrative information in a traditional textbook format with carefully prepared worksheets. The text provides background on theory and practice as well as instructions for completing the worksheets. By completing the worksheets students can complete a comprehensive policy analysis, develop a viable alternative, and plan a strategy for its implementation.



Spotlight on Ellis continued

Practitioner's Policy Analysis, as this method is called, is unique because it is easy to use, comprehensive, and draws from multiple disciplines. It is easy to use in that it allows students to complete the process following a simple workbook format. It is comprehensive in that it includes every major dimension of social policy: problem identification, history, norms and values, political factors, the service delivery system, alternative development, effective proposal development, and strategic planning. It draws from multiple disciplines in that it uses policy-related literature and processes from social work, sociology, political science, public administration, and social psychology.

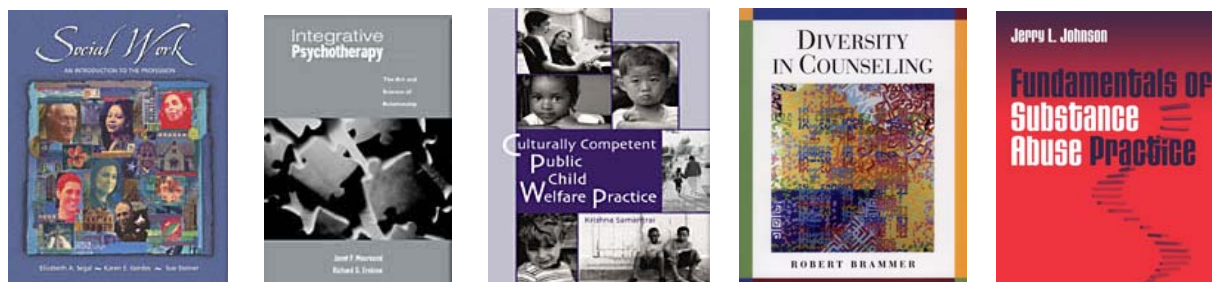
Practitioner's Policy Analysis is the result of several years of real-world policy experience as well as classroom teaching. It has been used with undergraduate students, graduate students, and practitioners and applied in both individual and group settings. *Impacting Social Policy: A Practitioner's Guide to Analysis and Action* provides a practical, step-by-step guide to using this method.

Hot Topic

See this edition's Hot Topic on Enmeshment of Staff in Social Service Agencies by **Nancy Summers** is located at the end of this newsletter!

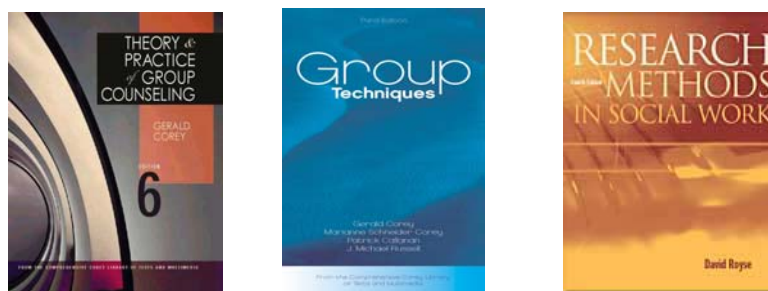
Brooks/Cole News

Some of our 2004 FIRST EDITIONS hot off the Presses and ready for review today!



- *Social Work: An Introduction to the Profession*, by **Elizabeth Segal/Karen Gerdes/Sue Steiner**
- *Integrative Psychotherapy: The Art and Science of Relationship*, by **Janet Moursund/Richard Erskine**
- *Culturally Competent Public Child Welfare Practice*, by **Krishna Samantrai**
- *Diversity in Counseling*, by **Robert Brammer**
- *Fundamentals of Substance Abuse Practice*, by **Jerry Johnson**

Some of our 2004 REVISIONS hot off the Presses and ready for review today!



