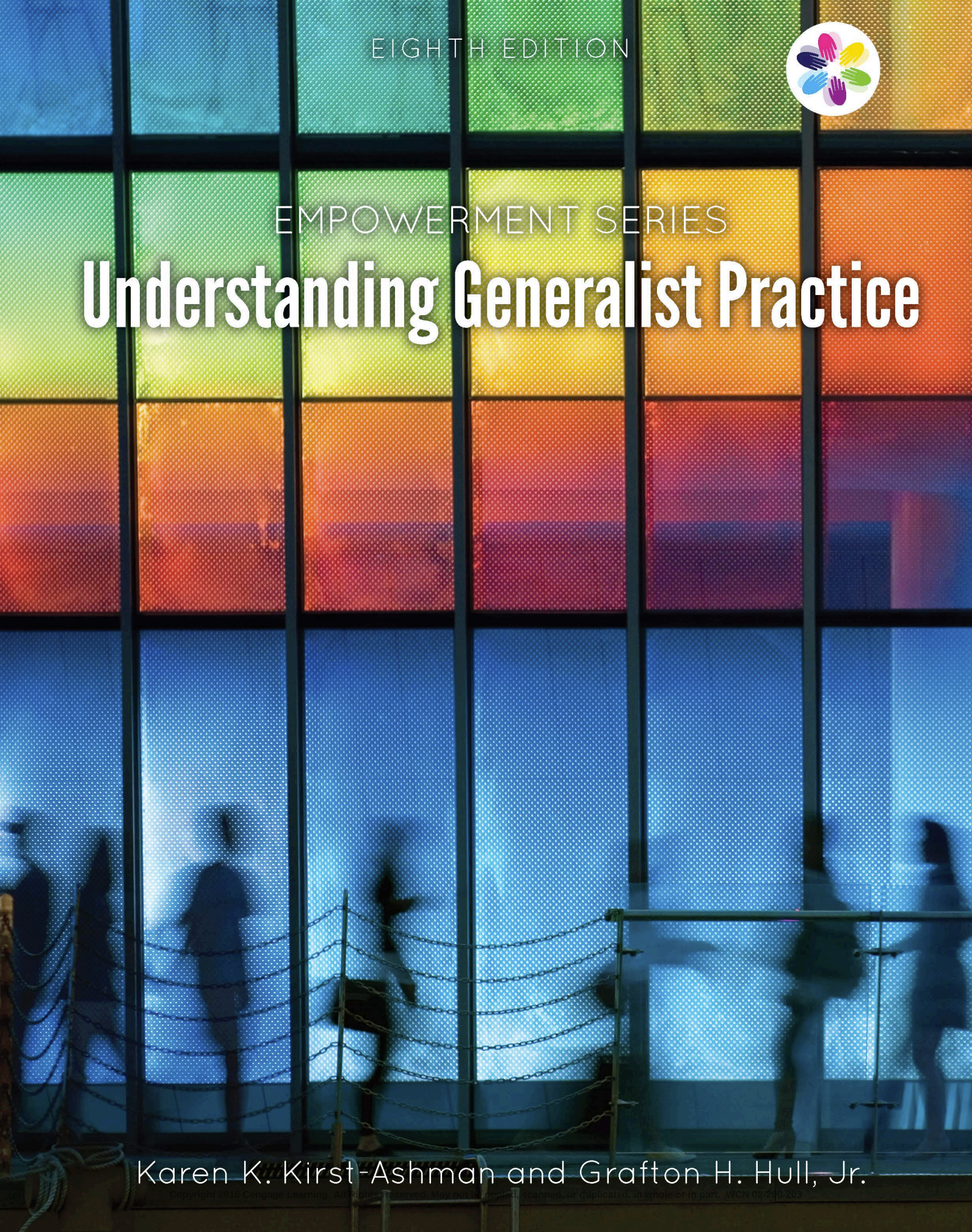

Understanding Generalist Practice

Eighth Edition

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Professor Emerita, University of Wisconsin–Whitewater

Grafton H. Hull, Jr.
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***Understanding Generalist Practice*, Eighth Edition**
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To Linda Kirst and Jim Spielman, the best relatives anyone could ask for

To my grandchildren, Patrick, Tatiana, Gregory, Ilsa, Marcus, Michael, Savannah, and Jonah

About the Authors

Karen K. Kirst-Ashman, BSW, MSSW, PhD, has been a full professor and was a former chairperson in the Social Work Department at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, where she taught for 28 years. She is certified as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the State of Wisconsin. She earned her BSW degree in 1972 and MSSW in 1973 at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and her PhD in Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. She has worked as a practitioner and administrator in child welfare and mental health agencies. She received the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater's Excellence in Teaching Award in 1986 and the University Outstanding Teaching Award in 2007. She has been a member of the board of directors of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), in addition to being an accreditation site visitor. She is also a current member of CSWE, the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). She has served on the editorial board of *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* and as a consulting editor for many social work journals, including the *Journal of Social Work Education*. She is the author of numerous publications, articles, and reviews concerning social work and women's issues. Other books she has authored or coauthored include: *Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare: Critical Thinking Perspectives* (5th ed.), *Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment* (10th ed.), *Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment* (4th ed.), *The Macro Skills Workbook* (2nd ed.), and *Generalist Practice with Organizations and Communities* (5th ed.).

Grafton H. Hull, Jr. received his BS in Sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and his MSW from Florida State University. He received his Doctor of Education degree with a major in Counseling, Guidance, and Personnel Services from the University of South Dakota. Dr. Hull served as Captain in the U.S. Army, providing social work services at Fort Knox, Kentucky, immediately after completing his MSW degree. In addition to military social work (working with individuals, families, and groups), he worked as a social worker and supervisor in the field of child welfare and juvenile probation in Wisconsin.

Dr. Hull has taught at Fort Knox Community College, Morningside College, the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, Missouri State University, Indiana University Northwest, and the University of Utah. He has been a faculty member, department chair, program director, director of a school of social work, and Special Assistant to the Senior Vice President for Accreditation. He has taught BSW, MSW, and PhD courses in social work.

Professional activities include serving as president of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD); as site visitor, nominations committee member, accreditation commissioner, and board member of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE); and as president of the Wisconsin Council on Social Work Education and Missouri Consortium of Social Work Education Programs. He also served as a board member of the Indiana Association for Social Work Education, and the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research.

Dr. Hull has been a consultant to over 50 social work programs in the United States and Canada and a member of the editorial board or consulting editor for the *Journal of Social Work Education*, *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *Advances in Social Work*, and *Areté*. He also served as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*.

His scholarship includes eight books in social work coauthored with esteemed colleagues, multiple book chapters, and more than two dozen publications in social work journals. He also served as a founder and principal in the Baccalaureate Educational Assessment Project. Dr. Hull's honors include the Mary Shields McPhee Memorial Award for Faculty Excellence in Research (Utah), Significant Lifetime Achievement Award (BPD), Social Work Educator of the Year (Wisconsin CSWE), President's Medal of Honor (BPD), and multiple certifications of appreciation and achievement for community and professional service. His biography is included in *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who in the World*.

Brief Contents

Contents

Preface

Understanding Generalist Practice is a guide to generalist social work practice. It provides a conceptual framework useful for viewing the world from a generalist perspective. Within this framework, the text has two primary goals. First, it aims to teach students the relationship-building, interviewing, and problem-solving skills necessary for them to work with individual clients. These skills form the basis for social work practice with systems of other sizes, such as families and groups (mezzo) and organizations and communities (macro).

The text's second major goal is to introduce students to the breadth of generalist practice. It helps them maintain a focus not only on the needs of individual clients but on those of families, groups, organizations, and communities. The book's intent is to structure how students think about clients and their problems so that they automatically explore alternatives beyond the individual level. Links are clearly made among multiple levels of practice. A systems approach aids students' understanding of how perspectives shift when changing from one practice level to another.

This book is designed for either an introduction to generalist social work practice course or one stressing skill development for working with individuals and families. It grounds students from the very beginning of the practice sequence with a strong generalist perspective.

