

## **Vocational Professionals.**

by Dave Andrews

### **The Significant Trend Towards Professionalisation**

All of us know that most community work is still being done as it always has been done, not by professionals, but by volunteers.

But as I look around me I see a significant trend in community work towards increasing professionalisation.

Many of us have watched with the sociologist Harold Wilensky as we have witnessed the successive stages involved in professionalisation take place.

To begin with people who wanted to be involved in community work just got involved in community work. Then various parties involved in community work pressed for there to be more adequate training . Then those with more adequate training pressed for a professional association. Then those in the professional association pressed for the support of the system to impose certification requirements on the practice of community work.

So now there is the situation where voluntary community work goes largely unrecognised, unless it is under the auspices of professional community work (1).

There are of course many explanations of this trend towards increasing professionalisation.

Some say the increasing trend towards professionalisation is due to an increasing sense of responsibility among community workers. It is simply a matter of community workers accepting responsibility for our area of work and assuming the responsibility to make sure that everything done by everyone in our area of work is done well. After all 'every other profession has carefully defined boundaries to its domains.' (2)

Others say the increasing trend towards professionalisation is due to an increasing sense of desperation among community workers. It's not merely a matter of mapping out our area of work. It's also a matter of staking out our claim to our territory of work and standing up against anyone who would dare to encroach upon our rights to control our territory exclusively ourselves. 'It's a matter of self preservation for practitioners in all fields of public service to draw their own circles within which no outsider may enter.' (3)

Still others say the increasing trend towards professionalisation is due less to need for preservation, and more to the desire for prestige among community workers. It's actually a matter of getting some recognition for the type of work we do and gaining a bit of respect into the bargain. As a matter of fact, 'most (community) workers want professional status.'(4)

Kay Laursen, speaking of the social work profession of which she is a part, is quite scathing about the increasing trend towards professionalisation.

'It is my thesis that professionalism is primarily a quest for power: and that the individuals feel they can achieve greater personal prestige, financial remuneration, and even political power by becoming members of a profession.(5)

Whether Kay Laursen is correct or not - and I'm certainly not in a position to judge other people's motives in the matter - there is no doubt that professionals are an emerging power in community work circles.

And Earnest Greenwood, who wrote a classic paper on professionalism in 1965, noted that professionals have become a class apart from volunteers when it comes to systematic knowledge,

ascribed authority, official sanctions, careful transactions, and an associated professional subculture (6)

I know that there has been some doubt over the years as to whether community work professionals are fully developed professionals in this sense (7). But according to my observations most community work professionals I know display all the essential characteristics of fully developed professionals.

### **The Dangerous Features of Professionalisation**

In 1982 Donald Kraybill and his colleagues published a controversial list detailing the dangerous features of professionalisation that they had observed.(8)

Whether we agree with it or not, I think it can serve as a useful check list for considering the consequences of a preoccupation with professionalisation.

It could be used by any professionals - be they ministers or doctors, counsellors or lawyers, health workers or housing workers, welfare workers or social workers - operating in community work circles .

The first danger of professionalisation is: *Serving the Profession*.

There is a tendency for professionals to serve the profession rather than the people it purports to serve.

There was a time not long ago that the staff and students in the social work department of the university at which I taught used to march in the streets of the city to demonstrate their commitment to human rights. They no longer do so.

In fact ,as far as I can recall, the staff and students went out on strike only twice in the last two years. One time was when the students protested about payment of fees. And the other time was when the staff protested about the payment of their salaries. They used to demonstrate more of a commitment to human rights, now they demonstrate more of a commitment to their own rights.

Socialisation at a social work department such as mine has produced, as Lester Anderson says, 'the autonomous professional who know who they are, are committed to the profession and are motivated to serve as professionals throughout their career'.(9)

The second danger of professionalisation is: *Believing the Ideology*

There is a tendency for professionals to believe the propaganda of their own ideology.

A colleague of mine works for a church based community organisation. The organisation prides itself on its professional competence. At various times my colleague has heard people say how much better the professionals are, than non-professionals, in providing a good quality service .

Unfortunately their belief in their own competence blinds them to such an extent that they simply cannot see how inadequate the quality of the service they provide really is. And, the irony is, that while the professionals may not be aware of this, the non-professionals are only too acutely aware of the situation. But they are seldom consulted for their views.