- *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*, 6/e by **Gerald Corey**
- *Group Techniques*, 3/e by **Gerald Corey/Marianne Schneider Corey/Patrick Callanan/J. Michael Russell**
- *Research Methods in Social Work*, 4/e by **David Royce**



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- Test drive WebTutor on Web CT and Blackboard today at: (Available with selected Social Work titles)
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- Test drive MyCourse 2.1—FREE online course builder—today at <http://mycourse.thomsonlearning.com>
- Coming this summer, Web Tutor Toolbox on Web CT and Blackboard—FREE online course builder
- Selected books have online resources such as weblinks, online quizzes and professor instructor materials. To see if your book has such resources, please visit our Social Work website and select Instructor Resources.

Online Library of Current Event Topics New!!! Exclusively from Thomson/Wadsworth and the Gale Group! Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center

Expose your students to *all* sides of today's most compelling issues! The *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center* draws on Greenhaven Press' acclaimed social issues series, as well as core reference content from other Gale and Macmillan Reference USA sources. The result is a dynamic online library of current event topics—the facts as well as the arguments of each topic's proponents and detractors. For more information, please contact your Thomson/Wadsworth representative or visit www.gale.com/opposingviewpoints/ and take a guided tour!

Near Real-Time News Delivered Online Daily!

NewsEdge is a "push" service of daily news. Articles will appear on the Instructor side of the Web site (**behind the passcoded area**) and in WebTutor with no active searching on the part of instructor or student. *NewsEdge* offers a wide variety of local news that may be especially relevant to the course. *NewsEdge* articles do not draw from academic journals and are not archived, but instead offer near real-time coverage of breaking stories. *NewsEdge* is not designed as a research tool - but rather as an opportunity for instructors to bring the latest developments in their fields into your classroom daily. Instructors can customize the *NewsEdge* feed to receive the range of articles they prefer. To contact us or to find out information visit our Website at www.wadsworth.com

Additional Resources for you

- To request **Review Copies**: http://www.thomsonlearning.com/samples/samp_order.asp
- To see **what else is new**, our 2003 & 2004 Texts: http://www.newtexts.com/newtexts/discipline.cfm?discipline_id=32
- Tips to **submitting manuscript proposals**: Go to our home page at (<http://socialwork.wadsworth.com>), select **Contact Us**, then select **Visit Our Author's Corner** (see box located at the right of the screen)



- Instructor Support materials are not automatically sent to adopters. To receive available text support materials, contact your local Wadsworth sales representative. Go to our home page (<http://socialwork.wadsworth.com>), select **Find your Rep**
- Do you have any comments or suggestions concerning this newsletter? Would you like to submit materials? Please contact Caroline at caroline.concilla@wadsworth.com

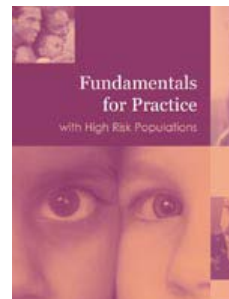
Hot Topic

Article by:

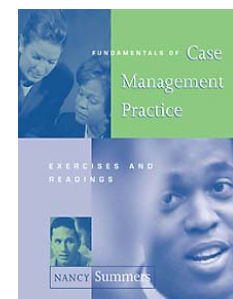
Nancy Summers

Nancy Summers is the Coordinator of the Human Service Program at Harrisburg Area Community College. She is also a consultant – she designs and develops workshops, training seminars, support groups, public information and public education material. Nancy Summers has been a Case Manager and Director of public education for mental health throughout her years in the profession.

Brooks/Cole Publications by Nancy Summers



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Enmeshment of Staff in Social Service Agencies

What is Enmeshment?

Enmeshment refers a condition, which can be present among staff in some social service units. Enmeshment occurs when there is increasing focus by staff on themselves and each other causing less and less focus on clients. This condition can affect an entire staff or a portion of the staff of a social service unit. At the most extreme, staff eventually functions as a primary group for individual staff members who are enmeshed to the exclusion of clients and client concerns.

