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# W Social Work Practice

A Generalist Approach

Louise C. Johnson



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# **Social Work Practice**

## ***A Generalist Approach***

***Fourth Edition***

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# --- PREFACE ---

Written from a generalist perspective, *Social Work Practice: A Generalist Approach* synthesizes historical and current understandings into a logically developed sequence for learning 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 but would be most effective 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 dysfunctional aspects of the situation is developed and a 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 explaining 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, which can then be used as a base for considering their application 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 with a wide variety of situations, such as 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 service process—which is conceptualized as assessment, planning, action, and termination.

Material about minority groups and women is incorporated into the text, which specifically addresses issues of working with these groups. The material on minority groups is not focused on work with a particular minority group but upon 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 author, based on twenty 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 author assumes that the present cannot be understood apart from the past, so that 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. Extensive use of charts and schemas is made as a means to help students organize considerable amounts of information into a coherent whole to maximize understanding.

A major change in this edition is the inclusion of many more case examples. Most chapters have a case example to illustrate the material discussed in each major section. 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 problem, 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 conceptu-

alizations 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 student and teacher. An appendix with summaries of models of social work practice is included, as well as a glossary of key terms.

## **Acknowledgments**

The formulation of social work practice presented in this book has developed from the author's teaching experiences. Encouragement and support of students and colleagues has been the major incentive for developing the formulations and for writing the book. It is to these persons, too numerous to name, that the book is dedicated.

I also wish to acknowledge the reviewers who critiqued this manuscript at various stages: Richard Blake, Seton Hall University; Barbara McGregor, Saginaw Valley State University; Emma Quartaro, Seton Hall University; and Jack Sellers, University of Northern Alabama.

L. C. J.

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## PART ONE

# Perspectives on Social Work Practice

PART ONE FOCUSES ON the assumptions that underlie social work activity. Social work is complex, with a wide variety of applications and no universally accepted definition. Because of the complexity of social work practice, there are a number of descriptions—termed *perspectives* here—of its nature, and five of these are discussed in Part One. The perspectives were chosen as those most often referred to in social work literature and those that, when taken together, best explain the nature of contemporary generalist social work practice. The author makes no attempt to identify a particular ideology or model as the approach of this book. Rather, concepts, ideas, and understandings gained from a wide variety of practice literature and experiences are synthesized so as to describe the realities of generalist social work practice as perceived by the author.

The perspectives discussed here can be applied to social work when practiced from a generalist approach. **A generalist approach requires that the social worker assess the situation with the client and decide which system is the appropriate unit of attention, or focus of the work, for the change effort.** As the unit of attention may be an individual, a family, a small group, an agency or organization, or a community, the generalist approach emphasizes knowledge that can be applied to a variety of systems. The knowledge base is developed throughout the book, but specifically in Parts One and Three; Part Two is more particular regarding various systems. Each of the five perspectives discussed in Part One has application to all the units of attention noted above.

Each of the perspectives describes social work practice from contrasting but complementary views. Together, they provide a description of the essential nature of generalist social work practice. Parts Two and Three of the book further develop how a social worker responds to the social-functioning needs of people both individually and collectively in situations that impact on that functioning. Thus, the entire book is a statement about the nature of generalist social work practice.

The first two perspectives address the “why” of social work practice. Perspective one, “Social Work as a Response to Concern/Need,” discusses the basic reason for the



social work endeavor. It develops the concepts of need, common human needs, human diversity, social systems needs, and social functioning. The second perspective, "Social Work as a Developing Profession," examines practice historically in order to understand why practice exists in its current form. Chapter 2 also introduces the concepts of profession, assessment, person in the situation, relationship, process, and intervention.

The last three perspectives discuss the "how" of social work practice. Perspective three, "Social Work as a Creative Blending of Knowledge, Values, and Skills," discusses how knowledge, values, and skills are used in understanding and taking action in relation to social-functioning needs. The concepts developed are knowledge, values, skills, and creative blending. Perspective four, "Social Work as a Problem-Solving Process," presents a way of thinking about the process of social work or the steps used in responding to need. It develops the concepts of problem and process. Perspective five, "Social Work as Intervention into Human Transactions," discusses the way in which the social worker brings about change. It develops the concepts of intervention, transaction, and influence.

With the understandings gained from Part One, the reader will be prepared to study the actions of a social worker as he or she responds to human needs in the social-functioning arena.