We often simply do not recognise the terrible dangers associated with, what another colleague of mine, Bill de Maria, calls 'the dark side of the values we cherish'. (10).

The third danger of professionalisation is: *Utilising the Mythology*.

There is a tendency for professionals to utilise the humanitarian mythology of the profession to rationalise the vested interests of the profession.

For instance there is a well known welfare project that a community work colleague has developed nearby. Not because of a demonstrable need for the particular service. But because of his need to demonstrate his ability to establish a professional service.

It certainly is a most impressive welfare project. It is set in a lovely building with beautiful furnishings and brilliant facilities. It operates on a big budget with a well qualified staff in well equipped offices. It uses an inordinate amount of resources to help the small number of people who utilise its services. But it is a marvellous showcase for the community worker concerned.

'Within all the helping professions' Ruth Krall says sadly 'I have seen issues of power, status, economics... and control shabbily dressed in the language of compassion for clients'. (11).

The fourth danger of professionalisation is: *Fragmenting Reality*.

There is a tendency for professionals to specialise and, in so doing, to fragment reality.

Even in community work, which tends to be more generalist than most professions, people still tend to specialise and, in so doing, to fragment reality.

It is very seldom we deal with the community as a whole. Most of us break up the whole in order to deal with it bit by bit. In so doing very seldom do we deal with people as whole people. Most of us categorise their problems and try to solve them in terms of their various parts.

Many people find it frustrating to run around from one office to another in order to meet the various specialists who can attend to the various parts of their problem. But when their problems are serious, they have very little resources and they are dealing with a lot of stress, the situation is not just frustrating, it's infuriating.

'Specialisation intrudes on all professionals says Donald Kraybill. 'And unfortunately fragmentation is an inherent part of the ...process'.(12).

The fifth danger of professionalisation is: *Separating People*.

There is a tendency for professionals to specialise, and, in so doing, not only fragment reality, but also separate themselves from the reality of other people which they do not share.

Even in community work, which tends to be less specialist than most professions, people still separate themselves from one another as a result of their specialisations.

Recently my colleague's supervisor dismissed a proposal she had worked on with a community group, because the supervisor said my colleague, an unqualified welfare worker, did not have the expertise to put a sound proposal together that only she, a qualified social worker, had.

It apparently did not register to my colleague's supervisor, that the people in the community group, with which my colleague worked, were all capable people, with years of experience, not only in planning but also in implementing the project they proposed, and who thus had developed, with my colleague, far greater expertise than my colleague's supervisor could ever realise.

'A commitment to the professional complex can alienate a person from their neighbour' says Redekop. 'Keeping the profession from alienating you from your neighbours is a very difficult assignment. (13).

A sixth danger of professionalisation is: *Making Mystery*.

There is a tendency for professionals to develop a mystique about their profession.

Apparently community workers think quite mysteriously. At least, they talk about the way they think, quite mysteriously. Some talk about 'closed sets' and 'centred sets' in community work. They don't relate they 'liaise'. They don't just develop contacts or connections like everybody else they develop 'networks with key players'. They don't just drop by for a visit: they 'interact'. They are apparently

always willing to 'dialogue' and, whenever required, are always ready to 'advocate'. Not 'top down'. But 'bottom up'. It's all a matter of 'O - 1 - 3'. And to most of us that's a mystery.

'Specialised language and verbalised procedures' according to Donald Kraybill, are intended to 'create a mysterious shroud over professional practices', (14).

A seventh danger of professionalisation is: *Protecting Secrets*.

There is a tendency for professionals to protect the secrets of their profession.

Apparently community workers can talk so secretively among themselves that no-one can understand what they are talking about.

Recently a friend found herself at a party for community health workers and their families. She is an informed woman who was looking forward to chatting with people who, like her husband, were community health workers, and who, she thought, would be interested in community concerns in general and health issues in particular. But try as she might she couldn't break into their conversation. She didn't understand a thing they were saying. And they wouldn't speak to her in terms she could understand.

Needless to say my friend and her family left the party early. On the way home she told her husband that she thought it was real irony, that people who were meant to be on about community health, were so unwilling to share the secrets of their trade with the uninitiated, when their work was to share the secrets of their trade with the uninitiated.

According to Ruth Krall, that experience is not exceptional. 'Social workers....fight for the protection of their professional secrets like everybody else.' (15).