For example, in a social service agency run as a shelter for abused women the staff was entirely focused on their own personal problems. Hours during each day were spent discussing and attempting to help each other resolve personal problems occurring outside the work site. In addition, the staff examined in considerable detail their own interpersonal relationships and issues. Staff attended board meetings, former staff sat on the board, and former board members were workers in the shelter. Clients were not seen and were not given service plans. An elaborate rationale was used to justify lack of client contact. Outsiders were told that women needed to assert themselves and develop their own plans, requesting help as they felt they needed it. To intervene or insist on goal planning or consultation with staff was explained as interference in a woman's independence. As a result clients received no service. This is an extreme case and because it was impossible to break up the enmeshment and the board was also involved, the state closed the shelter and started a new one.

How Enmeshment Happens

Enmeshment occurs primarily for 4 reasons

1. **Isolation.** A staff that functions with little or no supervision or oversight can gradually lean together for support in difficult times. Isolation can happen for the following reasons:
 - (a) The unit is located far from main headquarters or offices.
 - (b) The staff involved work evenings or weekends when there is no one to give regular supervision and oversight.
 - (c) The unit is simply never visited by those with supervisory or oversight responsibility. There is inadequate or no back-up for inexperienced staff who work alone on evenings and weekends
 - (d) The unit has contact with supervisors, but it is not meaningful contact



Summers Article continued

Lack of contact with superiors or contact, which proves meaningless often, occurs because those with oversight have indicated that they believe everything on the unit is being done professionally and real oversight is not necessary. This leaves supervisors, consumed with many responsibilities, free to focus attention elsewhere. But for those on the unit pride develops as they come to believe that they need little supervision and they come to see asking for help as a mark against the reputation they have developed with those responsible for oversight. Thus the isolation can be self-perpetuating.

Contact with those responsible for oversight which is not meaningful can happen for several reasons:

- (a) An overworked supervisor may give only cursory oversight making it clear that s/he cannot really take on any more problems. Staff will feel it necessary to withhold problems to protect the supervisor.
- (b) A supervisor may be intimidated by the staff who have perhaps been there longer and have a tradition of working independently. They may strongly resent attempts to begin real oversight and make coming to the unit so odious for the supervisor that s/he focuses attention elsewhere.
- (c) The staff tell the supervisor what the supervisor needs to hear to be assured that everything on the unit is running well and thus the supervisor does not seek further contact with the staff, reinforcing a sense of autonomy.

2. Poor Preparation. Staff will begin to lean together for support if they are poorly trained and feel uncertain about client behaviors. Many mistake academic degrees for good training, which of course is useful in hiring staff. Staff who are unprepared, however, have never learned the following:

- (a) How to really handle aberrant behavior
- (b) How to elicit cooperation and collaboration
- (c) Ethical behavior expressly applicable to the situation in which they will be working
- (d) Sound procedures for goal planning so that goals are reachable
- (e) How to interpret the behaviors they are seeing

Individuals with poor preparation, and particularly those who work in isolated situations come to see the client as the problem. A we-them mentality develops because the staff lacks the understanding to know what they are seeing in client behavior and the skills to handle it. A very common response among unprepared staff is to develop the view that the clients are devious and manipulative

Poor preparation, when it affects a majority of the staff, always leads to punitive measures against clients. These measures are justified and supported by the rest of the staff as needed to keep the clients in line and exert control in what is seen as an inherently dangerous or unpredictable situation. Punitive measures of this nature are almost always abusive.

3. The Pied Piper Effect. In the Pied Piper Effect an individual leader, usually the person in charge of the unit, uses his/her employment to develop a personal cult. All sorts of favors are performed for staff outside of work, parties are held, people can always drop in at this person's house. Those who don't go along are treated rudely or given less desirable work or shifts. Everyone sees it to their advantage to be part of the leader's in-group. Special favors, like being able to leave early or being allowed to entertain a boy or girlfriend on the unit are given to those who are supportive of the leader.

Going to work thus becomes a social event for the staff and a place where they can find support from one another that one would ordinarily find in family and friends outside of work.

4. The Organization Seeks Financial Gain. Sometimes an organization, in an effort to increase income from funding sources, will take clients into programs that are not prepared to handle them regardless of training. Clients who are loud, abusive, physically violent are placed on units where the personnel are not sufficient to handle a situation which is suddenly out of control. This leads staff, even well-trained staff, to feel abused by those above them and a coming together in mutual distrust of superiors and support of one another occurs.

