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Essential Skills of Social Work Practice: Assessment, Intervention, and Evaluation. Thomas O'Hare.
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Pugh's study is impressive. She acknowledges that future research might include adults and their consumption patterns with regard to the economy of dignity. It would also be interesting to see how children and parents who are disabled fit into this research. This book makes an exciting contribution to scholarship on consumption, childcare, and social policy. It is a riveting account of how parents and children negotiate being a part of the economy of dignity and how they struggle to belong.

Cheryl Najarian Souza, University of Massachusetts Lowell

Thomas O'Hare, *Essential Skills of Social Work Practice: Assessment, Intervention, and Evaluation*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books, Inc., 2009. \$39.95 paperback.

Several texts on social work practice have survived the test of time, undergoing numerous revisions to include practice knowledge, skills, and competencies. Consequently, the author of any new practice text is challenged to present solid foundational content in addition to offering something new and relevant that will capture the interest of educators and students alike. Thomas O'Hare of Boston College is the author of a new text, designed for upper level BSW and MSW students. The text provides foundations for effective casework and a framework for advanced social work practice.

The text's focus is consistent with a practitioner-scientist model where social work direct practice is informed by empiricism. O'Hare contends that social workers need not be researchers themselves but should have current knowledge of the literature regarding the validity of theory and the efficacy of interventions. Emphasis is placed on the need for social workers to be critical consumers of interdisciplinary developmental and practice research to enhance their lifelong learning and practice.

Four prominent practice theories (i.e., psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, family systems, and phenomenological/humanistic) are briefly presented along with an apparently thorough review of their respective empirical support and contributions. This content may provide a

beginning framework for critical analysis as students engage in more in-depth exploration of practice theories and interventions in advanced courses.

O'Hare presents readers with solid information regarding the interrelated and reciprocal functions of assessment, intervention, and evaluation. For example, he emphasizes that evaluation should be an integral part of the assessment phase, while also occurring systematically throughout the treatment process. He suggests that in order to practice competently, social workers need to be well grounded in empirical literature regarding evidence-based practices (EBPs) with diverse client systems. Knowledge of EBPs should guide social workers as they select what the author terms *essential skills* or *combinations of essentials skills* (i.e., interventions)—support, therapeutic coping and case management—for individuals, families, or groups.

Portions of the NASW Code of Ethics that apply to direct practice are discussed along with strategies social workers can utilize to reduce potential ethical breaches and liability. O'Hare raises compelling questions regarding liability for educators, and he offers recommendations about what educators can do to advance EBP in their teaching.

Part three of the text focuses on combining essential social work skills when working with different populations who present with varying presenting problems and diagnoses. Using case vignettes, O'Hare demonstrates how these skills can be utilized in different configurations to build upon client strengths and to enhance adaptive capabilities, positive coping, and problem solving.

O'Hare's text has notable strengths and some limitations. The link between research and practice is clearly articulated. Information on existing EBPs and the identified need for more research to establish new EBP methods may increase social worker knowledge and provide a basis for effective practice. Case vignettes and sample assessment and treatment plans are very useful to illustrate the multidimensional assessment and application of essential skills/interventions. Content on reducing social worker liability is valuable for practitioners. Two Appendices, *The Psycho-Social Intervention Scale* and *The Comprehensive Service Plan* offer tools to assist beginning

practitioners in conducting thorough assessments and planning interventions.

To gain the most from this text, it is recommended that students first complete a foundation research methods course. The content on the efficacy of prominent practice theories is useful; however, the description of each theory is limited. In order for students to gain an in-depth understanding of these theories and provide a basis for critical analyses, supplemental information is suggested. Culturally competent practice is discussed, although content on diverse cultures and underrepresented groups is not a significant focus of this text.

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