Content is practical and highlights the usefulness of the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM) in the planned change (or problem-solving) approach used in much of social work practice. GIM provides clear guidelines for how students might proceed through the helping process, while allowing a wide range of flexibility for the application of theories and specific skills. Students will gain a foundation upon which they can continue to add and build skills. GIM, as a unifying framework, is intended to help students make sense of the breadth and depth of the social work profession.

Understanding Generalist Practice avoids focusing on any particular theoretical model but rather addresses a core of carefully chosen skills for working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. They are those deemed to be most useful to generalist practitioners in a wide variety of settings. Such core skills include, for example, those involved in working with families and recording information.

Social work ethics and values are another major dimension of the text, and an entire chapter addresses professional values. Content goes on to examine ethical dilemmas commonly encountered in practice and to suggest solutions. Sensitivity to human diversity and populations-at-risk is paramount, with individual chapters devoted to cultural competence and to gender sensitivity. Additionally, content on human diversity is incorporated throughout the text. Moreover, another full chapter discusses advocacy in response to oppression.

In order to be usable and practical, content is clearly presented. Numerous case examples demonstrate how skills are applied in real social work settings. The problem-solving model itself is graphically illustrated to provide the clearest picture possible of its implementation. Research applications in terms of evaluating one's own practice are emphasized. An entire chapter is devoted to developing relevant evaluation skills.

Additionally, content and specific skills are elaborated upon in a number of practice areas (for example, child abuse and neglect, crisis intervention, alcohol and other substance abuse, and working with older adults). Such content areas are targeted for a number of reasons: they are among those often encountered in practice, they present excessively difficult situations for untrained workers to address, and/or they are not consistently covered in another area of the required social work curriculum.

In summary, we believe *Understanding Generalist Practice* will be a practical and flexible tool for students. We aim to emphasize the unique nature of social work as a valuable helping profession and believe students will find this book's content interesting and enjoyable.

Relationship Between Content and the *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) and Professional Competencies

This book addresses accreditation standards and competencies established by the Council on Social Work

Education (CSWE).[1] Our intent is to facilitate programs' ability to link content provided in this textbook with expectations for student learning and accomplishment. As is true in almost all learning, students must acquire knowledge before they are expected to apply it to practice situations.

CSWE has identified 31 component behaviors that operationalize nine core competencies that are critical for professional practice (CSWE, 2015). For clarity, we have alphabetized the component behaviors listed under each competency. **Multicolor helping hands icons** located within paragraphs clearly show the linkage between content in the textbook and competencies with their component behaviors. Each icon is labeled with the specific behavior or competency that relates directly to the content conveyed in the paragraph. For example, an icon might be labeled EP [Educational Policy] 3b, which is the behavior to "engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2015, EP, p. 7). Accredited social work programs are required to prove that students have mastered all component behaviors for competence as specified in the EPAS. (Please refer to http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=81660 for the EPAS document.)

For all icons, **Competency Notes** are provided at the end of each chapter. These Competency Notes explain the relationship between chapter content and CSWE's competencies and their component behaviors. They also list page numbers where icons are located and this content is discussed. A summary chart of the icons' locations in all chapters and their respective competency or practice behavior is placed in the inside front cover of the book.

MindTap

MindTap for *Understanding Generalist Practice* engages and empowers students to produce their best work—consistently. By seamlessly integrating course material with videos, activities, apps, and much more, MindTap creates a unique learning path that fosters increased comprehension and efficiency.

For students:

- MindTap delivers real-world relevance with activities and assignments that help students build critical thinking and analytic skills that will transfer to other courses and their professional lives.
- MindTap helps students stay organized and efficient with a single destination that reflects what's important to the instructor, along with the tools students need to master the content.
- MindTap empowers and motivates students with information that shows where they stand at all times—both individually and compared to the highest performers in class.

Additionally, for instructors, MindTap allows you to:

- Control what content students see and when they see it with a learning path that can be used as-is or matched to your syllabus exactly.
- Create a unique learning path of relevant readings, multimedia, and activities that move students up the learning taxonomy from basic knowledge and comprehension to analysis, application, and critical thinking.
- Integrate your own content into the MindTap Reader using your own documents or pulling from sources like RSS feeds, YouTube videos, websites, Google Docs, and more.
- Use powerful analytics and reports that provide a snapshot of class progress, time in course, engagement, and completion.

In addition to the benefits of the platform, MindTap for *Understanding Generalist Practice* contains the following components, broken into a logical folder structure:

- Start: A polling activity and reflection activity get students thinking about relevant topics they are about to explore in-depth in the chapter.
- Read: Students read the chapter content
- Discuss: Using YouSeeU, students will engage with classmates to discuss chapter topics
- Practice: Students analyze cases and respond to quiz questions, as well as watch videos highlighting social work scenarios and respond to quiz questions.
- Review and Reflect: Students can prepare for exams by taking a practice quiz and by completing a reflection exercise that ties to the one he or she completed in the Start folder.

1. Please note that this content addresses standards posed in the EPAS. In no way does it claim to verify compliance with standards. Only the CSWE Commission on Accreditation can make those determinations.

Additional Supplements

Online Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual (IM) contains a variety of resources to aid instructors in preparing and presenting text material in a manner that meets their personal preferences and course needs. It presents chapter-by-chapter suggestions and resources to enhance and facilitate learning.

Cengage Learning Testing Powered by Cognero

Cognero is a flexible, online system that allows instructors to author, edit, and manage test bank content as well as create multiple test versions in an instant. Instructors can deliver tests from their school's learning management system, their classroom, or wherever they want.

Online PowerPoint®

These vibrant Microsoft® PowerPoint® lecture slides for each chapter assist instructors with lectures by providing concept coverage using images, figures, and tables directly from the textbook.

New Content

Each chapter cites chapter learning objectives at the beginning and summarizes relevant content at the end. Definitions have also been updated throughout. Other new additions include the following:

Chapter 1

- The 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards
- Identification of additional aspects of human diversity including disability and ability (formerly referred to with the term *ability*), marital status, religion/spirituality (formerly simply *religion*), and tribal sovereign status

Chapter 2

- Failures in using empathy

Chapter 3

- Additional material on online support groups and participatory action research

Chapter 4

- More content on interdisciplinary collaboration
- Additional information on negotiation
- More discussion on preparing news releases
- Increased discussion on writing skills for electronic communication
- Updated content on needs assessment

Chapter 5

- Additional information on assessment
- Additional example about assessment of older adults
- Identification of a rating scale for assessing strengths of adolescents

Chapter 7

- A new case example involving emotional/psychological child maltreatment
- Updated statistics on legal and illegal immigration

Chapter 8

- More on locating valid and reliable instruments for assessments
- Updated information about online resources
- More on sustainability of change efforts

Chapter 9

- A new format for family resource assessment
- Updated statistics on single-parent families
- New content on cultural competence with families

Chapter 10

- Terms used to describe various sexual orientations

Chapter 11

- Updated references to the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards that specifically relate to ethical issues and dilemmas.

Chapter 12

- Updated information about people with disabilities

Chapter 13

- Updated statistics on women's income
- Updated definitions concerning sexual assault
- New content concerning the consequences of sexual assault
- New content involving advocacy on the behalf of battered women
- Additional content on counseling battered women and developing a safety plan
- New content on the international picture of domestic violence
- Updated statistics on women in leadership positions and the glass ceiling

Chapter 14

- Updated information on legislative advocacy

Chapter 15

- More on working with adults having disabilities
- Discussion of the role of empathy in case management
- Increased research on the effectiveness of case management with different client groups

Chapter 16

- Updated content on the use of e-mails and memos
- New information on the use of texting in agency settings
- Updated examples of electronic security breaches

Related Texts

Understanding Generalist Practice introduces generalist practice and targets skills for working with individuals and families while introducing work with larger systems. Another book in the Empowerment Series, *Generalist Practice with Organizations and Communities* (2018), uses the Generalist Intervention Model introduced in this book and covers the additional knowledge and skills for work with organizations and communities. Both can be used to integrate a generalist perspective at any point in the practice sequence.