An eighth danger of professionalisation is: *Manufacturing Need*

There is a tendency for professionals who specialise in meeting peoples' needs to manufacture a sense of need in order to secure contract to meet it.

A recent study indicates that some groups of people with disabilities like those with hearing impairment, do not need specialised services, if they can get guaranteed access to generic services, through such a simple expedient as training the general population in a given community to sign.

However the professionals, whose incomes depend on the development of specialised services, still insist on the need for specialised services for the hearing impaired, and resist the transfer of resources from welfare to education in order to train all the children at school in the use of sign language.(16)

'Behind the disinterested masks', says John McKnight, 'are simply the servicers, their systems, their techniques and their technologies - businesses in need of markets, economies seeking growth potential, professionals in need of incomes.' (17)

A ninth danger of professionalisation is: *Abusing Power*

There is a tendency for professionals to exploit people in need by reporting problems, proposing solutions, presenting treatments and performing services that may be in their best interests, but not necessarily the best interest of their clients.

A recent study of service delivery to disabled people with disabilities shows that they would be much better off with cash transfers to secure services of their choice.

But the professionals, whose control would be affected by direct cash transfers that would circumvent the particular services they provide, have successfully lobbied against the move by their clients, advanced by their self-advocacy groups, for the government to grant disabled people direct cash transfers.

In order to maintain their professional control over their clients, they have deliberately thwarted a move for people with disabilities to gain greater control over their own lives. (18)

'The great danger of the increasing professionalisation of different forms of treatment', says Henri Nouwen, 'is that they become ways of exercising power instead of offering service'. (19)

A tenth danger of professionalisation is: *Avoiding Responsibility*.

There is a tendency for professionals to be responsible only to themselves, not to society, and then, only in terms of the lowest common denominator of their professional association.

A friend of mine was actually reprimanded recently for writing about his community work concerns for the community he works with.

His learned colleagues told my friend that writing popular articles on development, for ordinary people to read, was a sheer waste of time. It was far more important, they argued, for him to publish erudite material in academic journals.

His learned colleagues acknowledged few, if anyone in the community my friend works with, could relate to such material, let alone make much sense of it in terms of their lives. But they dismissed his concerns as inconsequential.

Apparently in his associates' view, it was more important for my friend to be accountable to other professionals, than to answer the questions the people he was working with were asking him about the work.

According to Freidson 'A profession quite naturally forms a perspective of its own, a perspective all the more distorted...by its source in a status answerable to no one but itself. Once a profession forms such a self-sustaining perspective, protected from others' perspective, insulated from the necessity of justifying itself to outsiders, it cannot be expected to see itself and its mission with clear eyes, nor can it be reasonably expected to assume the perspective of its clientele. If it cannot assume the perspective of its clientele, how can it pretend to serve it well?' (20)

### **The Disabling Effects of Professionalisation.**

John McKnight is worried that much of the professional work we do not only does not enable communities, it actually disables communities.

McKnight sets out his case quite persuasively in a classic paper called Professionalised Services and Disabling Help (21)

McKnight says that service is the biggest business in modern society. In Australia less than 3% are involved in agriculture and only 17% are involved in manufacture; while more than 63% are involved in services of various kinds. Most people in modern society are therefore service producers and service consumers.

McKnight says that the success of the business depends on the service producers turning the service consumers into satisfied customers. For the service producers to make the service consumers satisfied customers, the service producers have to develop professional expertise in meeting the needs of the community. And in the process of developing expertise in meeting the needs of the community, the professional develops the ability to define the needs of the community and the means by which the needs of the community can be met. The community thus becomes a client. (22)

McKnight says, that to stay in business, professional community workers must convince the client communities they work for, that their services are indispensable. And in order to do that, professionals try to communicate several propositions to their clients, which distort the truth, but serve the purpose of disabling client communities, and making the disabled client communities dependent on their professional community workers. (23)

The first proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their client communities is: *"You are deficient!"*

McKnight says, communities may have needs, but not all needs are deficiencies that must be filled or fulfilled by a professional service. Some needs may be illusions that people ought to give up. Some may be obligations that people ought to take up themselves. Some may be rights that people ought to struggle for against even expert opinion. And some may be unresolvable problems that people should just accept responsibly, if not happily, as unalterable facts of life. It does people a terrible disservice to define all needs as deficiencies that require professional services to be filled or fulfilled.

