My Last Will

My last will and testament. What can I leave to Doshisha where I have taught for twenty years and now that I am seventy I am finished? In the words of an ancient philosopher “I am a part of all I have met.” That is, Doshisha has contributed to my growth and development but by the same token I hope that a part of me has begun to belong to Doshisha but that as time passes my contribution whatever it is, will no more be distinguished as separate and individual and belonging to Dorothy Dessau but will become an integral part of Doshisha thinking and teaching. But what I leave to Doshisha is not from me only.

I have taught through an interpreter, Hisako Ueno and therefore, though the basic thought has been mine and consequently American, it is she who has transformed it to make it understandable to Japanese minds. Therefore my legacy to Doshisha comes from the two of us because our contributions have been intertwined and without her very able help through the years, there might not have been any legacy at all.

I am an American with Danish, English and Dutch forbears. I teach in a Japanese society and the case work which I teach has been highly developed in the United States but sometimes I wonder whether any bequest from me will be useful to Doshisha. When I came to this country my thinking was naive. I knew in general about cultural differences but I had not thought deeply about them and how they would affect the teaching of the very American product, case work. Today, though I still believe that case work can and should be practiced in Japan I am very much aware of cultural differences and their effect on the way case work is done in this country. Perhaps one of the cultural differences which most affects case work thinking is the directness of the westerner as opposed to the indirectness of the Japanese. In case work our effort is to
My Last Will

bring problems to the surface and to look at them. We talk about facing reality. We spell it out and we underline it with the client but the Japanese would prefer to have it come out with subtlety and suggestively and the question arises then as to what this does to the therapy. An interesting case in point was a recent class discussion which had to do with Miss A., a young woman with whom the student had been having regular interviews over a long period. Recently without notice to the worker, she has been cutting her interviews. The student, after waiting for her, telephones her and Miss A apologizes and says that she will come next time but often she fails to come, even then. I suggest in supervision that the student discuss with Miss A the fact that she is cutting and the meaning of this but the student feels strongly about this and tells me that Miss A “is very Japanese” and that she cannot talk with her about it directly.

The Japanese attitude of resignation to fate is the opposite to that of the westerner, and history makes clear why this is. A large number of the ancestors of the people of American settled in the United States because they wanted to get away from intolerable conditions in Europe. They thought they could change their lives in the new country and they did. They had the will and the strength to take the tremendous step of leaving their native countries and beginning over again in America. But in Buddhism there is strength in resignation to bear suffering and pain and so the Japanese has been trained through the centuries to bear his lot and not to complain. Case work has to do with facing the problem and doing something to get rid of it. There is no virtue in bearing unnecessary pain and this is quite the opposite of the Japanese attitude that “It cannot be helped.” The following situation brings out very clearly the difference in attitude between the Japanese and the foreigner. It also brings out a difference in attitude in regard to the rights of parents over children.

In January a high school student counsellor in my class told of a sixteen year old boy he was seeing regularly at the request of the home room teacher. The boy, Toshio T had twice attempted suicide and fre-
quently cut school. He appeared listless and withdrawn. The worker explained that his parents lived on the boat where they worked. From time to time they would visit Toshio and his twelve year old brother who shared an apartment with him. As the story unfolded, I became more and more angry at the parents. A couple who neglected their children as they were doing should, in my opinion, be punished. Children of sixteen and twelve should not be expected to look after themselves and if, to the parents it was more important to make money by their boat business than to care for their children, custody of the children should be taken from them. In the United States such parents would be taken to the Childrens Court to explain to the judge why they were neglecting their children and if they refused to change their way of life, the children would be taken from them. I explain all this to the ten students, all of whom have social work jobs of various kinds. They listen politely to my words but they do not understand my anger. “But these are boat children” they say “And there are hundreds like them. Couples who work in their own small boats cannot behave differently.” But I keep on insisting that some effort be made. I suggest that the worker consult the teacher of the primary school the younger boy attends. Perhaps he has problems too and together with his home room teacher, the counsellor can try to persuade the parents to change their life situation. Finally I suggest that if none of these efforts have any result, the counsellor consult with the Jido Soden Sho. Over and over again the opinion is expressed that these are boat children so that the situation is inevitable and that there is nothing the worker can accomplish even if he talks to the parents. I am terribly worried and indignant about the case and I cannot understand the apathy of the members of the group. But I am strong and persistent and finally because of this, the worker agrees to talk with the parents and explain to them his concern about Toshio. He says that perhaps they do not realize how unhappy the boy is and how unsupported he feels.
My Last Will

