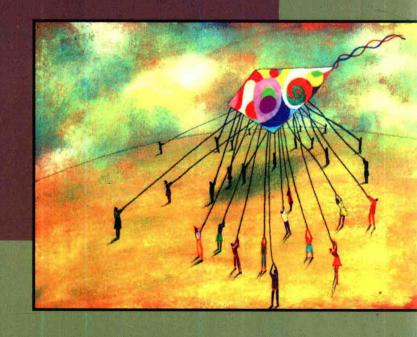
# MACRO SKILLS WORKBOOK A Generalist Approach

**SECOND EDITION** 



Karen K. Kirst-Ashman / Grafton H. Hull, Jr.

# Macro Skills Workbook

# A Generalist Approach Second Edition

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# **⋈** DEDICATION

To Vicki Vogel, our good friend and colleague

Students must practice skills in order to learn them. It is difficult, however, for instructors in classroom settings to provide students with opportunities to practice macro skills with organizations, communities, and political entities. This workbook is intended to solve that problem by offering a wide range of exercises, role plays, activities, and case scenarios that allow students to learn and employ specific macro skills based on a sound theoretical foundation.

This workbook can be used in the following four ways:

- 1. As the primary text in a practice course focusing on practice with organizations and communities
- 2. As a workbook accompanying other macro theory and practice texts
- 3. As a complement to the macro text Generalist Practice with Organizations and Communities, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2001), since the contents of the two books directly correspond
- 4. As a tool for integrating macro skill development for field internships

The content here aims to be relevant, practical, and coherent. Generalist practice is clearly defined, and macro practice skills are addressed from a generalist perspective. Specific macro practice skills are presented in a straightforward and interesting manner, and both applications to actual macro practice situations and the importance of client system strengths are emphasized throughout. Content is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate generalist practice courses.

In addition to being a readable and practical guide to working in and with organizations and communities, the workbook also addresses a major concern in social work education today: the strong tendency for students to veer away from considering jobs in which they could help communities and organizations seek and achieve social change. Instead, students are frequently drawn to the perceived psychological drama and intensity of more clinically oriented practice with individuals, families, and small groups. Here, we emphasize the importance of macro practice for practitioners working in direct service or lower level supervisory job positions. The fact is that practitioners cannot simply assume that administrators will do the effective, efficient, or even *right* thing. In such cases, the practitioner may have to accept the responsibility for bringing about necessary changes. With that in mind, this book examines organizational and community theories and links these theories to practice applications.

This workbook aims to fulfill four major goals:

- First, it proposes a *generalist* perspective that emphasizes how micro, mezzo, and macro skills are interlinked. Our generalist approach assumes that group (i.e., mezzo) skills are built upon a firm foundation of individual (that is, micro) skills. Likewise, the skills involved in working with organizations and communities (that is, macro skills) rest upon a solid base of both micro and mezzo skills. We link the three levels of practice (micro, mezzo, and macro) to show students how all three levels of skills are utilized in everyday practice situations. Whole chapters and numerous examples throughout illustrate the application of micro and mezzo skills to macro practice situations. Other explanations and exercises demonstrate for students the importance of thinking about clients and their problems in ways that take into account the client's larger environment. Students are encouraged to explore automatically alternatives beyond the individual and small group levels.
- Second, the workbook includes clearly defined, step-by-step frameworks for thinking about and initiating macro change in organizations and communities. It proposes a model for decision making concerning whether or not to pursue macro intervention in a given situation. If such an intervention is judged necessary, a procedure is suggested for effective management of the macro change process.