The second proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their client communities is: *"You are the problem!"*

McKnight remarks, even where communities may be deficient, it is not good to give people the impression that the problem is simply that they are deficient. They may well be deficient in some area. Most of us are deficient in one area or another of our lives. But sometimes the problems people have aren't caused so much by their deficiencies, as by an emphasis on their deficiencies, that prevents people recognising their capacity to function quite effectively. It certainly does not help communities to describe people as problems.

The third proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their client communities is: *"You haven't just got a single problem, You have an entire collection of problems!"*

McKnight reminds us, it may be better to consider people as having problems, rather than being problems, but it still doesn't do people much good to give them the impression that they are simply a bundle of dysfunctional bits and pieces. They may well have a lot of problems. In fact most people I know do have a lot of problems. But most people I know also have the potential to solve a lot of their problems themselves. It not only does not help, it actually does communities real harm, to deal with people as if they were a set of problems that needed to be taken apart, solved, and put back together again, by somebody else.

The fourth proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their client communities is: *"We are the solution to your problem!"*

McKnight points out that how essentially dictatorial that message is. The client is the problem. The professional is the solution. The people themselves are not the answer to the question their problems pose. Their peers are not the answer to the question their problems pose. The only answer to the question the client asks is the professional. It is not a bilateral process. It is a unilateral process. It is essentially a dictatorial process, under the control of the professional. To which the client submits. It effectively undermines any movement toward democracy in the community.

The fifth proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their client communities is: *"We know your situation!"*

McKnight brings up how totally disempowering that message is. There is no greater power than the power to question. For from the power to question flows the power to find answers. If a professional can take control of the definition of a person's difficulties, the professional can take control of a person's life. From then on autonomy ceases to exist. The citizen becomes a client. The professional assumes the prerogative to decide a person's fate. Communities no longer exercise the right to decide matters for themselves.

The sixth proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their clients communities is: *"You can't understand the problem or the solution."*

McKnight brings out how thoroughly patronising that message is. The language of the professional mystifies both the problem and the solution so the ordinary person cannot evaluate the process for themselves. The only people competent to evaluate the merit of a particular process proposed by one professional is another professional. The ordinary person thus becomes totally dependent on the

professional. So communities can no longer choose whether to be a client or not. They can only choose whose client they will be.

The seventh proposition that, according to McKnight, professional community workers of all kinds try to sell their client communities is: "*Only we can decide whether the solution has dealt with your problem!*"

McKnight explains how completely destructive such a statement is of the last vestiges of human rights. The person has already been reduced from a citizen with inalienable rights to a client with limited rights. Now the person is being reduced further, to become a consumer, with no rights at all, except the right to consume uncritically. The ordinary person is considered to be so deficient that they are not deemed fit to decide for themselves whether or not a particular service has been helpful or not. The professional is everything. The client is nothing. Communities, as such, cease to exist.

To many self respecting professionals McKnight's perspective on the disabling effect of professionalisation might seem preposterous.

No doubt many would argue vigorously about McKnight's notion that professionals are normally not very democratic in their work.

McKnight argues, however, that though many professionals seek a democratic understanding of their role, the evidence seems to indicate that, in spite of community orientated rhetoric, the way they usually work, is not only not democratic but actually anti-democratic and detrimental, if not destructive, to community. (24)

Ann Oakley's recent study of how many people in helping professions treat the people they work with in the community, unfortunately confirms these views, and suggests that there may be more to them than we would like to consider. (25)

Oakley documents some of the disastrous disabling messages that are passed on by professionals to the people they work with in the community. She says people report being treated as children, incapable of making intelligent choices. She says people report being treated like delinquents, unable or unwilling to make normal decisions themselves. The clients report being told what to think and how to feel by the professionals. And they report being reprimanded if they made too many enquiries about their treatment, or objected for some reason or other.

McKnight says that by treating people like that, professionals deliberately increase their power at the expense of the ordinary people whom they purport to serve. 'This analysis suggests that the disabling effects are intrinsic to modern professional service. Whatever the benefits they might provide, they can only be assessed after recognising them as essentially self interested systems with internally disabling effects' (26)

Kay Laursen, surveying the Australian social work scene, concurs with McKnight.