Symptoms of Enmeshment

When a staff becomes enmeshed there are three outstanding characteristics of the group. The first two are:

- (a) Time is spent together to the exclusion of the clients and their concerns
- (b) A sense of autonomy occurs



Summers Article continued

Here are some examples of a staff that has come to focus on each other to the exclusion of clients:

- Staff sit together in offices and nurses stations, rather than interact with clients
- Staff erect barriers to clients such as closed doors, curtains, no response to knocks on the door
- Staff views requests from clients as annoying interruptions
- Staff is very involved socially apart from work, going to parties together, taking off when others are off to go drinking or partying with one another, exchanging expensive gifts
- Staff knows intimate details of one another's lives and spends time at work discussing these
- Staff develops rationales for why they cannot have more contact with clients (they won't change, contact causes the client to become agitated, the clients are manipulative, clients need to be more independent)

Here are some examples of a staff that has come to feel autonomous

- Staff mistreats clients without concern for retribution
- Staff exerts inappropriate power on the unit (such as switching the TV to a program staff wants when clients are watching something else)
- Staff makes up records and goal plans rather than have meaningful contact with clients
- Staff comes and goes as they please, talks on the phone, brings personal guests on the unit
- Staff has administration convinced there is no replacement for them.

When enmeshment has become extreme a third characteristic is pronounced

(c) A we-them attitude develops against anyone who threatens the in-group's authority or autonomy.

Here are some examples of how this works:

- Staff who refuse to mistreat clients or who have meaningful contact with clients are seen as stupid and naïve and the staff makes sure to inform supervisors of this appraisal.
- Staff goes to great lengths to discover who might have lodged concerns with administration and finds ways to write that person up or force the person out of their position.
- Staff explains client complaints as not credible because they come from clients who can be expected to distort things.
- Staff explains complaints by clients' families as meaningless because they are taking what they have witnessed out of context and the observation is not reliable.
- Staff explains complaints by new workers or interns as being naïve because the person hasn't enough experience to know what they are really seeing.
- Punitive actions such as assigning undesirable tasks and shifts are taken against workers who do try to work with clients or who make suggestions to improve contact with clients on the unit.

Diagnosing Enmeshment

All groups of staff who work together harmoniously lend each other support in difficult times (For instance when one staff member or another experiences a death, divorce, or some other personal tragedy). This is useful in creating a team approach in the unit and should be supported.

The next step toward enmeshment is time spent at work discussing the individual staff person's issues. At this stage the situation is fairly easy to address. Those with oversight need to be alert to the possibility of enmeshment and look for patterns that might be obvious.

One obvious pattern occurs when the unit is responsible for scheduling of themselves. Sometimes this is the only clue administration has that there might be a problem. What will be noticeable is that the same staff are always scheduled together, or the staff who were supposed to work are off sick or on a family emergency when other members of the in-group are not working.

Taking scheduling away can cause considerable anger, but it is a good idea for those with oversight to do the scheduling in order to rotate individuals.



Summers Article continued

What to Do About Enmeshment

Prevention

There are several ways to prevent enmeshment from occurring in the first place. For administration in agencies, these steps may seem cumbersome and time-consuming, but the alternative is risking the care of clients in their charge.

Below are some preventive measures:

- (a) Make sure staff is not isolated.
 1. This means regular, meaningful contact where real interest is shown in problems encountered with clients and training and supportive instruction is shared with the staff around the current issues.
 2. Make sure real support is available to help when crises do develop, particularly during off hours.
- (b) Ground every new employee in ethics of the organization and make it absolutely clear that ethical violations will not be tolerated
- (c) Rotate all staff to other programs so that the opportunity to become enmeshed is not as available
- (d) Insist that staff leave the unit for meals and breaks. Staff who spend their entire shift with clients are more likely to become enmeshed. Presumably breaks away from the unit are also breaks from each other.
- (e) Visit the unit at unexpected times. This is particularly important in residential facilities where often there is no oversight after regular business hours
- (f) Conduct meaningful customer satisfaction surveys and use the material to improve the unit. Do this as a matter of course so that it is an expected part of doing business. If not staff can interpret the survey as spying. Never make unit staff responsible for distribution of or interpretation of results of the survey. That should be Reserved for administration only.
- (g) Find free training and send individual staff members to this training (another break from each other). Show an interest in helping individual staff members increase their skills and become more competent.
- (e) Maintain control of scheduling
- (f) Do not be blackmailed by the notion that it will be hard, if not impossible, to replace staff. Allowing staff, who have become enmeshed to the degree that they are abusive to clients, retain their current position simply perpetuates the sense of autonomy and enmeshment.