Acknowledgments

No book is produced without the help, support, and cooperation of many people. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to those who have assisted with the continued success of this book. They include Steve Ferrara of Nelson-Hall, who initially supported and encouraged us to pursue the book, and Julie Martinez, Product Manager at Cengage Learning, who provided exceptional insight and synchronization, and whose enthusiasm and energy kept us improving our efforts. Several other people played key roles in the preparation of the manuscript, and we thank each of them. They include Stephen Lagos, Product Assistant at Cengage, whose conscientious, perceptive work and expert assistance greatly facilitated the writing process; our great friend and colleague Vicki Vogel, who continually exceeds our expectations in her support and talents in creating supplementary technical materials and in indexing; Nicole Sala, Product Information Specialist at Cengage, who demonstrates exceptional marketing skills; Michelle Clark, Content Project Manager, who has done an excellent job of guiding us through the production process; and Jitendra Kumar, Project Manager at MPS Limited, for his conscientious, responsive, and insightful help and coordination. We wish to show appreciation to our spouses, Nick Ashman and Jannah Mather, whose incredible support, encouragement, and patience continue to sustain us. Karen Kirst-Ashman gives special thanks to her nieces and nephews for the inspiration they provide: Maggie, Becca, Laura, Daniel, Danny, Andrea, Joel, Taylor, Sydney, Aiden, Brittany, Emmanuel, and Lucas.

We would also like to acknowledge those colleagues and students from across the country who have sent their suggestions and recommendations for improving each edition. A distinctive thank-you goes to Tiffany Jo Marko of Disability Connections for her thoughtful observations and suggestions. We would especially like to thank our reviewers, who provided us with expert and excellent feedback to improve our work. They include:

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1 Introducing Generalist Practice: The Generalist Intervention Model

Bob Thomas/The Image Bank/Getty Images

Learning Objectives (LOs)

This chapter will help prepare students to:

- LO 1-1 Employ a unique approach to helping in the field of social work.
- LO 1-2 Define the process of generalist practice by describing its inherent concepts.
- LO 1-3 Acquire and apply an eclectic knowledge base to practice.
- LO 1-4 Apply the systems theory theoretical framework to practice.
- LO 1-5 Apply the ecological theoretical framework to practice.
- LO 1-6 Acquire professional values and apply professional ethics to practice.
- LO 1-7 Recognize a wide range of practice skills to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
- LO 1-8 Emphasize principles involving values that underlie generalist practice.
- LO 1-9 Appreciate and stress the importance of human diversity.
- LO 1-10 Advocate for human rights, and pursue social, economic, and environmental justice.
- LO 1-11 Demonstrate a wide range of professional roles.
- LO 1-12 Define critical thinking skills and apply them to practice.

LO 1-13 Incorporate research-informed practice.

LO 1-14 Follow a planned change process.

LO 1-15 Employ the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM), which uses a seven-step planned change focus.

DACEY, AGE 26, IS THE MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN. She hasn't seen or heard from the children's father for over a year. To make ends meet, she works as a waitress and bartender for as many shifts as she can get. She only has a 10th-grade education and is struggling to keep her family fed, clothed, and housed. Often she's forced to leave Danny, her eldest at age 8, in charge when she can't find or afford a babysitter. When she gets home, she's beat and finds it's easy to get cranky and impatient with the kids. Although she hasn't given them specific rules for behavior, she expects them to "be good" and not add to her already heavy burden of problems. She fluctuates from being really strict to being overly indulgent, allowing the kids to do almost whatever they want. Sometimes, she "loses it" and takes a belt to them to get them to behave. For example, Rudy, her 6-year-old, got caught shoplifting a bag of his favorite candy, Mega Warheads. Dacey subsequently beat him severely enough that he couldn't go to school the next day. School personnel had noted bruises on the two oldest children several times. As a result, Dacey had become involved with Child Protective Services. She loves her kids and doesn't want to lose them. However, she clearly understands it can be done, as she herself was removed from her parents' home and placed in foster care.[1]

FREDERIKA, AGE 86, LIVES BY HERSELF in a small urban apartment with 17 cats. She has been living there for the past 13 years since her husband died. She has no living relatives except an older sister living across the country and a niece a state away. Frederika has always considered herself a strong, independent woman and had worked outside of the home much of her younger life. However, now she is forced to admit to herself that she's getting weaker. Everything seems harder to do than it used to. She is also starting to forget things. For example, she sometimes forgets to cook and eat. To compensate for this forgetfulness, Frederika keeps writing herself little notes on Post-its and leaving them everywhere to remind her to do things. The apartment is getting messier. She deeply loves her cats, but it is getting more and more difficult to keep their litter boxes clean. The landlord has been up three times to complain about the mess and tell her she must clean it up. She does not want to leave her home. She is terrified of losing her dignity and independence.

A FAMILY OF FOUR—THE FIFTH GENERATION TO LIVE ON THE FAMILY FARM—is dispossessed. They had several years of crop failures and were unable to pay back the loans they so desperately needed to survive at the time. They're living in their '02 Chevy van now. They can't find any housing they can possibly afford even though both parents, Leah and Robert, work full-time, minimum-wage jobs. Fall is almost here. They dread the winter when it gets much colder. Leah is striving to keep the kids, ages 9 and 11, fed. They're supposed to go to school soon. She also worries about Robert, who is getting seriously depressed about losing the farm and not providing adequately for his family. They just don't know where to turn.

1. This vignette is loosely based on one presented by R. M. DeMaria (1999) entitled Family Therapy and Child Welfare, in C. W. LeCroy (Ed.), *Case Studies in Social Work Practice* (2nd ed., pp. 59–63). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks-Cole.

Introducing Generalist Practice

The previous situations confront generalist social work practitioners daily. Social workers do not pick and choose which problems and issues they would like to address. They see a problem, even a difficult problem, and try to help people solve it.

Social workers are generalists (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015). That is, they need a wide array of skills at their disposal. They are prepared to help people with individualized personal issues and with very broad problems that affect whole communities.

This book is about generalist practice and what social workers do to help people with problems in virtually any setting. There are many ways to describe what social workers do. They work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Their work is based on a body of knowledge, practice skills, and professional values. They work in settings that focus on children and families, health, justice, education, and economic status.

Social workers and social work educators have seriously debated the definition of generalist practice for decades (Hernandez, 2008; Landon, 1995). Currently, at least five concepts are generally accepted as underpinnings for generalist practice (CSWE, 2015; Hernandez, 2008). First, a theoretical approach is assumed in which individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities are viewed as systems within their environments. (Systems terms and concepts are explained and discussed later in the chapter.) Second, generalist practitioners use a problem-solving, planned change approach to resolve issues encountered by any of these systems. In other words, generalist social workers follow a designated plan or procedure for getting things done. Third, ethical principles and social work values are exceptionally significant in all aspects of generalist practice. These include a focus on human well-being, human rights, and social and economic justice, as well as an appreciation of human diversity. Fourth, practitioners assume a wide range of roles to achieve their goals. A professional **social work role** is behavior and activity involved in performing some designated function that is part of professional social work practice. Fifth, it is essential that generalist social workers select the most effective intervention strategies possible, carefully evaluate the results of their work, and be competent. In effect, generalist social workers must have infinite flexibility, a solid knowledge base about many things, and a wide range of skills at their disposal.

Proposed here is a model of planned change based on a specific definition of generalist practice. It views practice from a systems perspective. The intent is to clarify in a practical manner what occurs in generalist social work practice. The model addresses the qualities that make social work unique and special. It demonstrates how a social work planned change approach can be applied virtually to any situation, no matter how difficult or complex. Finally, the model integrates an orientation to advocacy and a focus on more than just an individual as the target of the change efforts. Social work intervention may involve work with families, groups, organizations, or communities.

The terms *micro, mezzo,* and *macro* will periodically be used throughout the book to refer to their respective systems. Practice with individuals is considered as **micro practice**, practice with families as *micro/mezzo practice*, practice with groups as **mezzo practice**, and practice with larger systems, including organizations and communities, as **macro practice**. Note that families are designated with the term *micro/mezzo.* Families are groups, yet have distinctive status because of their intimate nature. Therefore, we will treat them as a special system on a continuum between micro and mezzo practice.