'It is my contention that professionalism is primarily characterised by self-interest, expressed in a quest for power, economic, social, personal, and political; that professionalism by its very nature makes little difference to the underlying causes of client's problems (it does not, nor does it intend to, change the social structure in any radical way such that the more fundamental causes of problems are dealt with); that when it comes to the crunch, to a choice between "the powers that be" and the welfare of their clients, professionals opt for the former, while simultaneously trying to convince their erstwhile clients that this betrayal is in their best interests; and finally, that professionalism militates against a genuine service to clients because it alienates professionals from their own humanity, and naturally from the common humanity they could share with their client.' (27)

'Thus!' says Laursen, 'I question professionalism itself, in social work as elsewhere, because as a social institution, it seeks only greater power for its members, while offering very little in the form of a genuine human service to people, in return. (28)

Harold Throssell an Australian social worker and writer says: 'In Australia, the Australian Association of Social Workers controls the training courses (in the sense that they have to be approved by A.A.S.W.) and, to a considerable extent, who gets employment: those with particular paper

qualifications, regardless of aptitude. The professional organisations (A.A.S.W., N.A.S.W. in the United States, B.A.S.W. in the United Kingdom) model themselves on those established in medicine, law, etc., with their codes of ethics, constitutions, grades of membership, and methods for keeping people out; with more and more full-time officials, minutes, mounting piles of reports. In true Parkinsonian style, these bodies develop lives of their own: committees proliferate, subscriptions increase, more and more time is spent at seaside conferences. Social action cannot be undertaken until "more research is done", "we have more office space", "we have more secretaries", "the issues are defined more clearly". In reality, political action is resisted in order not to lose the patronage of governments and other authorities, and in order to maintain the prestigious positions of the leading members.' (29)

No wonder Richard Titmuss, quoting George Bernard Shaw, once stated that '*professions are conspiracies against the laity.*' (30). Ain't that the truth!

### **A Vocation for a New Generation of Professionals**

Henri Nouwen says that 'when we go back to the original meaning of the word "profession" (we) realize that it refers to "professing" one's own deepest conviction'.(31)

It is my conviction that we desperately need to rediscover our vocation, and deconstruct and reconstruct our professions in terms of our vocation.

According to the existential psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, 'Everyone has their own specific vocation'.(32) And according to his colleague, in analytical psychiatry, Carl Jung 'To have a vocation is to be addressed by a voice. We hear a voice. We are called'.(33)

While our call may well come to us in our own voice, a still small voice from somewhere deep inside us, 'our vocation acts like a law of God. It makes demands upon us. It demands our best, and, at times, even better than our best. To liberate. To redeem. To transform'.(34)

If this is, as I believe, our vocation then, anyone who would aspire to be, what I call, a '*vocational professional*', would need to be a professional who, in the words of Henri Nouwen, 'dares to claim ... a vocation that allows him or her to enter into deep solidarity with the anguish underlying all the glitter'.(35)

This is, of course, is not easy.

John McKnight considers the notion of a '*vocational professional*' a complete contradiction in terms, and insists that while his analysis is an argument *for* the importance of reform, it is also an argument *against* any possibility of real transformation.

He asserts that 'the disabling effects of professionalisation are intrinsic, (not extrinsic,) to modern professionalised services, and so cannot be ameliorated' under any circumstances.(36)

However, William Doherty, the Director of the Family Therapy Programme at the University of Minnesota, argues that though transformation may be difficult, it is not only theoretically possible, it is actually happening right now.

In his bestselling book, Soul Searching, Doherty tells of an exciting new movement in which professionals are getting together to encourage one another to intentionally pursue a more personally and socially responsible approach to their practice.(37)

Jean Vanier, who works with people who are profoundly disabled, says that the only way that any one of us can become a '*vocational professional*' is by listening to the cry of the suffering as it echoes in our own soul.

He says if we listen intently then we will quickly learn that 'people have suffered a great deal at the hands of the powerful - doctors, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, and others. They have suffered so much from broken promises, from people wanting to learn from experiments, or to write a thesis, and then having gained what they wanted - recognition, an impressive book, article (or report) -



going away and never coming back. (That) they are waiting for someone who really cares, who sees them in the light of love, who recognises their gifts (not just their deficits), who accepts their need for change, but who will accept them just as they are, with no preconceived ideas (of) change.'(38)

It is that cry -'for someone who really cares'- that constitutes our vocation; and it is in the context of that cry -'for someone who really cares'- that we are called to deconstruct and reconstruct our professions.

A process some people call 'de-professionalisation.'

