
GENERALIST

SOCIAL WORK

PRACTICE

An Empowering Approach



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Generalist Social Work Practice: An Empowering Approach

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Preface

Generalist social work practice reflects the growing realization that people do not exist in isolation from their social and physical environments. The generalist perspective builds on the concept of human interrelatedness. It recognizes the necessity that social workers develop knowledge and skills to work with human systems of all types and sizes to fulfill the profession's mandates of upholding human dignity and promoting social justice. Even social work practitioners who specialize benefit from the wide-angle view that generalist practice provides. The generalist perspective offers a comprehensive understanding of human functioning and multiple opportunities for solutions.

The knowledge base about human systems that supports a generalist approach emphasizes that what happens to one of us affects us all. We are all in this together. When we work to ensure the rights and develop the strengths of all of the world's citizens, each one of us benefits from the resources we create. Everyone has something to offer and, if we invest in the opportunities for each one of us to do so, our investment accrues. When we successfully pool our efforts, we each end up with more than we could ever achieve on our own.

The approach to social work practice presented in *Generalist Social Work Practice* acknowledges our interdependence and celebrates the resources that collaboration creates. It maintains a broad based view of human functioning and explores processes for activating resources in people and their environments. Moreover, it specifically focuses on the nature of the helping relationship itself as a resource for both workers and clients. Collaboration is the heart of this empowering approach. We believe in the creative synergy of collaborative processes. It is how we wrote this book.

Plan of the Book

Generalist Social Work Practice organizes material into four parts. Part One, "Social Work Practice Perspectives," explores the purpose of social work to enhance human functioning and promote social justice from a generalist practice orientation. Chapter 1

presents generalist social work as an integration of practice, policy, and research. Chapter 2 explicates the ecosystems view of person and environment transactions. Chapter 3 surveys the current influences on practice of empowerment, the strengths perspective, and competence-centered social work. Chapter 4 reframes the traditional problem-solving paradigm to emphasize empowering processes for social work practice.

Part Two, “The Dialogue Phase,” examines the practice processes related to constructing empowering client system/worker relationships. Specifically, the chapters in this section cover the skills, knowledge, and value orientations necessary in preparing for a collaborative social worker/client relationship, forming partnerships, articulating challenges, identifying client system strengths, and defining the initial direction for the helping relationship. Chapter 5 describes how to prepare a productive frame of reference for initiating the helping relationship. Chapter 6 features practice skills for forming a collaborative partnership with clients and highlights issues of confidentiality. Chapter 7 explores communication skills and introduces listening and responding skills to facilitate clients’ dialogue on challenges. Chapter 8 presents practice skills for identifying strengths, including cultural strengths. Chapter 9 examines skills for setting preliminary goals and defining a direction to orient assessment and identify priority needs.

Part Three, “The Discovery Phase,” presents solution-oriented processes for assessment and planning in generalist social work practice. Chapters survey collaborative approaches to exploring and analyzing the capacity of personal, interpersonal, and societal resources. Chapter 10 details practice skills and techniques associated with assessment. Chapter 11 describes analytic processes to evaluate the capabilities of resources for meeting the demands of clients’ situations. Chapter 12 includes skills in delineating goals and objectives and constructing action plans.

Part Four, “The Development Phase,” features social work skills for implementing, evaluating, and stabilizing change efforts. Empowering processes include activating personal and interpersonal and organizational resources, expanding societal opportunities, recognizing success, and integrating gains. Chapter 13 explores strategies for implementing plans of action. Chapter 14 explicates ways to expand opportunities in social institutions through case management, resource development, and legislative advocacy. Chapter 15 presents skills for social work research and evaluation including single-system designs. Chapter 16 considers empowering ways to end the helping relationship and stabilize gains achieved through the social work intervention.

Appendix A includes the NASW Code of Ethics. Appendix B describes the fictitious Northside Community service network from which all text examples are drawn. These materials orient students to the professional and community contexts of social work practice.