In the next three months, there is no mention of Toshio and what has happened to him but again in April the counsellor brings up the same case. The situation is unchanged except that the boy has become more depressed and has been cutting school more. Though the counsellor has seen mother once or twice, his talk has been casual and he has made no effort to see father or to get the parents to think of changing their way of life. To-day we have two foreign professional case workers in the group—one from Europe and the other from the United States and to-day it is they who are angry and upset and they cannot understand the Japanese attitude and the seeming indifference to the fate of the two neglected children.

Again the Japanese patiently explain to the two foreigners as they had to me that these are boat children. It is too bad that they must suffer but it cannot be helped. They explain that children belong to parents and that outsiders have no right to try to control what the parents do to their children. They cannot interfere in a family situation unless some member of the family “is doing harm to others.” This then seems to be the basis of what the foreigner thinks is gross indifference to a child’s rights—the concept that what happens between parent and child is not the concern of others except in the case of outstanding cruelty and to leave two school children, one of whom is sixteen to live alone together in an apartment is not under the circumstances considered as cruel or unnatural. The members of the group say that they would not treat their own children that way but that they cannot demand of other parents especially when they are poor that they come up to their standards of child care. This incident, I believe, illustrates a deep cultural difference of concept, three case workers from abroad, one of them from Europe and the other two American but from widely separated areas, all shocked in the same way by the story of Toshio and each wanting to take some immediate action while the Japanese take the attitude that the situation is lamentable but that it cannot be helped and that outsiders have no right
My Last Will

to criticize the parents for what they are doing and that the only way to help is to teach the two children to adjust to the situation.

"You must not cause trouble to others." This is a major precept in Japan and children are taught this from their earliest years. But in the west there is not this emphasis. We are taught that we should treat others as we, ourselves would like to be treated but there is not this tremendous emphasis on the importance of not giving trouble to others. In therapy, the western trained case worker tries not to moralize with the client and telling him not to cause trouble to others seems to the therapist to be moralizing. Rather he tries to help the client to think about his own feelings and dissatisfactions and it is only when the client talks about having caused trouble to others that the worker encourages him to elaborate on his feelings about this. This, therefore is a cultural difference about which we have to think when we try to apply the American brand of case work in Japan. There are many other such cultural differences which give food for thought but there is not space to elaborate on them in this paper. To mention a few, there is the feeling about the dignity and prestige of age. We do not have the same attitude towards it in the west. The average age of the case worker in the United States is between twenty and thirty. In doing case work with people older than himself in Japan, the young case worker has difficulties which the worker in the west does not have to face.

"You must not burden another person with your troubles." The attitude behind these words is close to that behind the attitude already discussed that "You must not cause trouble to others" but it is different. It is an attitude deep in the hearts of the Japanese people and this has to be broken down before the case worker can begin to help them. Then too, the habit of reflection is common in Japan but not in the west. Of course when people in other countries have done something which they think is wrong, they think about it and possibly repent but it is not the same as it is in Japan. Perhaps this last concept is one which somehow
My Last Will

we could incorporate into western thinking and case work practice. In spite of the cultural differences in the east and in the west, the writer believes that there is a real place for the practice of case work in Japan and it is her hope that it will continue to be taught in Doshisha University Graduate School and that those who teach it will be professors who themselves are case work practitioners. Theory must be taught but along with theory case workers must learn how to do and those who instruct them are more able teachers if they, themselves, have had experience working in the field.