I prefer to call the process 're-professionalisation' rather than 'de-professionalisation' because it doesn't require a complete disassociation from everything to do with professionalisation, only a disassociation from the dangerous features of professionalisation.

It requires a disassociation from our professional predilection for success, and status, and all that stuff. And that requires a disassociation from our professional predisposition to accumulate a dazzling array of knowledge and skills to impress people. But that does not require any disassociation from the professional prerequisite to acquire an adequate range of knowledge and skills to serve the people we work with.

The purpose of the process of 're-professionalisation' is not to discount the importance of professional competence, but to develop our competence in the context of authentic compassion.

We must make sure that that we don't serve our professions so much as the people our professions purport to serve, and that we don't impose our ideology or explicate our mythology at the expense of people.

We must make sure that that we don't allow the specialities we practice to fragment reality, or separate us from people whose fragment of reality we do not specialise in, and that we don't develop a mystique about our procedures, or protect the secrets of our trade, that could be shared so as to empower people.

We must make sure that that we don't manufacture a sense of need in order to secure a contract to meet it, and that we don't abuse our power in the performance of our duties, or avoid our responsibility to the people in whose name we perform those duties.

We must do our best to make sure we become, what I call, *amateur, radical, and revolutionary professionals*.

### **Amateur, Radical and Revolutionary Professionals**

#### *Amateur Professionals*

*A vocational professional is an amateur professional.*

This is not the contradiction that it might appear to be. Because the opposite of amateur is not professional - it is mercenary. The vocational professional is not a mercenary, but an amateur, at heart.

As David Augsberger says, the notion of an 'amateur' comes from the Latin word 'amator', which in English means 'love', which in this context means 'someone who does something for the love of it.'(39). Hence, anyone who serves others for the love of it, is an amateur at heart.

The amateur professional is a person who is a warm professional. Exactly the opposite of the stereotype of the cold professional. Because their heart is on fire with a desire to help people meet their needs in any way they can. Whether they get paid a lot, paid a little, or paid absolutely nothing at all!

Paul Mercer is an excellent example of an amateur professional. He is a general practitioner, who treats his patients as people and treats people with respect. He takes a lot more time with people than he is supposed to. He gives people not only his attention but also himself. He enters into their struggle,

and in the context of their struggle he seeks to serve them, minimising their pain, maximising their opportunities and enabling them to cope with the difficulties they face. He loves the people he works with in the community and, not surprisingly, the people love him.

The medieval medical dictum that Kadushin cites is a motto which Paul Mercer lives out in his community, and each of our communities would be much better off if every community worker tried, like Paul

"To cure sometimes,  
To relieve often,  
To comfort always" (40)

### *Radical Professionals*

*A vocational professional is a radical professional.*

Martin Rein suggests that if we are going to begin to do justice to the people we work with we should develop 'a radical profession.' A radical profession, according to Rein, is not a profession made up of people who are single issue activists, but a profession whose members actively make the people that they work with the single most important issue they are concerned with.(41)

Jack Rothman says there are three types of professional role orientation that he has observed:

- (1) a professional role orientation, which 'implies a high degree of concern with professional values and standards'
- (2) a bureaucratic orientation, which 'refers to a preoccupation with policies and terms of the employing agency'
- (3) a client orientation, which 'emphasises primary attention to the needs of those served by the agency'. (42)

Most social workers, according to Rothman, tend to be orientated more towards bureaucratic concerns, if not professional concerns, rather than to client concerns.

So in order to develop a radical orientation to community work, which treats the people in the community seriously, many community workers will have to develop a radical reorientation to social work.

Developing such a radical reorientation to social work is not easy. It's particularly difficult because the prospect of accountability of professionals to the people they work with, and the mutuality it implies, is often considered 'a dangerous form of role confusion', and 'the world in which we live, has no models to offer to those who want to work towards mutuality' (43).

In spite of the difficulties, however, Concetta Benn and her colleagues deliberately developed a radical reorientation to their community work in the Family Centre Project in Melbourne. (44)

Concetta Benn and her colleagues systematically tried to reduce the status differential between the professionals and the people they worked with in the project through a devolution of power that was enhanced by an approach that encouraged participation.

The professionals encouraged the people to set the agendas for the project and they encouraged one another to serve the agendas the people set for the project, rather than manipulate the project to suit themselves, or exploit the project in terms of their vested interests.

