

ADVANCED
GENERALIST
PRACTICE
WITH AN
INTERNATIONAL
PERSPECTIVE

MARIA O'NEIL McMAHON



Advanced Generalist Practice

With an International Perspective

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Dedicated to Social Workers everywhere
as they respond to their call
to solidarity with people in need

PREFACE

The meaning of “generalist practice” in social work was clarified in the United States as the need for baccalaureate-level education for beginning professional social work practice became recognized by both the National Council on Social Work Education and the National Association of Social Workers in the 1970s. The need for the development and understanding of “advanced generalist practice” persists in the 1990s. Just as generalist practice developed due to changes and demands in the social and professional environment, advanced generalist practice is finding its identity in response to emerging needs and demands within the profession and within the social, national, and international environments. It took 10 to 15 years of searching and refining before a general consensus became apparent among social workers as to the meaning of generalist practice. Struggles and debates on the subject included (1) definition (generic versus generalist), (2) scope (public versus private agencies, mental health settings versus social service settings), (3) method (problem-solving process versus casework, group work, community organization), and

(4) theoretical orientation (selected theoretical perspective or eclectic use of multiple theories).

Although little debate or resistance remains regarding these topics for generalist practice, the search for understanding and agreement at the advanced generalist level continues. For example, the term “advanced generalist practice” may be called “generalist practice at the advanced level” or “advanced practice from a generalist perspective.” Debate continues regarding the appropriateness of advanced generalists’ engaging in clinical practice in mental health settings or in private clinical practice. It may be argued, too, that certain theories or interventions (models or methods) are too specialized for advanced generalists to demonstrate with competence. The relationship between generalist and advanced generalist practice is also a question in need of clarification.

This text is an attempt to further the dialogue and offer a guiding model that is in step with contemporary needs and developments within the profession and the extended social environment. It provides answers to the what, where, how, and why of advanced generalist practice. The interrelationship between generalist and advanced generalist practice as kindred and progressively connected practice models is emphasized. Without losing the basic characteristics of generalist practice, which is primarily a direct practice model, advanced generalist practice is presented as an integrated practice model that uses key concepts and processes in direct and indirect practice roles. Building on the direct practice model of generalist practice, emphasis is given to indirect practice roles for holistic advanced generalist practice. Several examples offered throughout the text were given by advanced generalists practicing or teaching in different countries.

A reader of this text would benefit from having first read my book, *The General Method of Social Work Practice: A Problem-Solving Approach* (Prentice-Hall, 1990). It was first published in 1984 in response to the need for a guide for action and integration of the various dimensions of generalist practice for entry-level workers as they problem solved with diverse systems. This author sees a need today for a sequel to respond to a current need in social work education and practice for guidance and integration in advanced generalist practice. The model of advanced generalist practice presented in this book responds to a need for practitioners with a global awareness in an increasingly technological postmodern environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express gratitude to all who helped to make this book a reality, particularly those colleagues who contributed to the chapters of the book, including Sarah DeLancey, Nancy M. Hall, Linner Ward Griffin, Elbert (Al) Siegel, Marilyn A. Biggerstaff, Frank R. Baskind, and Cary Jensen.

Sarah DeLancey is the Regional Director of the North Carolina Division of Social Services. She administers the delivery of social services in 33 county departments in eastern North Carolina. Her professional background includes experience as manager, consultant, supervisor, teacher, and direct service provider. She has served as an adjunct faculty member in the East Carolina University School of Social Work. Nancy Hall is a Regional Trainer for the North Carolina Division of Social Services. She coordinates and arranges training for all employees of 16 county departments of social services. Her prior roles in the Division of Social Services have included Director of Social Services, Staff Developer, Coordinator, and Assistant Program Director. She has also been a faculty member in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Throughout the state of North Carolina, all new employees

of the Division of Social Services receive an orientation in which they are introduced to generalist practice as presented in Chapter 1 of this text. In Chapter 6, Sarah DeLancey and Nancy Hall discuss the various roles of the advanced generalist administrator, offering numerous firsthand examples from their years of experience in public social services.

Linner Ward Griffin is the lead Professor of the Health/Aging Sequence in the Masters of Social Work program at East Carolina University's School of Social Work. Her research, publications, and teaching are primarily in the areas of health, mental health, research, policy, practice, and gerontology. She is the author of the ten volume practice monograph series called *A Guide to Adult Protective Services*, 1990. In Chapter 7, Dr. Griffin gives a thorough overview of contemporary research with emphasis on research and technology for advanced generalist practice.

Elbert (Al) Siegel is the Director of the Social Work Program in the School of Social Work and Human Services at Southern Connecticut State University. His practice experience has included working in Jewish community centers and the field of psychiatry, and directing a resettlement agency for immigrants in Israel. Case examples in Chapters 2 and 8 of this text reflect some of his experiences while practicing in Israel. Currently, Dr. Siegel's research and publications are in the areas of resettlement, acculturation, and orientation processes of larger organizations. In Chapter 8, he contributes valuable insight and information for understanding and integrating social policy into the advanced generalist perspective.

Marilyn A. Biggerstaff is Professor of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University. She received her Doctorate in Social Work from the University of Southern California. Dr. Biggerstaff teaches research and social work practice and conducts research in the practice of social work and the legal regulation of the profession. She is in private practice in Williamsburg, Virginia. Frank R. Baskind is Professor and Dean of the School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University. He previously served as Dean of the School of Social Work and Human Services at Southern Connecticut State University and Director of the Undergraduate Social Work Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Dr. Baskind conducts research in generalist social work practice. Cary Jensen received his Master of Social Work Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University. He has been a practicing clinical social worker for 10 years and is currently on the clinical staff at the Virginia Treatment Center for Children, Medical College of Virginia Hospital. In addition, he is a social work doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University. In Chapter 9, Marilyn Biggerstaff, Frank Baskind, and Cary Jensen share results of a study they conducted using 14 focus groups of practicing social workers. Their findings communicate changing practice needs of particular relevance to advanced generalist practice.

I am deeply grateful to Sister Mary Joan Cook of Saint Joseph College in West Hartford, Connecticut, for her review of the manuscript and helpful edi-

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Maria O'Neil McMahon

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1

Advanced Generalist Practice

THE FOUNDATION

In 1958, the National Association of Social Workers identified a “Working Definition of Social Work Practice” to be used for developing a “common base” for practice.¹ The base for social work is a generic foundation consisting of five components that are found at the roots of any profession. They are purpose, sanction, values, knowledge, and method (Diagram 1–1). Social work educators and practitioners have identified specific content in each of these five areas to distinguish social work from other professions (Diagram 1–2). All accredited social work education programs teach the generic foundation of social work.

Basically, the primary *purpose* of social work is to enhance social functioning. Social workers develop the capacities of individuals and the resources of society to achieve the highest quality of life for both the individual and society. *Sanction* is defined as “authoritative permission.”² Sanction to practice social work comes from a variety of sources, including governmental or voluntary