My teaching at Doshisha is finished and I think about what I have in my possession to bequeath to her that is permanent and vital. I think of case work and how it has changed over the years since I first came into the profession. But has it really changed? Many of the things being "discovered" by social workers today are precisely the same as what we were taught fifty years ago but terminology is new so that the younger generation of social workers believe that they have made startling and wonderful discoveries. Perhaps this kind of thing is inevitable in any profession. Various principles become so ingrained that they are forgotten and practice becomes routine so that a re-awakening and rethinking is needed. Today in the west it is popular to say that case work is dead and that group work and community action have taken its place but this I do not believe. It is true that fresh approaches are necessary in our growing and expanding world to meet the tremendous needs of the masses and it is also true that work with the individual is expensive and time consuming and that there are not enough trained case workers to handle the many, many individuals who need help if they are to be treated one by one. It is a fact that social workers tend to swing from one extreme to another. Fifty years ago we were very community minded. With the development of psychiatric principles we became more and more engrossed with the individual until we forgot the community. Case workers, trained to give expert service to the individual, shut their eyes to com-
My Last Will

community problems and acted as though they did not exist. It was not their function to deal with them and so they ignored them. To-day, thinking is quite different and it is believed that in order to be of service the worker must be equipped not only to help the individual but to use his strength and his knowledge to make the community provide what the individual needs. He must have political and social interests and insights and must be working in many directions on many different levels. For example, if the community needs a hospital, he must go out and see that one is built. If there is an area of drug users, he must go and sit in the lobby of the apartment house where they live and as they come and go out, he must talk to them and try to get them interested in being helped. He must have the capacity and the training to work interchangeably with individuals and with groups for it is too expensive and too time consuming now-a-days always to serve people one by one. And when he does deal with one person as he must some times do, he cannot be content just to work with him but he must work with those who make up his environment—family, teachers, friends and other relatives outside the family. There must be group meetings with these people and everyone must think together. The worker must use himself, every part of him, in his work with others. He must not keep distance between himself and those he is working with but he must help them to feel close to him. Superficially perhaps it would seem that case work is different that it used to be but basic principles do not change. If this is true, long after Dorothy Dessau is no longer here as an individual, those basic social work principles which she has taught will remain and serve as a permanent foundation in the teaching of social work in Doshisha. Therefore, in this, her last will and testament, she bequeaths to those who follow her the following principles which she believes cannot die but which must be the basis for good social work thinking and practice.

1. People in every culture all over the world have the same feelings and the same emotional needs, though they are expressed differently in
My Last Will

different countries. But each individual is unique and must be thought of in terms of himself and not in comparison with other people. No two people, no matter how similar their environment, will react in the same way to the same experience.

2. Character is not inborn but its development depends to a large extent on the relationship between the young child and his parents.

3. All human beings everywhere are striving for satisfaction, physical, mental and emotional and as social workers, our aim it to help people find these.

4. To help another person we do not sit in judgement over him; nor do we try to tell him what to do but rather we try to give him support so that he can make his own decisions as to what is good for him to do.

5. The case worker is in the position of giving and helping but this does not mean that the recipient is weak and beneath him. As the worker comes to know the client, his respect for him grows and he recognizes his potential strengths and it is as case work brings these out and helps the client to be aware of them that it is successful and satisfying not only to the client but to the worker as well.

6. Listening is an important part of case work but it is only a part.

7. It is mainly through speech that people communicate. Without such communication it is difficult to have relationship between them. Therefore in case work our effort is (1) to maintain meaningful communication between worker and client and (2) to help the client to communicate with his family members and to help them to communicate with him.

8. The cause of mental illness, character defect and delinquency does not lie only in the mentally ill or delinquent person or the one with character defect. His behavior is very much determined by the behavior of other members of the family towards him and therefore in case work, we must work, not only with the mentally ill or delinquent
My Last Will

member of the family but with the whole group,—that is, we must
do not only individual therapy but family therapy.