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SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

A GENERALIST APPROACH

LOUISE C. JOHNSON
STEPHEN J. YANCA

SEVENTH EDITION

Social Work Practice

A Generalist Approach

Louise C. Johnson

Professor Emeritus
University of South Dakota

Stephen J. Yanca

Saginaw Valley State University

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PREFACE

Written from a generalist perspective, *Social Work Practice: A Generalist Approach,* Seventh Edition, synthesizes historical and current understandings into a logically developed sequence for learning about and teaching the practice of social work. As a textbook for beginning students, it should be particularly useful for undergraduates in introductory practice or methods courses. The material can be used on a one-semester basis or in a two-semester sequence.

Generalist social work, as developed in this text, begins with the need of an individual or a social system. The social worker explores or assesses the situation in which the need exists with the client and significant others. Based on the findings of this exploration, a plan for work to alleviate the situation is developed and an agreement contract between the worker and the client is drawn up. The focus of the plan can be an individual, a small group, a family, an organization, or a community. Once the plan is developed, the worker and client, and perhaps other persons, work to carry out the plan. At some point, the worker and client decide whether to terminate their relationship or continue to work together on further plans.

Students should have certain prerequisites before using the material covered in this book. These include:

1. At least one introductory course covering the history and development of social welfare and an introduction to the profession.
2. A broad liberal arts base providing a wide variety of knowledge pertaining to the human situation, an appreciation of history, and some understanding about the nature of knowledge.
3. Courses providing an understanding of human behavior and the social environment such as those in psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics. Courses that include understandings of human development and human diversity, including racial and ethnic differences, are particularly important.

A course on human behavior in the social environment taken in a social work program is *not* a prerequisite or a corequisite. This book provides the content needed for integration of social science content into the social work practice frame of reference. Examples of concepts and how they are used in practice situations are given as one means to assist students in applying this knowledge to practice.

The book does not attempt to present any one model or approach to social work but rather synthesizes material from a number of sources into a coherent whole. Although at points it may seem that the major focus is on work with individuals, this is not the case. It is often easier, however, for students to grasp concepts when their application to work with individuals is presented. These examples can

then be used as a base for considering applications to other systems (family, small group, organization, and community). Also, no attempt is made to consider practice with any particular population or social problem area. Rather, the assumption is made that the generalist approach can be used in a wide variety of situations, such as with older people, those who have medical and mental health problems, those who are discriminated against because of lifestyle, and those who suffer because their social situation does not provide for their basic needs. This focus, then, includes service to discrete groups such as homosexuals, the homeless, and veterans.

Plan for the Text

Part One develops five perspectives on social work practice and a framework on which the other two parts are based. Parts Two and Three consider two processes essential to the social work endeavor: the interactional process and the social work process—which is conceptualized as assessment, planning, action, evaluation, and termination.

Social work background material about minority groups and women has been emphasized in the text, which specifically addresses issues of working with these groups. The material on minority groups is not focused on working with a particular minority group but on providing the student with a framework from which to view all persons of minority status. It seeks to provide an understanding of what knowledge and attitudes are needed if a social worker is to work effectively with persons of minority status. It is expected that the learning environment will then provide specific materials for those minority groups that students are most apt to encounter in their practice of social work. Readings that are useful in the development of understanding about practice with minorities and women are suggested. In order to enhance readability, yet maintain a nonbiased gender content, the pronouns *he* and *she* are used alternately throughout the book.

The organization chosen for this text seems most appropriate to the authors, who have based it on years of experience in teaching generalist social work practice. As the concepts are developed, attention is given to building on material presented in earlier sections of the book. Repetition is used to reinforce learning. The authors assume that the present cannot be understood apart from the past; thus historical as well as contemporary aspects of the material covered are noted.

Since this is a book for beginning students, it was written with their needs in mind and does not attempt to detail all aspects of the concepts introduced. It does develop concepts so that students will have more than a superficial introduction yet not be overwhelmed by material for which they have no experiential knowledge. An attempt has been made to minimize the use of jargon yet to introduce the student to professional language. Charts and schemas are provided to help students organize considerable amounts of information into a coherent whole to maximize understanding.

The book contains many case examples. Most major sections of each chapter contain vignettes that depict the major concepts in action. In addition, longer case

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examples are provided. In some chapters, a case may be provided in several parts, illustrating several major concepts. An attempt has also been made to use case examples from practice in a wide variety of settings. In choosing case material, dimensions of size and kind of community, client age and needs, and agency purpose and source of sanction have been considered. Although much can be learned from a textbook, thorough learning takes place only as the conceptualizations are applied in actual practice experiences. Each chapter contains a summary, a statement of learning expectations for that chapter, study questions, and suggested readings for use by students and teachers. An appendix, with summaries of models of social work practice, as well as a glossary of key terms, are included at the end of the text.

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L. C. J.
S. J. Y.

Social Work Practice

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PART ONE

Perspectives on Social Work Practice

Part One provides an overview of the nature of social work practice. When the reader has an understanding of the complexity of the practice situation and has developed a framework in which to place the details, study of practice specifics can follow. The reader likely will wish to return to the concepts presented to develop a greater depth of understanding.

Social work is complex, having a wide variety of applications. Because of this, there are a number of *perspectives* regarding its nature. Five descriptions or perspectives are presented here to provide the overall framework of generalist social work practice. These are most often those referred to in social work literature and that best explain the nature of contemporary generalist social work practice. No attempt has been made to identify a particular ideology or model as the approach of this book. However, a specific approach has developed with each subsequent edition and is referred to as an *interactive-transactional* approach to generalist social work practice using ecosystems and strengths perspectives. Concepts, ideas, and understandings gained from a wide variety of practice literature and experiences are synthesized to describe the realities of generalist social work practice.

A *generalist approach* requires that the social worker assess the situation with the client and decide which systems are the appropriate *units of attention*, or focus of the work, for the change effort. As the units of attention may include an individual, a family, a small group, an agency or organization, a community, or the transactions among these, the generalist approach emphasizes knowledge that can be applied to a variety of systems. Each of the five perspectives discussed in Part One has application to all these units of attention.

Each perspective describes social work practice from contrasting but complementary views. Each may be seen as a different facet of a complex way of thinking, feeling, and doing, and each provides a way of understanding the activity that has come to be known as generalist social work practice. Together, they provide a description of the essential nature of generalist social work practice.

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