Generalist practice skills are integrally linked. They are built upon each other in a progression from micro to mezzo to macro levels. Relating to individuals in groups (mezzo practice) requires basic micro skills for working with individuals. Likewise, macro practice requires mastery of both micro and mezzo skills for relating to and working with individuals and groups of individuals in organizational and community (macro) settings. As an introduction to generalist practice, this book establishes a framework for analyzing issues and problems from a generalist perspective. It then describes and discusses the micro skills necessary to formulate the foundation for the ongoing development of mezzo and macro skills. Linkages with mezzo and macro practice are emphasized throughout.

Social Work Is Unique LO 1-1*

The purpose of social work is "to (1) enhance the problem solving and coping capacities of people, (2) link people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities, (3) promote the effective and humane operation of these systems, and (4) contribute to the development and improvement of social policy" (Pincus & Minahan, 1973, p. 8). In other words, the purpose of social work is to help people in need by using any ethical means possible. However, specifying a cookbook recipe for social work practice is impossible due to the variety of problems encountered and the methods employed. Flexibility and creativity are key qualities for generalist social work practitioners.

Other fields also perform some of the same functions as social work. For instance, mental health clinicians in psychology, psychiatry, and counseling use interviewing skills. Some use a planned change approach. Figure 1.1 illustrates how social work overlaps to some extent with other helping professions. All, for example, have a common core of interviewing and counseling skills.

Figure 1.1 Social Work and Other Helping Professions

However, social work is much more than having a clinician sit down in his or her office with an individual, group, or family and focus on solving mental health problems. (We don't want to imply that this is all that other helping professions do. Their own unique thrusts and emphases are beyond the scope of what can be included here.) Social work has at least six major aspects that make it unique.

Focus on Any Problem

The first unique aspect of social work involves how practitioners may focus attention on *any problem* or cluster of problems, even those that are very complex and difficult. Social workers do not refuse to work with clients or refer them elsewhere because those clients have unappealing characteristics. There may be a family where sexual abuse is occurring. That abuse must stop. Likewise, there may be a community where the juvenile crime rate is skyrocketing. Something needs to be done.

Generalist practice does not imply that every problem can be solved, although it does mean that some of them can be solved or at least alleviated. Generalist practitioners are equipped with a repertoire of skills to help them identify and examine problems. They then make choices about where their efforts can be best directed.

Targeting the External Environment for Change

The second aspect that makes social work unique involves *targeting the environment* for change. The system that social workers need "to change or influence in order to accomplish (their) goals" is called the **target system** or **target of change** (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, & Strom-Gottfried, 2013; Pincus & Minahan, 1973, p. 58). Targets of change are not limited to individuals or families. Sometimes, services are unavailable or excessively difficult to obtain, social policies are unfair, or people are oppressed by other people. Administrators and people in power do not always have the motivation or insight to initiate needed change. Social workers must look at where change is essential outside the individual and work with the environment to effect that change.

For example, consider a large northern city where homelessness has become a major problem. Loss of industry to other locations where production is

* Note that content headings in chapters throughout the book are tagged with learning objectives (e.g., LO 1-1, LO 1-4). These indicate what content relates to which learning objective.

cheaper, unemployment, and lack of low-income housing have caused the homelessness problem to escalate. Many people have run out of resources and have few options. They have been forced into homelessness. A social worker concerned about this issue might strive to identify other individuals in the community, such as professionals, politicians, and other community leaders, who are also concerned about this problem. Such people might include public social services administrators, social workers in other agencies, leaders of charitable organizations and churches, and faculty and students in the social work departments of area universities. The social worker initiating change could identify these individuals, contact them, and call a meeting to discuss plans. Established goals might then include improving "community awareness and acceptance of the problem of homelessness," establishment of "emergency shelter space for homeless people," exploration of the possibility of developing "long-term . . . transitional and low-priced housing arrangements for homeless families," and enhanced "coordination of existing services for homeless people" (Alexander, 2004, p. 135). Here the community would be the target of change on the behalf of people in need, namely the homeless population.

Advocacy

The third aspect that makes social work unique is related to targeting the environment. Namely, social workers often find the need to *advocate* for their clients. **Advocacy** is the act of "representing, championing, or defending the rights of others" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2015, p. 372). It involves actively intervening in order to help clients get what they need. Most frequently, this intervention focuses on "the relationship between the client and an unresponsive 'system'" (Epstein, 1981, p. 8). Clients have specified needs. Social agencies, organizations, or communities may not be meeting these needs. These unresponsive systems must be pressured to make changes so needs can be met. Specific techniques of advocacy will be addressed in much greater detail later in Chapter 14.

Professional Values and Ethics

The fourth aspect that makes social work unique is its emphasis on and adherence to a *core of professional values*. The *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is available on the Web at http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp. This code focuses on the right of the individual to make free choices and to have a good quality of life.

Partnerships with Clients

The fifth aspect making social work unique is related to the core of social work values and how important it is for clients to make their own decisions. Social workers do not lead people into specific ways of thinking or acting. Rather, they practice in a *partnership* with clients, making and implementing plans together. Most other professions emphasize the authority and expertise of the professional, on the one hand, and the subordinate status of the client as recipient of services, on the other.

Adherence to Professional Standards

The sixth aspect that makes social work unique involves how social work education is held accountable regarding specifically what makes social workers competent in their practice. Highlight 1.1 discusses the relationships among social work, social work education, and the *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* that govern what is taught in social work programs. Highlight 1.1 also explains how content in this book relates to educational standards and how the multicolor helping hands icons placed throughout this book identify such content.

What Is Generalist Practice? LO 1-2

Generalist social work practice may involve almost any helping situation. A generalist practitioner may be called upon to help a homeless family, a physically abused child, a pregnant teenager, a sick older adult unable to care for him- or herself any longer, an alcoholic parent, a community that is trying to address its drug abuse problem, or a public assistance agency struggling to amend its policies to conform to new federal regulations. Therefore, generalist practitioners must be well prepared to address many kinds of difficult situations.

The social work profession has struggled with the idea of generalist practice for many years. In the past, new practitioners were educated in one main skill area (e.g., work with individuals, groups, or communities) or one area of practice (e.g., children and families, or policy and administration). A generalist practitioner needs competency in a wide variety of areas instead of being limited to a single track (CSWE, 2015, p. 3).

HIGHLIGHT 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Educational Policy

Students require knowledge in order to develop skills and become competent. In social work, the terms *competence* and *component behaviors* have unique meanings beyond the typical dictionary definitions. "Competence" in the usual sense means that a person possesses suitable skills and abilities to do a specific task. Competent baseball players must move quickly, catch, throw, and play as part of a team. They also have to think quickly, understand the rules of the game, and be knowledgeable of their environment. In the same way, competent social workers should be able to do a number of job-related duties, think critically, and understand the context of their work. For example, social workers must develop and use interviewing, engagement, assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation skills with their clients. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), social work's formal accrediting organization, has defined specific Competency areas for all social work students, along with their corresponding component behaviors. (**Accreditation** is the official authorization that a social work program has fulfilled and maintains the required standards to achieve this credential.) Professional social work education programs teach content, skills, and values that comply with these *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS).

The EPAS articulates what a professional social worker should be competent to do. This answers the question, "What should a social worker be capable of and proficient at accomplishing?" Note that the EPAS also contains standards governing other aspects of social work programs, such as "Program Mission and Goals" and "Curriculum" (CSWE, 2015, pp. 10, 11, 14).

What Is Competent Social Work Practice?

The EPAS specifies nine competencies that are operationalized by 31 component behaviors. **Competencies** are basic capabilities involving social work knowledge, skills, and values that can be demonstrated and measured by component behaviors. Competencies reflect more general expectations for proficient social workers. **Component behaviors**, on the other hand, are measurable actions that demonstrate the application of social work knowledge, skills, and values for effective social work practice. Component behaviors are more specific and are used to measure competency. Here component behaviors are alphabetized under each competency. Note that multicolor helping hands icons such as those depicted beside each competency given in this Highlight are incorporated throughout the book. The icons indicate which of the nine EPAS competencies and 31 component behaviors the corresponding text is about. To establish a clear relationship with icons throughout the chapter, Competency 1 will be referred to as EP 1, with its component behaviors as EP 1a, EP 1b, and so on. Similarly, Competency 2 will be referred to as EP 2, with its component behaviors as EP 2a, EP 2b, and so on. EPAS competencies and component behaviors are described next.