- Third, the workbook identifies, explains, and examines specific skills useful in macro practice, including: working with the media, using new technological advances, fundraising, grant writing, working in court settings, evaluating macro practice effectiveness, resolving ethical dilemmas in macro contexts, advocating for populations-at-risk, and managing time and stress within macro environments. The book is flexible, easily adaptable to the instructor's needs. Specific exercises can be emphasized or omitted, depending on how workbook content corresponds to other course content.
- Fourth, this workbook presents students with material that is not only relevant and interesting, but also consistent with accreditation standards. This material targets social work values and ethics, human diversity, the promotion of social and economic justice, and the empowerment of populations-at-risk. In addition, this book aims to comply with accreditation standards by adopting a generalist perspective, emphasizing evaluation of practice, focusing on the differential use of communication skills with colleagues and community members, demonstrating the appropriate use of supervision, and examining practitioner functioning in organizational structures.

Many generalist curricula are structured so that practice courses oriented toward macro practice with organizations and communities follow practice courses concerned with micro systems and mezzo systems. We, therefore, assume that students will use this workbook close to the time when they will be completing their course work and seeking employment. For that reason we include chapters on constructing resumés and finding jobs, along with chapters on stress and time management. This material is vital to students and may not be addressed elsewhere in the curriculum.

# **Acknowledgments**

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# **M** Contents in Brief

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# Chapter 1 Introduction to Generalist Practice with Organizations and Communities

## Why Do You Need This Workbook?

Most social workers first entering professional practice view their jobs as dealing primarily with individuals and families. However, they actually practice in an agency environment, and the agency functions within a community. Through their workers, agencies provide resources and services to communities, and both your agency and its community will profoundly affect your ability to practice social work.

It is almost always easier to focus on the individual client(s) in front of you than on the larger picture of the agency and the community. It is tempting to believe that administrators and politicians will assume responsibility for all administrative and political matters. Indeed, in an ideal world, those functionaries would initiate and implement any and all changes necessary for the provision of the most effective and efficient service. In the real world, however, people in power are beset by multiple pressures and distractions, and they may choose not to make—or may fail even to see a valid need for—such macro changes.

Therefore, social workers must often take a much broader approach to their practice. As a generalist practitioner you will likely have to face community problems and gaps in services. Likewise, there will probably be times when your agency is ineffective in the performance of its task, is not doing something it should do, or is simply doing the wrong thing. Holloway (1987) describes some problems facing human service organizations as "profound" and others as very "subtle": "the agency does not reach out to potential clients, the agency is insensitive to clients' definitions of problems, it serves those for whom public sympathy is high and refuses to serve others, it makes referrals for its own rather than the client's convenience, or it offers one kind of service to meet all needs" (p. 731). In the face of such community or organizational problems, it is the practitioner's professional and ethical responsibility to consider helping the agency improve its service provision to clients.

Working in an agency or organization context requires an understanding of how such organizations function in their communities as well as in the larger political environment. Agency rules and policies will monumentally affect what you can and cannot do for your clients. For instance:

- Suppose your agency requires you to complete extensive and tedious paperwork for client intakes. You might suggest shortening this procedure for the sake of both clients and workers.
- Or suppose you want to add a new program to better serve your clients: You work in a domestic violence shelter traditionally oriented to helping survivors, and you want to start a new program for the treatment of abusers.
- Or suppose you want to implement a new project. This entails writing a grant proposal requesting funds to support an extensive in-service training program to teach workers new assessment techniques

These are three examples of internal agency issues that affect clients. Just as you function as a professional in an agency, you, your clients, and your agency must work in a community context. Community issues, therefore, can have major impacts on your own and your agency's ability to perform:

 You might need to address prejudice and racial discrimination in a community torn by racial tension and hatred.

- You might want to help clients and other community residents start a crime prevention program to increase neighborhood solidarity and make residents safer in their homes and on their streets.
- Community residents might seek your help in organizing themselves to exert political pressure in order to improve garbage cleanup and increase the frequency of police patrols.

Political forces, of course, also affect communities: Suppose the state legislature (or Congress) decides to discontinue subsidies for public transportation in your state's major urban areas. Without such subsidies, public transportation can no longer operate, and most of your clients depend on this transportation to get to work, shopping areas, and school. Your agency job description probably won't include mobilizing voters and taking political action. Nevertheless, the specific social service you provide (for example, counseling or financial assistance) can depend entirely on the availability of transportation, and that need can suddenly supersede all other problems. What if you can't do your job because your clients can't get to you? Can you ethically ignore the political debate over public transportation? What macro practice skills could you use in this situation?

