

Assessment

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Assessment teaching/training in Italy

(it is usually part of the teaching of Methods and Techniques of Social Work in B.A. programs. It's also present in M.A. programs under different titles)

Assessment is mainly conceived as having an individual as its object, even though it should be considered also for group and community interventions (this is a consequence of the prevailing professional practice).

In didactic presentations, assessment is considered as part of the Core Knowledge of the Social Worker under the following 5 perspectives (cognitive-analytic, cognitive-critical, pragmatic-relational, ethical and emotional) each of which is stressed, though naturally with some differences among different authors

1- The analytic framework through which the CASE is ASSESSED (i.e. located and analyzed) towards the definition of a help intervention project (procedural-operative rationality). The main general conceptual scheme through which assessment is considered is that of problem individuation/problem solving; but then the analysis is presented following different theoretical traditions and lexicons (e.g. diagnostic-therapeutic; functional-adaptive; structural-emancipative; genealogical-critical). This is expected to be the locus of the professional's EXPERT knowledge. But the various perspectives are often considered as mutually inconsistent and exclusive (and selectively taught), and pluralism itself felt as a lack of "scientificity" of the SW knowledge;

2- A reflexive and critical perspective towards the PRACTICE of assessment as a descriptive-evaluative task, which refers to many implicit beliefs and evaluations (“trained” common sense, risks of stereotypization-stigmatization, emotional involvement-detachment of the professional), and is always a doubly singular performance: singular responsibility of the SW, specificity of the singular case;

3- The operative constraints of the institutional resources (their quantity, quality, temporality) available to confront the problem;

4- The ethical and deontological constraints related to the assessment - its existential consequences in a broad sense and
- its legal-bureaucratic consequences (as it has a main part in the construction of the official DOCUMENTATION of the case) in a strict sense.

5- The affective-relational dimension that is established through the assessment, with particular reference to the definitions of the subject and his/her problematic conditions made by the professional and their relation with the subject's self-image and description of his/her situation and needs.

Stress on the procedural-operational character of the assessment (in relation with Supervision):

- operational definition of the analytical concepts, objectives and means as intended result of the assessment;
- Injunction not to confuse the help intervention motivated and justified by the assessment with the objectives stated within the assessment procedure (risk of self-referentiality of the intervention)
- circular feedback relation between assessment and monitoring of the intervention (adjustment of the intervention, control on unintended-unexpected consequences of intervention).

Diagnostic techniques and tools for assessment:

Biographic interview, biogram, various forms for social career analysis; forms for the comparison between the definition of the problem by the SW and by the subject

Tacit dimension in assessment teaching and training. Stress is on *field education* and on *learning by doing*. This is an important dimension but it also reveals some limitations:

- abstractness of the teaching programs in contextual disciplines - philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, political science, law - in relation with the necessity of their application to specific contexts and singular cases.
- Lack of a research tradition in Social Work - along the lines of Bourdieu's Theory of practice - within the academic community. Those who teach and train in assessment are almost all academic outsiders, i.e. professional SW with limited teaching assignments.