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

EP 1, 1a–e

Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Social workers understand frameworks of ethical decision making and how to apply principles of critical thinking to those frameworks in practice, research, and policy arenas. Social workers recognize personal values and the distinction between personal and professional values. They also understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior. Social workers understand the profession's history, its mission, and the roles and responsibilities of the profession. Social workers also understand the role of other professions when engaged in interprofessional teams. Social workers recognize the importance of lifelong learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective. Social workers also understand emerging forms of technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice. Social workers:

1a. make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW *Code of Ethics*, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context;
1b. use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations;
1c. demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication;

HIGHLIGHT 1.1 *(continued)*

1d. use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and
1e. use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

EP 2, 2a–c

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power. Social workers:

2a. apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;
2b. present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and
2c. apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.

Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

EP 3, 3a–b

Social workers understand that every person, regardless of position in society, has fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights. Social workers understand strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected. Social workers:

3a. apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels; and
3b. engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

EP 4, 4a–c

Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective roles in advancing a science of social work and in evaluating their practice. Social workers know the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multidisciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing. They also understand the processes for translating research findings into effective practice. Social workers:

4a. use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research;
4b. apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings; and
4c. use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

EP 5, 5a–c

Social workers understand that human rights and social justice, as well as social welfare and services, are mediated by policy and its implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. Social workers understand the history and current structures of social policies and services, the role of policy in service delivery, and the role of practice in policy development. Social workers understand their role

(continued)

HIGHLIGHT 1.1 *(continued)*

in policy development and implementation within their practice settings at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, and they actively engage in policy practice to effect change within those settings. Social workers recognize and understand the historical, social, cultural, economic, organizational, environmental, and global influences that affect social policy. They are also knowledgeable about policy formulation, analysis, implementation, and evaluation. Social workers:

5a. Identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services;
5b. assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services; and
5c. apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

EP 6, 6a–b

Social workers understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers value the importance of human relationships. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to facilitate engagement with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand strategies to engage diverse clients and constituencies to advance practice effectiveness. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may impact their ability to effectively engage with diverse clients and constituencies. Social workers value principles of relationship building and interprofessional collaboration to facilitate engagement with clients, constituencies, and other professionals as appropriate. Social workers:

6a. apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies; and
6b. use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

EP 7, 7a–d

Social workers understand that assessment is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in the assessment of diverse clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand methods of assessment with diverse clients and constituencies to advance practice effectiveness. Social workers recognize the implications of the larger practice context in the assessment process and value the importance of interprofessional collaboration in this process. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may affect their assessment and decision making. Social workers:

7a. collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies;
7b. apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies;
7c. develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies; and
7d. select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

EP 8, 8a–e

Social workers understand that intervention is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are knowledgeable about evidence-informed interventions to achieve the goals

HIGHLIGHT 1.1 *(continued)*

of clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to effectively intervene with clients and constituencies. Social workers understand methods of identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-informed interventions to achieve client and constituency goals. Social workers value the importance of interprofessional teamwork and communication in interventions, recognizing that beneficial outcomes may require interdisciplinary, interprofessional, and interorganizational collaboration. Social workers:

- 8a. critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies;
- 8b. apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies;
- 8c. use interprofessional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes;
- 8d. negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies; and
- 8e. facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

EP 9, 9a–d

Social workers understand that evaluation is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. Social workers recognize the importance of evaluating processes and outcomes to advance practice, policy, and service delivery effectiveness. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in evaluating outcomes. Social workers understand qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness. Social workers:

- 9a. select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of outcomes;
- 9b. apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the evaluation of outcomes;
- 9c. critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention and program processes and outcomes; and
- 9d. apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

The Definition of Generalist Practice

For our purposes, the definition of generalist practice involves 12 key concepts. We will define generalist practice as the application of an *eclectic knowledge base,*[2] professional values and ethics, and a *wide range of skills* to *target systems of any size* for change. Generalist practice is then guided by *three primary principles involving values.* It occurs within the *context* of an organizational structure. Finally, it employs *four major processes* (CSWE, 2015).[3] (Highlight 1.2 identifies each of these 12 major concepts characterizing generalist practice and outlines major notions related to them. Each concept is described more thoroughly later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.)

In summary, the core of generalist practice, then, rests on a solid *foundation of knowledge, values, and skills.* Knowledge includes a range of conceptual frameworks and information about understanding and practicing social work *(concept 1* in the definition of generalist practice). Values are based on professional ethics and the ability to distinguish between personal and professional values *(concept 2)*. Skills include those for working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities *(concept 3)*. Necessary skills include those directed at initiating and implementing changes in any of these systems *(concept 4)*.

2. The term *eclectic* refers to selecting concepts, theories, and ideas from a wide range of perspectives and practice approaches.
3. Most of these concepts are taken directly from the EPAS. Acquiring knowledge begins to prepare students for competent practice. Linking content to the EPAS ultimately is intended to assist in a social work program's accreditation process.

HIGHLIGHT 1.2 Concepts in the Definition of Generalist Practice

1. *Acquisition of an eclectic knowledge base*
   A. Fields of practice
   B. Systems theories
   C. The ecological perspective
   D. Human behavior and the social environment
   E. Social welfare policy and policy practice
   F. Social work practice
   G. Research-informed practice and practice-informed research
   H. Values and principles that guide practice
2. *Acquisition of professional values and application of professional ethics*
   A. National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*
   B. International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work *Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles*
   C. Awareness of personal values
   D. Management of ethical dilemmas
3. *Use of a wide range of practice skills*
   A. Skills for working with individuals and families (micro skills)
   B. Skills for working with families and groups (mezzo skills)
   C. Skills for working with organizations and communities (macro skills)
4. *Orientation to target systems of any size*
   A. Micro
   B. Mezzo
   C. Macro
5. *Primary value principle:* Emphasis on client empowerment, strengths, and resiliency
6. *Primary value principle:* The importance of human diversity
7. *Primary value principle:* Advocacy for human rights, and the advancement of social, economic, and environmental justice
8. *Context:* Work within an organizational structure
9. *Process:* Assumption of a wide range of professional roles
   A. Counselor
   B. Educator
   C. Broker
   D. Case manager
   E. Mobilizer
   F. Mediator
   G. Facilitator
   H. Integrator/Coordinator
   I. Manager
   J. Initiator
   K. Negotiator
   L. Spokesperson
   M. Organizer
   N. Consultant
   O. Advocate
10. *Process:* Application of critical thinking skills
11. *Process:* Incorporation of research-informed practice
12. *Process:* Use of planned change

Three Principles Involving Values That Characterize Generalist Practice

Three primary principles involving values characterize generalist practice. The first of these principles involving values entails an emphasis on client *empowerment, strengths,* and *resiliency (concept 5* in the definition of generalist practice).

- **Empowerment** is "the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their life situations" (Gutierrez, 2001, p. 210). It concerns ensuring that others have the right to power, ability, and authority to achieve **self-determination** (each individual's right to make his or her own decisions).
- **Strengths** include any "capacities, resources, and assets" that can be accessed to increase empowerment (Saleebey, 2013, p. 102).
- **Resiliency** is the ability of an individual, family, group, community, or organization to recover from adversity and resume functioning even when suffering serious trouble, confusion, or hardship (Clark, 2013; Glicken, 2006).

The second principle involving values that is emphasized in generalist practice is the importance of

"understand[ing] how [human] diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity" (CSWE, 2015, p. 7) *(concept 6)*. **Human diversity** entails multiple factors, including "age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status" (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).

The third principle involving values that is accentuated in generalist practice concerns *advocacy for human rights* and the *advancement of social, economic, and environmental justice* (CSWE, 2015, p. 7) *(concept 7)*.