One of this workbook's major assumptions is that generalist practitioners require a wide range of skills because they must be prepared to help individuals, groups, families, organizations, and communities in a multiplicity of situations—no matter what specific area they work in: children and families, health, justice, education, economic status, etc. To help you function more effectively as a generalist practitioner, we provide a series of exercises and activities to improve your skills for working in and with organizations and communities.

This chapter will:

- Define generalist practice and provide a generalist perspective for macro practice
- Formulate a systems perspective for macro practice, emphasizing macro client, target, change agent, and action systems
- Explore a variety of professional roles assumed in macro practice. Examine the concept of critical thinking

#### What Is Generalist Practice?

Generalist practice is the application of an eclectic knowledge base, professional values, and a wide range of skills to target any size system for change within the context of three primary processes (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 1997).

- First, generalist practice involves working effectively within an *organizational structure* and doing so *under supervision*.
- Second, it requires the assumption of a wide range of professional roles.
- Third, generalist practice involves the application of *critical thinking skills* to the *planned change process*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Note that another term often used to describe what generalist practitioners do is *problem-solving*. This term essentially refers to the same thing as planned change, although many debate the nuances of difference. Social work's more recent emphasis on client strengths may be at odds with the more negative connotations of the word "problem." The term "change" may have more positive connotations despite the fact that most social work intervention deals with problem situations. As there is some evidence that the term planned change is more frequently used in generalist practice, we will arbitrarily use it here (Hoffman & Sallee, 1993; Landon, 1995).

#### Eclectic Knowledge Base

Some of the terms inherent in that definition may need further clarification. An eclectic knowledge base is a foundation of information and skills that includes a wide range of methods and styles taken "from various sources" (Mish, 1995, p. 365). Generalist social workers must know about many things and must involve themselves in a wide variety of helping processes—helping a homeless family, a sexually abused child, a pregnant teenager, an elderly person no longer able to care for herself, an alcoholic parent, a community ravaged by a drug abuse problem, or a public assistance agency struggling to amend its policies in conformity with new federal regulations.

#### **Professional Values**

Values are principles, qualities, and practices that a designated group, individual, or culture deems inherently desirable (Mish, 1991, pp. 1302-1303). Professional values determine right and wrong behavior.

### Wide Range of Practice Skills Targeting Any Size System

These dimensions of generalist practice are so intertwined that we address them together. Different specific skills are used with micro, mezzo, or macro systems, respectively, and the generalist perspective assumes a multi-level approach to intervention. That is, in a given situation, a generalist practitioner might have to intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and/or communities. Therefore, social workers must master the skills needed to work with any of these entities.

Micro practice focuses on planned change with and for individuals. The context is usually "intervention on a case-by-case basis or in a clinical setting" (Barker, 1999, p. 302). The focus of attention is the individual, and the social worker must know how to communicate and work on a one-to-one basis.

Mezzo practice is generalist social work practice with small groups. In macro settings, this primarily involves task groups. Here, it is important to understand group dynamics and communication patterns. Working with families combines micro and mezzo practice. Because of the intimacy and intensity of family relationships and the importance of the family context to individuals, families deserve special status and attention.

Finally, *macro practice* is designed to affect change in large systems, including organizations and communities (Barker, 1999). Macro skills enable social workers to change agency or social policies, plan and implement programs, and initiate and direct projects in agency or community contexts. These are the skills this workbook stresses.

A generalist practitioner, however, is always open to the possibility of acting—either simultaneously or sequentially—on other levels of intervention. Generalist social workers, then, must be prepared to approach a problem from a wide variety of perspectives.

The figure below illustrates how you can focus your assessment on micro, mezzo, or macro levels of intervention.