SKILLS REQUIRED TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH COMMUNITIES

“Traditional” perspectives to understanding community behavior

(Kahn) 1970 – We must understand the language of community – Resources and interests must be directed towards both the individual and social change.

Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman 1986 – As the world changes we change. Community represents that level of human behavior at which we as individuals connect with the social or collective world around us.

Historical perspective - Renaissance View:

Anderson & Carter (1990:95-96) – Suggests that community is a perspectivistic notion. This notion of multiple “perspectives” rather than a “single definition of” community is perhaps appropriate because it implies that community is different things to different people. (Includes traditional as well as alternative perspectives). We must realize the important roles of all individuals in the community. All diverse populations.

Community as place: Geographic location – a place to carry out social action.

Dwight Sanderson – Rural area in which people have a common sense of interest, obligation, and responsibility.

Ferdinand Tonnies (In Warren and Lyon 1988:7-17) Describes two contracting ways people relate to each other as members or collectivities. The different ways people relate to each other in different relationships that predominate in large urban communities, compared to those in small communities.

Gemeinschaft relationships: Traditional and rural – How people relate to each other in small, stable rural communities where people knew each other well.

Gesellschaft relationships: Impersonal and urban – Contract-like exchange – favors in return for goods or services. People needed things from others in order to survive.

Warren (1978:9) Social systems view – allows us to recognize the influence on communities of other systems and subsystems in the larger environment.

Systems approach – acknowledges that influences among systems components and between communities and the environment are reciprocal.

“Alternative” perspectives to understanding community behavior
**Alternative approaches to community:** Social workers assisted communities and their members in using their assets to achieve both individual and collective well-being. Offers more holistic or comprehensive approaches to understanding many interrelated elements of community life than in the past.

**Concepts for understanding and intervening in and with communities are:**
- Community building
- Community renewal
- Community assets and strengths
- Social capital
- Civil ethic and civil society

**Poverty reduction:** Fundamental concern for Social Worker's. Care of other concerns include: infant mortality, substance abuse, violence, racism & sexism, child abuse & neglect, hunger, homelessness, and teen pregnancy.

**Alternative approaches** – Integration of new developments in strength based and assets based theory and practice emerged in social work practice only recently.

**Community Building** – Create communities that work for the low-income people who live there.

**Walsch** – More comprehensive approach to poverty in theory & practice because it goes beyond analyzing poverty only in terms of jobs or income “but (also) as a web of interwoven problems – poor schooling, bad health, family troubles, racism, crime, and unemployment – that can lock families out of opportunity, permanently.”

**Ewalt** – It is clear that redeveloping impoverished communities requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the physical & economic conditions of neighborhoods as well as the social and cultural aspects.

**Strengths & assets:** e.g. focuses on employed teenagers and stay at home Moms who take care of latch-key kids rather than focusing solely on deficits like crime, unemployment, or school failure.

**People & Place-based strengths:** Human services – Focused on education, family support and health care needs of the poor. Place strategists – Focused more on rebuilding neighborhoods with housing and retail development and attempts at job creation, than on human development.

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