They encouraged one another to become human resources that could be utilised, within certain limits, by the people, to serve the agendas the people set for the project.

The Family Centre Project was far from perfect. The family's right to participate accrued to them only at the rate the staff conceded it. But there were genuine, ongoing concessions that made increasing levels of participation, by the poor, in decisions that affected their lives, really possible. So in spite of the imperfections The Family Centre Project, the staff managed to facilitate a process of movement towards real 'power for the poor' (45).

Concetta Benn and her colleagues show us the way forward. We need not be conservative. We can be radical. And, as radical professionals, we can make a significant difference in our communities, in spite of our imperfections, by focusing on the people we work with, and facilitating a process of movement through the people we were with towards real power for the poor.

*Revolutionary Professionals*

*A vocational professional is a revolutionary professional.*

Robert Chambers suggests that if we are going to begin to do justice to the people we need to work with, we should develop a 'revolutionary profession'. According to Chambers a revolutionary profession is not a profession made up of people who build road blocks, and defend the bastions of one ideology against another, but a profession whose members can break through barriers, and fight against the biases which discriminate against the disadvantaged in our society. (46)

Chambers outlines a number of preferences that affect our participation as professionals in the struggle to do justice to the people we need to work with.

Chambers suggests that when we select the projects we want to work with that we tend to select nice clean projects first and "dirty", "smelly" projects last.

Project Preferences

First	Last
Modern	Traditional
Large	Small
Complex	Simple
Regular	Irregular
Quantified	Unquantified
Predictable	Unpredictable
High Technology	Low Technology
High Profile	Low Profile
High Cost	Low Cost
Hard	Soft
Neat	Messy
Clean	Dirty
Nice	Smelly (47)

Chambers further suggests that when we select the time and the place we want to work, that we tend to select "easy" times and places first, and "difficult" times and places last.

Time and Place Preferences

First	Last
Accessible	Inaccessible
Convenient	Inconvenient
Near	Far
Easy	Difficult
Office	Field
Suburban	Urban
Urban	Rural
During Office Hrs	Out of Office Hrs
Day	Night
During the Week	Over the Weekend
Dry	Wet
Cool	Hot
Warm	Cold (48)

Chambers finally suggests that when we select the people we want to work with, we tend to select "rich" people first, and "poor" people last.

#### People Preferences

First	Last
Rich	Poor
Fair	Dark
Male	Female
Adult	Child
Educated	Illiterate
Influential	Ineffectual (49)

Chambers argues that these preferences, are neither accidental nor incidental. They are, he says, crucial choices that we, as professionals tend to make that profoundly affect our degree of participation in the struggle to do justice to the people we need to work with most, the most disadvantaged people on our planet.

Chambers asserts that these professional preferences are reactionary. They not only reflect the dominant values of our society , but they also reinforce the dominant values of our society. To the neglect of the most disadvantaged people on our planet)who do not count for much in the present scheme of things.

Chambers insists that if we are to begin to do justice to the most disadvantaged people on our planet we need to reject the dominant values of our society. He says we need to not only reevaluate our professional preferences, but also actually reverse our professional priorities. He says we need to commit ourselves to a revolutionary option for the poor.

The revolution envisaged does not involve pitting the left against the right, but putting the first last and the last first.

This revolution may be non violent, but it is not without violence. The changes it requires are bloody difficult!

In spite of the difficulties however, I know quite a few young professionals who are doing their best to become fair dinkum revolutionary professionals.

Peter Stewart is a musician who works with disadvantaged groups round Brisbane, through street arts, so as to enable dispossessed people to articulate their rage and act out some of the possible solutions to the problems that enrage them.

Steven Yates and Emma Pritchard, are a doctor and a lawyer respectively, who have chosen to leave highly rewarding and highly remunerative positions in Brisbane to relocate to a low profile town in central Australia in order to help provide much needed medical and legal services for aboriginal communities.

Greg and Katie Manning are a wonderfully well-qualified Aussie couple, a do-it-yourself engineer, and a life-be-in-it physiotherapist, who have moved to India with their two children, Rebecca and Callum, to make themselves available to do community development work with their local counterparts in a city slum.

Peter Stewart, Steven Yates, Emma Pritchard, and Greg and Katie Manning show us the way forward.

We need not be reactionary. We can be revolutionary. And, as revolutionary professionals, we can make a very significant difference in our world.

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