The Context for Generalist Practice

Another concept significant to generalist practice is its *context (concept 8* in the definition of generalist practice). Most social workers are employed by an organization. They work in an agency environment complete with policies, management, and a designated clientele. Thus, generalist practice occurs within the *context of an organizational structure.*

Four Processes That Characterize Generalist Practice

Four processes characterize generalist practice. First, generalist practice requires the assumption of a wide range of *professional roles (concept 9* in the definition of generalist practice). Second, it requires the application of *critical thinking skills* throughout the course of intervention *(concept 10)*. Third, generalist practice incorporates *research-informed practice* to determine the most effective ways to help people and serve clients *(concept 11)*. Fourth, practitioners follow a seven-step *planned change* process to achieve intervention goals *(concept 12)*.

How Concepts Fit Together

We have indicated that this chapter will address in greater detail the 12 key concepts inherent in the definition of generalist practice (summarized in Highlight 1.2). The order in which they are presented does not imply that one concept is more important than another. Each is significant. Figure 1.2 illustrates how the various concepts fit together. The large square labeled *Organizational Structure* represents the organization (or agency) that employs you to do a social work job.

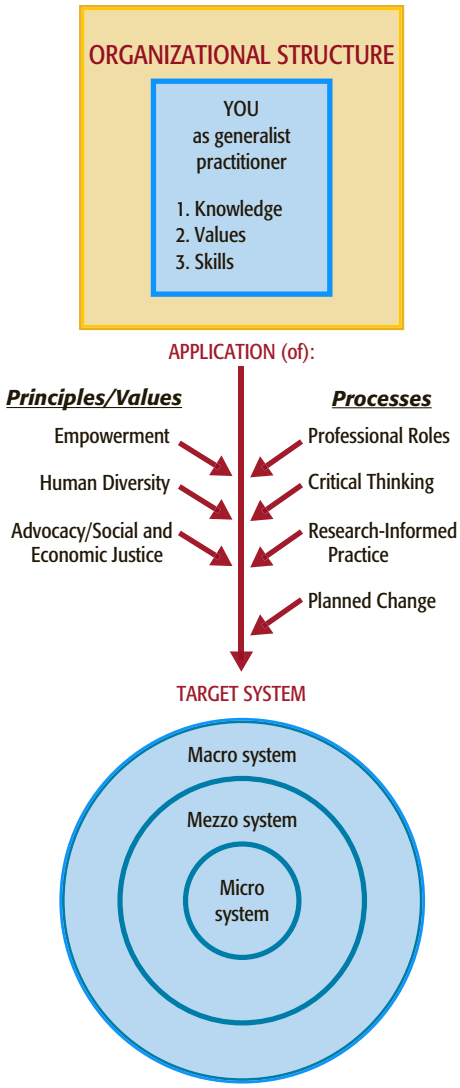

Figure 1.2 Definition of Generalist Practice

Organizational structure is the formal and informal manner in which tasks and responsibilities, lines of authority, channels of communication, and dimensions of power are established and coordinated within an organization. As a generalist practitioner, you will work in this environment with all its constraints, requirements, and rules. Thus, Figure 1.2 pictures you, the generalist practitioner, as a rectangle within this large square. In that same square you see the concepts *Knowledge, Values*, and *Skills.* These illustrate that you bring to your job a broad knowledge base, professional values, and a wide range of skills.

The concentric circles at the bottom of Figure 1.2 illustrate your potential *target systems*. As we have established, generalist practitioners may choose to work with an individual (micro system), a family (micro/mezzo system),[4] a group (mezzo system), or an organization or community (macro systems) as the target of their change efforts. These systems are positioned in concentric circles according to their respective sizes.

An arrow flows from the Organizational Structure square down to the Target System circles. This indicates that you, as a generalist practitioner, will apply your knowledge, skills, and values to help change a micro, mezzo, or macro system.

Other arrows point from concepts on the right and left to the central Application arrow. This means that generalist practitioners apply the concepts represented by the arrows as they undertake generalist practice. Principles/Values concepts, portrayed on the left, include empowerment, human diversity, advocacy for human rights, and the pursuit of social and economic justice. Social workers also apply the processes inherent in generalist practice. These, depicted on the right, consist of the assumption of various professional roles, use of critical thinking skills, incorporation of research-informed practice, and the undertaking of the planned change process.

Note that terms can sometimes be confusing. This book focuses on generalist practice and assumes that social workers are generalists. Therefore, the terms *generalist social worker, worker, generalist practitioner,* and *practitioner* will be used interchangeably throughout this book to refer to professionals undertaking generalist social work practice.

Defining Generalist Practice: An Eclectic Knowledge Base LO 1-3

EP 7b, 8b

Acquisition of an eclectic knowledge base is the 1st concept involved in the definition of generalist practice. The term **eclectic** refers to selecting concepts, theories, and ideas from a wide range of perspectives and practice approaches. Social work has a growing and progressive knowledge base. More and more is being researched and written about how social workers can become increasingly effective in helping people solve problems. Additionally, the field has borrowed much knowledge from other fields such as psychology and sociology. Social work then applies this knowledge to practice situations.

Knowledge involves understanding the dynamics of people's situations and recognizing the skills that work best in specific situations. We have emphasized that generalist social workers need a broad knowledge base because they are called upon to help people solve such a wide variety of problems. One important content area in the knowledge base that is discussed here involves fields of practice. A second important content area concerns the "theoretical frameworks" of systems theory and the ecological perspective (CSWE, 2015, p. 9). These two frameworks are intended to help guide the processes involved in social work practice, including engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation (CSWE, 2015, pp. 8–9). In addition, the social work profession considers it necessary that you assimilate knowledge and develop competencies related to the following content areas: human behavior and the social environment; social welfare policy and policy practice; social work practice; research; and values and principles guiding generalist practice (CSWE, 2015). We've established that a *competency* is the proven ability to demonstrate the acquisition of sufficient knowledge, skills, and values in a designated area in order to practice effective social work.

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Fields of Practice

There are a number of ways to classify the kinds of knowledge generalist social workers need. One is by **fields of practice**, broad areas in social work that address certain types of populations and needs. Each field of practice is a labyrinth of typical human problems and the services attempting to address them. Some fields of practice currently characterizing the profession include families and children, mental health, schools, aging, and substance abuse. Other fields of practice are occupational social work (focusing on work in employee assistance programs or directed toward organizational change), rural social work (addressing the unique problems of people living in rural areas), police social work (emphasizing work within police, courthouse, and jail settings to provide services to crime victims), and forensic social work (dealing with the law, educating lawyers, and serving as expert witnesses) (Barker, 2014).

Generalist social workers require information about people who need help in each of these areas.

4. As already indicated, families, by their intimate and special nature, lie on a continuum between micro and mezzo systems.

Workers also must be knowledgeable about the services available to meet needs and the major issues related to each area. On one hand, a social worker may be called upon to work with a problem that clearly falls within one field of practice. On the other hand, a problem may involve several of these fields.

For example, the Steno family comes to a social worker's attention when a neighbor reports that Ben, a 5-year-old child, is frequently seen with odd-looking bruises on his arms and legs. The neighbor suspects child abuse. Upon investigation, the social worker finds that the parents are indeed abusive. They often grab the child violently by a limb and throw him against the wall. This problem initially falls under the umbrella of family and children's services.

However, the social worker also finds a number of other problems operating within the family. The mother, Natasia Steno, is seriously depressed and frequently suicidal. She needs mental health services. Additionally, the father, Eric Steno, is struggling with a drinking problem that is beginning to affect his performance at work. A program is available at his place of employment where an occupational social worker helps employees deal with such problems. Thus, occupational social work may also be involved.

There is a maternal grandmother, Emma, living in the home with the Steno family, whose physical health is failing. She is also overweight and finds moving around by herself increasingly difficult. As a result, she is demanding more and more physical help and support from Natasia, who has back problems herself and finds helping her mother increasingly burdensome. Although she dreads the idea of nursing home placement, Natasia knows the issue must be addressed. Finally, Vernite, the 12-year-old daughter in the family, is falling behind in school. Truancy is becoming a major problem. This last issue falls under the school's umbrella.

Most of the problems that social workers face are complex. They may involve a variety of practice fields all at one time. In order to understand clients' needs, social workers must know something about a wide range of problems and services.