Breaking up Enmeshment

Breaking up an enmeshed situation after it is entrenched is exceedingly difficult. In many cases it is impossible and staff either need to be let go or deployed in other parts of the organization and separated.

An example of this occurred on an inpatient psychiatric unit of a medical hospital. While rounds were routinely made, they were predictable and the information collected was cursory. Other hospital personnel did not want to come on the psychiatric unit and a sense of isolation developed among the staff on the unit. Gradually staff began to become coercive in an attempt to control the clients who were difficult to manage. This control eventually took the form of denigration and abuse. When the situation was uncovered the staff became defensive. Elaborate interpersonal associations with each other evolved in which cover-up stories were concocted. The only recourse the hospital had was to relocate each of the staff members to other units of the hospital. Some left as a result.

A notorious case in one city involved a person who was hired to direct a county social service unit. This person employed the Pied Piper effect with so much success that large numbers of the staff began to see themselves as victims of the county. This view was planted and reinforced by the leader with intricate and painstaking favors, parties, and gatherings of the in-crowd in which planning for an overthrow of county authority was encouraged. Normal county directives were explained to staff as further victimization. The only way to break the enmeshment was for the county to go to court to close the unit and begin anew.

There are steps to take short of breaking up a unit and beginning again, but these have only moderate success. These steps are outlined above in the prevention section, but there are problems in instituting these after enmeshment is in place. They are

- (a) Staff will become belligerent and hostile, particularly to front-line supervisors made responsible for implementing the new way of doing things. Unless the supervisor is strong and very committed to seeing real change take place the supervisor will become intimidated in no time and begin to fake reports of change on the unit.



Summers Article continued

- (b) Staff will draw together even more, believing that they are under siege and thus become even more enmeshed.
- (c) Staff will scapegoat those they perceive might have brought about the change. Some of those scapegoated may be clients.

If an organization is going to try to break up enmeshment after it is in place here are some ideas:

- (a) Replace or relocate leaders of the enmeshment and hire in his/her place individuals who have been apprised of what is at stake and what needs to happen.
- (b) Begin immediate ethics training relevant to the particular client population and listen attentively to complaints about why this or that won't work. This gives you clues to what sorts of training and support the staff lacks and needs.
- (c) Take over scheduling and attempt to rotate staff wherever possible
- (d) Insist on regular breaks away from the unit
- (e) Find ways to give the staff breaks from each other

Conclusion

Enmeshment is an insidious condition. It evolves gradually and almost imperceptibly. By the time administration begins to hear enough complaints to take the matter seriously it may be too late to break up successfully without relocating individuals or letting some go.

The issue is, in the author's opinion, one of the main reasons for mistreatment of clients and leaves organizations who refuse to see it and address it vulnerable to sanctions from government and the courts, as well as withdrawal of funding sources. In addition, it is exceedingly widespread in a social service environment that relies more and more on less well-trained staff for more responsible positions.

For this reason, all complaints must be taken seriously and addressed. Concerns raised by clients, their families or workers cannot be dismissed. In some cases the person is not clear about why certain procedures are taking place, but that does not mean the complaint should be dismissed.

The Best Prevention!

The best prevention to enmeshment is a supervisory group and administration committed to the care of the staff, able to collaborate with them on their needs, available to listen to concerns, helpful in obtaining advanced training when an employee needs it, and encouraging of staff as they grow and when they falter. Staff is more likely to replicate the concern they experience and to pass it on to the clients they serve.

This attitude, in which the organization gives care and support to staff, particularly front-line staff, is the single greatest prevention to enmeshment an agency can have.