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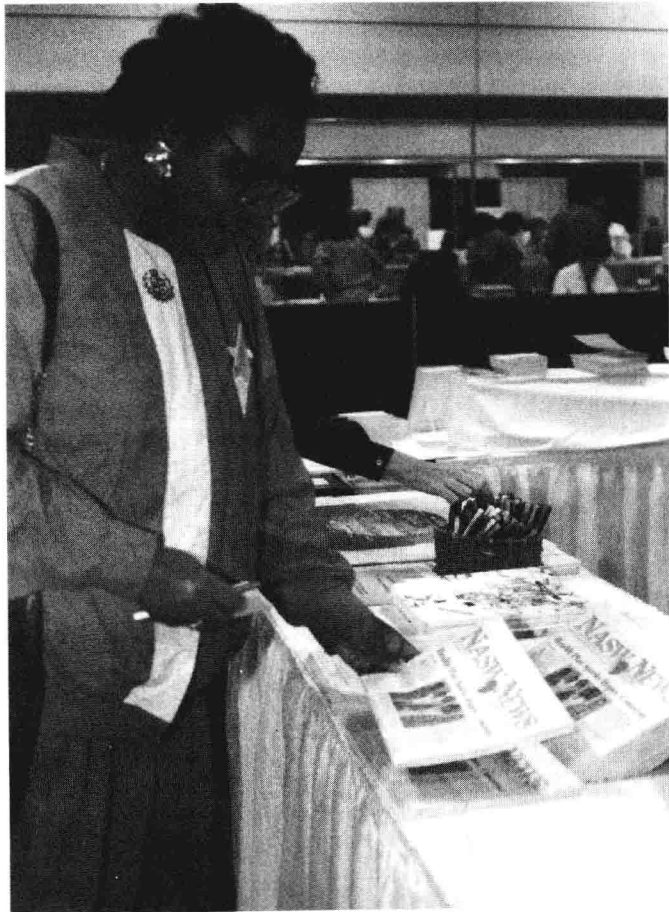
Social Work Practice Perspectives

Social workers strive to create order and enhance opportunities for people in an increasingly complex world. The social work profession charges its members with the responsibility of promoting competent human functioning and fashioning a responsive and just society. To achieve these goals, social workers require a clear understanding of the way things are and a positive view of the way things could be. Social work practitioners fine-tune their vision by incorporating into it professional perspectives on human behavior, social environments, and approaches to change.

Part One describes the perspectives that sharpen the vision of social workers and equips them to bring social work knowledge, values, and skills into the worlds of the clients they engage. Specifically, it offers information about generalist social work, an approach that prepares practitioners to work with a variety of human systems, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The chapters in this section discuss generalist social workers and the theories, orientations, and approaches that support their work. These perspectives guide generalist practitioners to an empowering practice approach that views human behavior in context and recognizes the inherent strengths and potential capabilities of human systems.

C h a p t e r 1

Generalist Social Work Practice



“What does your family need?” With this question, Andrea Barry, a family preservation worker, begins work with the Clemens family. She carefully studies the reactions to her question on the faces of the family members who are gathered with her around their kitchen table. She reads caution, apprehension, maybe even a little anger, and yes, there it is, a growing sense of surprise, of intrigue with her approach. As a social worker with Northside Family Services’ family preservation program, Andrea has seen this before. Preparing to fend off the blame of abuse or neglect, families involved with the program are often taken off guard by the careful, nonjudgmental phrasing of her questions. With the question, “What does your family need?” Andrea looks toward the future, toward things families can still do something about, toward the discovery of workable solutions. In other words, she sets the stage for empowering families, focusing on their strengths, and promoting their competence.

Andrea’s question embodies her view of how families might find themselves in this predicament. To ask, “What is your problem?” doesn’t make sense to Andrea who sees family difficulties arising from the challenge of scarce resources rather than emanating from something that the family is doing wrong. In fact, Andrea believes that even those families referred by the Child Protective Unit for work with the family preservation program are actually doing a lot right. She regards families as doing the best they can with currently available resources. So, of course, in trying to overcome their present difficulties, the subsequent question becomes, “What else do families need?” rather than “What else is wrong?” Her approach presumes that families are capable of making changes; it prompts them into collaborating with her as partners in the change process.

Andrea has learned from experience that different families need different constellations of resources for optimal functioning. Some family members need to understand themselves and each other better. Others need information about how to cope with the inevitable and also the unexpected changes that occur throughout their lives. Oftentimes, isolated families benefit from connection to the support of interpersonal relationships. Still other families need to access resources from within the community. Andrea teams with families to manage a network of social services selecting among possibilities ranging from housing assistance to job training to crisis child care to child abuse prevention.

Andrea also recognizes the need to broaden her focus, to look beyond the needs of individual families in order to serve their best interests. Many times, families, confined by forces considered beyond their personal control, seek a professional voice to speak out for them at the level of government, policy, and resource allocation. They certainly need power and resources to take charge of their own direction in a world that has grown complex and confusing.

As Andrea allows space for the Clemens family members to respond to her question, she reminds herself that this family is unique. She knows to attend to the ways that her clients are similar as well as to the ways they are different. As an African American woman, Andrea herself is sensitive to the confinement of prejudgments. The strengths the Clemens family members have to offer and the challenges they face are particular to their own situation. In other words, Andrea thoughtfully examines the assumptions she makes about people based on their obvious similarities in order not to ignore their inevitable differences.