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Systems Theory LO 1-4

EP 7, 7b, 8b

Systems theory provides social workers with a conceptual framework that can guide how they view the world. Generalist practitioners must be knowledgeable about the range of social systems in which people function and the ways social systems help or deter people in achieving personal and community well-being (CSWE, 2015). Social work focuses on the interactions of various systems in the environment including "individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities" (CSWE, 2015, pp. 8–9). A **system** is a set of orderly, interrelated elements that forms a functional whole. A person, a class, a family, and a college or university are all systems. Each involves many components that work together in order to function. Understanding systems theory is especially important because, as we have established, generalist practice targets systems of virtually any size for change. Regardless of your field of practice, having a sound knowledge base in systems theory is helpful. As a generalist, you will evaluate any confronting problem from multiple perspectives. You will determine whether change is best pursued by individual, family, group, organizational, or community avenues. You might decide that any of these systems should be the target of your planned change efforts.

Major Concepts in Systems Theory

In order to understand how a systems model can provide the framework for intervention, one must understand some of the major terms involved. These terms include *system, subsystem, boundaries, dynamic, interaction, input, output, homeostasis*, and *equifinality* (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2016).

We defined a *system* as a set of orderly, interrelated elements that forms a functional whole. Several aspects of this definition are important. The idea that a system is a "set of elements" means that a system can be composed of any type of things as long as these things have some relationship to each other. Things may be people or they may be mathematical symbols. Regardless, the set of elements must be orderly and arranged in some pattern that is not simply random.

The set of elements must also be interrelated. They must have some kind of mutual relationship or connection with each other. Additionally, the set of elements must be functional. Together, they must be able to perform some regular task, activity, or function and fulfill some purpose. Finally, the set of elements must form a whole, a single entity. Examples of systems include a large nation, a public social services department, a Girl Scout troop, and a newly married couple.

The conception of a system helps a social worker focus on a target for intervention. The system may be an individual or a state government. The fact that the target is conceptualized as a system means that an understanding of the whole system and how its many elements work together is necessary. Consider, for example, an individual named Bill as a functioning system. Bill says he is depressed. The psychological aspects are only one facet of the entire functioning system; physical and social aspects are among numerous other system characteristics. A worker who looks at the person as a total system would inquire further about the individual's health and social circumstances. The worker finds that Bill is suffering both from a viral flu infection that has been "hanging on" for the past 3 weeks and from a chronic blood disease. Both of these elements affect his psychological state. Additionally, the worker discovers that Bill has recently been divorced and, because he has only partial custody, misses his three children desperately. These aspects, too, relate directly to Bill's depression.

Thus, a systems approach guides social workers to look beyond a seemingly simplistic presenting problem. Workers view problems as being interrelated with all other aspects of the system. Many aspects work together to affect the functioning of the whole person.

A systems perspective also guides workers to view systems as dynamic—that is, having constant dynamic movement because problems and issues are forever changing. This perspective provides workers with an outlook that must be flexible. They must be ready to address new problems and apply new intervention strategies. For instance, a worker's assessment of the situation and intervention strategies would probably change if Bill, described previously, was fired from his current job or was reunited with his ex-wife.

Note that a **subsystem** is a secondary or subordinate system—a system within a system. For example, a subsystem within a family of five (mother, father, and three children) is the parental subsystem that includes the mother and father. Another significant term is **boundary**, an invisible or symbolic "line of demarcation that separates an individual, a subsystem, or a system from outside surroundings" (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013, p. 101). For instance, boundaries define who is included in any family (e.g., parents and children) and who is not (e.g., neighbors).

Systems constantly *interact* with each other. **Interaction** involves mutual involvement and communication with other people and groups in the environment. A systems focus provides the worker with a framework that extends far beyond that of the individual as the sole target of intervention. A systems perspective diverts the attention from the individual to the interaction between that individual and the environment (Hartman, 1970). There is a constant flow of input and output among systems. **Input** is the energy, information, or communication flow received from other systems; **output** is the same flow emitted from a system to the environment or to other systems.

Reconsider Bill, the depressed man. His relationship with his ex-wife and children is seriously affecting not only him, but also his interactions at work. Coworkers who were once his friends are tired of hearing him complain about how hard life is. They no longer like to associate with him. Bill feels that he is in a dead-end, low-level, white-collar job that requires a minimal level of skill. Even worse, his boss has cut back his hours so he no longer can work any overtime. Now he can barely scrape by financially. The courts have mandated support payments for his children, which he has not been able to make for 3 months. His ex-wife is threatening not to let him see his kids if he does not get some money to her soon.

Of course, one should note that Bill's ex-wife Shirley views the situation from a totally different perspective. She attributes the divorce to the fact that Bill had a long series of affairs throughout their marriage. She had sacrificed her own employment and career in order to remain the primary caretaker of home and children. She just could not stand the infidelity any longer and filed for divorce. Her serious financial situation is magnified by the fact that she has neither an employment nor credit history of her own. She remains extremely angry at Bill and feels demanding support payments is her right.

Bill, on the other hand, is expending much energy to hold his life together. This situation is his output. However, he is receiving little input in return. As a result, he is unable to maintain his **homeostasis**, which refers to the tendency for a system to maintain a relatively stable, constant state of equilibrium or balance.

A systems perspective takes these many aspects of Bill's life into account. It focuses on his input, output, and homeostasis with respect to the many systems with which he is interacting. Sitting in an office with this man for 50 minutes each week and trying to get him to talk his way out of his depression will not suffice in generalist practice. His interactions with his family and impinging mezzo systems (e.g., his coworkers)

and macro systems (e.g., the large company he works for and the state that mandates his support payments) provide potential targets of intervention and change. Can visits with his children and his support payment schedule be renegotiated? Can he pursue reconciliation with Shirley? Are the policies mandating his support payments and controlling his visitation rights fair? Are there any support groups available that he could join whose members had similar situations to his own and from whom he could gain support? Is there any potential for job retraining or perhaps a job change?

Equifinality refers to the fact that there are many different means to the same end. In other words, there are many ways of viewing a problem and, thus, many potential means of solving it. Bill's interaction with friends, family, coworkers, governmental offices, and health care systems all affect his psychological state. Therefore, targets of intervention may involve change or interaction with any of these other systems.

Conceptualizing Workers and Clients as Systems

A helpful orientation for practice is to conceptualize yourself and your clients in terms of systems. We have already established that a *target system* or *target of change* is the system that social workers need "to change or influence in order to accomplish [their] goals" (Pincus & Minahan, 1973, p. 58). Targets of change may be individual clients, families, formal groups, administrators, or policy makers, depending on what you need to change. At the micro level, a 5-year-old child with behavior problems might be the target of change, the goal being to improve behavior. At the mezzo level, a support group of people with eating disorders might be the target of change, aiming to control their eating behavior. Finally, at the macro level, an agency director might be the target of change if your aim is to improve some agency policy and she is the primary decision maker capable of implementing that change.

Three other systems critical to the planned change process are the client, target, and action systems (Hepworth et al., 2013; Pincus & Minahan, 1973). A **client system** is any individual, family, group, organization, or community that will ultimately benefit from generalist social work intervention. Your individual clients are client systems. The **change agent system** is the individual who initiates the planned change process. This book assumes you will function as the change agent system while helping your client systems.

You might gain the support of and join in coalitions with others who also believe in the proposed change, especially when you work for changes at the macro level. Then you, as a single change agent, might become part of a larger system. Whether you undertake macro change by yourself or join together with others, you are or are part of an **action system**. The action system then includes those people who agree and are committed to work together in order to attain the proposed change. An action system might undertake the planned change process to change an agency policy, develop a new program, or institute some project such as evaluating intervention methodology or setting up agency in-service training sessions.

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: The Ecological Perspective LO 1-5

EP 7b, 8b

The ecological perspective is another relevant part of social work's knowledge base. Like systems theory, it provides a useful conceptual framework for generalist practice. This text assumes a systems theory approach; however, it takes and utilizes selected terms from the ecological perspective that are exceptionally useful in describing human interaction with other systems. For instance, the term *social environment* is grounded in the ecological perspective. Generalist practitioners work with clients within the context of their social environments.

