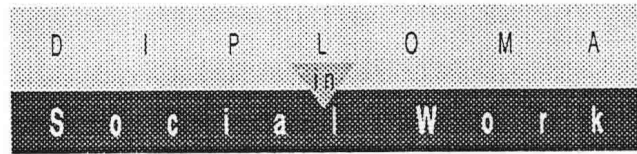


Social Work Practice I

An open learning package developed and published for the Department of Applied Social Studies

Chan Yuk-chung Chun Ping-kit Chung Kim-wah





Social Work Practice I

Chan Yuk-chung, Chun Ping-kit
& Chung Kim-wah

Volume 3



The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Department of Applied Social Studies
Educational Development Unit**

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Diploma in Social Work

Social Work Practice I

The components of this learning package are:

- Volume 1 (Units 1–10)
- Volume 2 (Units 11–20)
- Volume 3 (Units 21–30)



Social Work Practice I

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Planning and Contracting I

Preview

The first and second phases of the generic helping process – engagement and assessment respectively – are followed by the third phase – planning and contracting (an often neglected phase). The third phase is important because it is the bridge between the assessment and intervention phases. It is often neglected because many social work students and inexperienced social workers take it for granted that the outcomes of assessment will necessarily lead to successful intervention. This is only partially true. Between the assessment and intervention phases, there are two very important activities on the part of the social worker. The first activity is planning; i.e. devising an overall plan that guides an intervention. The second one is contracting which is the reaching of an agreement between the social worker and client so that both parties will be mutually committed to the plan developed. The two activities may go on in parallel, and have a common goal. However, we shall deal with them separately so that you will have a better idea of these two activities. We shall cover planning in this unit and contracting in the next unit.

Objectives

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- state the meaning of planning and explain the importance of planning in the generic helping process;
- list and describe the major components of a working plan;
- describe the principles for setting clear objectives, choosing appropriate units of attention, and identifying strategies to use in specific helping situation; and
- write a plan of action for social work intervention.

Introduction

Planning is a process which is built on our understanding of a client's problem that has been explored in the assessment phase, and it contains certain core tasks which the social worker must perform. The result of planning is the production of a working document known as a plan. It is this plan that shapes and in many instances guides our intervention. Without a working plan, our intervention will lack focus and organization. In many cases, a working plan may turn out to be ineffective. Therefore, as social workers, we need to know the tasks of planning an intervention. We also need to equip ourselves with certain planning skills in order to facilitate our implementation of these planning tasks.

Components of a plan



Read *Social Work Practice: A Generalist Approach* by Louise C. Johnson, 1992, pp. 245–253. Louise C. Johnson identifies three components of a plan. These components are, firstly, *goals and objectives*; secondly, *units of attention*; and lastly, *strategy*. Write down the main features of each of these components in the space provided.

1. Goals and objectives

2. Units of attention

3. Strategy

Goals and objectives spell out the purpose of an intervention. Units of attention indicate the systems (i.e. the individual, family, group, organization and community) that need to be changed. Strategy refers to how the unit of attention is to be changed. We shall describe each of these components in greater detail below.

Goals and objectives

Goals are the more general and long-term outcomes as expected at the final stage of an intervention, while objectives are the more specific and short-term outcomes at the intermediate stage. The process of working towards the ultimate goal is usually achieved by specifying the more immediate and more readily attained mini-goals or objectives. Achievement of the objectives leads to the attainment of the overall goals. Therefore, objectives are often regarded as outcomes at the intermediate stage of an intervention leading to the achievement of long-term goals.



Characteristics of well-set objectives

In social work practice, goal-setting is a professional task that requires considerable skills. To be able to set objectives satisfactorily in our plan for intervention, we need to know the characteristics of well-set objectives. Read carefully your textbook *Social Work Practice: A Generalist Approach* by Louise C. Johnson, 1992 pp. 245–247. List the qualities that characterize the well-set objectives.

According to Louise C. Johnson, well-set objectives are characterized by the following qualities.

Well-set objectives should be multiple and comprehensive in regard to the client's problems.

Human problems are complex with many different causes. They can seldom be reduced to a single cause. Moreover, human problems change over time. As a result, intervention objectives should be multiple to cover the different aspects of a client's problem.

Well-set objectives should be explicit and understandable to the clients.

Goals and objectives should be clearly and explicitly stated so that both the social worker and client know what to strive for in the course of intervention. Explicit goals not only prevent confusion and avoid mistrust, but also foster commitment of both the social worker and client to their respective tasks in the helping process.

Well-set objectives should be specific in terms of behaviour expected of a client.

It is better to state intervention objectives in terms of behaviour expected of a client. As an indicator of goal achievement, the chosen behaviour should be specific and measurable. This ensures that the stated objective within the specified time of intervention can be evaluated finally by both the social worker and client.

Well-set objectives should be attainable and realistic.

The objectives so set should be feasible. It is pointless to set goals that have no chance of being attained. For objectives to be attainable, we have to take into consideration such factors as the client's motivation and capacity as well as our own energy and time that are available. Always remember, an unreachable objective not only wastes time and effort of both the social worker and client, but also causes frustration to the two of them.

Well-set objectives should state the time frame within which they have to be achieved.

An objective that has a built-in time frame for its achievement serves to provide a basis for evaluation in the future. Consider the following objective: "The aim is to help Mr Chan cut down his cigarette smoking to no more than two cigarettes a day." This objective, which is explicitly stated in terms of behaviour expected of the client Mr Chan, does contain features of a well-set objective. However, there is still room for stating the objective in a much better way, for instance: "The aim is to help Mr Chan cut down his cigarette smoking to no more than 20 cigarettes a day by 31 May 1994, then to 10 cigarettes a day by 30 June 1994, and finally to no more than two cigarettes a day by 31 July 1994 when he completes the treatment programme." The difference is that the latter objective gives us a very clear time frame to evaluate the client's performance while the former does not.

Well-set objectives should be consistent with the agency functions.

As social workers, we serve to discharge the mission and functions of the agency for which we are working. This is reflected in our helping of the clients of our agency. As a result, our helping objectives should be consistent with our agency functions. If not, our agency will not be able to fund and support our intervention and we will then have little chance of achieving the stated objectives.



**LEARNING
ACTIVITY
1**

Below are two rather loosely formed statements of objectives taken from the case files of a family service agency. Try to rewrite them so that they meet the criteria of a well-set objective. Invent the details of the case where necessary.

1. On leaving the hospital, the client will need considerable support if she is to function in the family.

2. My aim in this case is to improve family communication.