Some debate exists regarding the relationship between systems theory and the ecological perspective. That is, to what extent are the theoretical approaches similar and dissimilar? The ecological approach assumes a person-in-environment focus. Each perspective has, at various times, been described as being a theory, model, or a theoretical underpinning. A number of the major terms involved in the ecological perspective will be explained. Subsequently, some similarities and differences will be discussed. Finally, the question of which approach is best will be addressed.

Ecological Terms

We have already reviewed some of the major terms in systems theory. We will now discuss some of the primary terms in the ecological perspective, including *social environment, person-in-environment, transactions, energy, input, output, interface, adaptation, coping,* and *interdependence*.

The **social environment** involves the conditions, circumstances, and human interactions that encompass human beings. Persons are dependent on effective interactions with this environment in order to survive and thrive. The social environment includes the types of homes people live in, the types of work they do, the amount of money available, and the laws and social rules they live by. The social environment also includes all the individuals, groups, organizations, and systems with which a person comes into contact.

A **person-in-environment** focus sees people as constantly interacting with various systems around them. These systems include the family, friends, work, social services, politics, religion, goods and services, and educational systems. The person is portrayed as being dynamically involved with each. Social work practice then is directed at improving the interactions among the person and the various systems. This focus is referred to as improving person-in-environment fit.

People communicate and interact with others in their environments. Each of these interactions or **transactions** (i.e., interactions in which something is communicated or exchanged) is active and dynamic. However, they may be positive or negative. A positive transaction may be the revelation that the one you dearly love loves you in return. A negative transaction may involve being fired from a job you have held for 15 years.

Energy is the natural power of active involvement among people and their environments. Energy can take the form of input or output. **Input** is a form of energy coming into a person's life and adding to that life (e.g., an older adult in failing health may need substantial physical assistance and emotional support in order to continue performing necessary daily tasks). **Output**, on the other hand, is a form of energy going out of a person's life or taking something away from it. For instance, a person may volunteer time and effort to work on a political campaign.

The **interface** is the exact point at which the interaction between an individual and the environment takes place. During an assessment of a person-in-environment situation, the interface must be clearly in focus in order to target the appropriate interactions for change. For example, a couple entering marriage counseling may first state that their problem concerns disagreements about how to raise the children. On further exploration, however, their inability to communicate their real feelings to each other surfaces. The actual problem—the inability to communicate—is the interface at which one individual affects the other. Each person is part of the other's social environment. If the interface is inaccurately targeted, much time and energy will be wasted before getting at the real problem.

Adaptation is the capacity to adjust to surrounding environmental conditions. It implies change. A person must change or adapt to new conditions and circumstances in order to continue functioning effectively. As people are continually exposed to changes and stressful life events, they need to be flexible and capable of adaptation. Social workers frequently help people in this process of adaptation. A person may have to adapt to a new significant other, a new job, or a new neighborhood. Adaptation usually requires energy in the form of effort. Social workers often help direct people's energies so that they are most productive.

People are affected by their environments and vice versa. People can and do change their environments in order to adapt successfully. For instance, a person would find surviving a Montana winter in the natural environment challenging without shelter. Therefore, those who live in Montana change and manipulate their environment by clearing land and constructing heated buildings. They change their environment so they are better able to adapt to it. Therefore, adaptation often implies a two-way process involving both the individual and the environment.

Coping is a form of human adaptation that implies a struggle to overcome problems. Although adaptation may involve responses to new positive or negative conditions, coping refers to the way we deal with the problems we experience. For example, a person might have to cope with the sudden death of a parent or with the birth of a baby.

Interdependence is the mutual reliance of each person on each other person. Individuals are interdependent as they rely on other individuals and groups of individuals in the social environment. Likewise, these other individuals are interdependent on one another for input, energy, services, and consistency. People cannot exist without each other. The business executive needs the farmer to produce food and customers to purchase goods. Likewise, the farmer must sell food products to the executive in order to get money to buy seeds, tools, and other essentials. People—especially in a highly industrialized society—are interdependent and need each other in order to survive.

Similarities Between Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

Some basic similarities exist between systems theory and the ecological perspective. Both emphasize systems and focus on the dynamic interaction among many levels of systems. Some of the terms (especially *input* and *output*) are similar. Additionally, each provides social workers a framework with which to view the world. Finally, both perspectives emphasize external interactions instead of internal functioning. In other words, from a social work point of view, both emphasize helping people improve their interactions with other systems. As a result, these two perspectives are different from a focus on fixing or curing the individual. Highlight 1.3 summarizes some of the key terms in both.

Differences Between Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

In the simplest sense, there are two major differences between systems theory and the ecological perspective. First, the ecological approach refers to living, dynamic interactions. The emphasis is on active participation. People, for example, have dynamic transactions with each other and with their environments. Systems theory, on the other hand, assumes a broader perspective. It can be used to refer to inanimate, mechanical operations such as a mechanized assembly line in a pea-canning plant. It can also be used to describe the functioning of a human family.

A second difference between the ecological perspective and systems theory is based on the emphasizing of different terms. For example, the ecological approach focuses on transactions between individuals and the environment at the interface, or point at which the individual and environment meet. Systems theory, on the other hand, addresses boundaries of subsystems within a system and the maintenance of homeostasis or equilibrium within a system. Some theoreticians might posit that the ecological model is an offshoot or interpretation of systems theory, as it is a bit more limited in scope and application.

Which Perspective Is Best?

Both systems theory and the ecological perspective provide major tools for conceptualizing social work (Kondrat, 2008). The important thing is that both emphasize interactions with the environment. Depending on the circumstance, one perspective might be more helpful to employ than the other. For example, systems theory might be more helpful when addressing problems within a family. Using notions like subsystems and boundaries helps social workers understand the ongoing dynamics. Likewise, analysis of a particular family system using these notions provides cues for how to proceed to improve family functioning.

HIGHLIGHT 1.3 Summary of Some of the Major Terms in Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

Some Major Terms in Systems Theory	Similar Terms in Both	Some Major Terms in the Ecological Perspective
System	Input	Social environment
Dynamic	Output	Person-in-environment focus
Interact		Transactions
Homeostasis		Energy
Equifinality		Interface Adaptation Coping Interdependence

On the other hand, an ecological perspective can also be useful. The notion of transactions with the social environment helps provide focus when a homeless family is not getting the resources it needs. A focus on the interface between family and environment leads a social worker to emphasize getting the family the services and support it requires to survive.

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Human Behavior and the Social Environment

Knowledge about human behavior and the social environment (HBSE) is an essential foundation on which to build practice skills. Accurate assessment of the person, problem, and situation is a critical step in effective intervention. The environment is vitally important in the analysis and understanding of human behavior. As social work has a person-in-environment focus, the interactions among individuals, systems, and the environment are critical. Such a conceptual perspective provides social workers with a symbolic representation of how to interpret the world. It provides ideas for how to assess clients' situations and identify their alternatives.

People are constantly and dynamically involved in social transactions. There is ongoing activity, communication, and change. Social work assessment seeks to answer the question, "What is it in any particular situation that causes a problem to continue despite the client's expressed wish to change it?" A person-in-environment perspective allows social workers to assess many aspects of a situation. Assessment may involve not only individual, personal characteristics and experiences but also interaction with people in the immediate environment. These experiences often concern relationships with peer, social, and work groups.

Assessments also often involve family situations. Because of the intimacy and intensity of family relationships and the importance of the family context to individuals, we have established that families deserve special status and attention.

Assessment may also relate to people's transactions with large organizations and systems around the individual in the macro social environment. The **macro social environment** involves the organizations[5] and communities[6] (including neighborhood, local, state, national, and global) with which people are engaged and the social,[7] economic,[8] and political[9] forces that affect these individuals. An individual's place within the total scheme of things can be analyzed.

Conditions in the macro environment may include poverty, discrimination, social pressures, and the effects of social policies. Such circumstances mean that clients' problems are not viewed solely as each client's own fault. The forces surrounding the client frequently cause or contribute to problems. Thus, social workers must focus their assessment on many levels. How the client and the problem fit into the larger picture is critically important.

For instance, consider Kevin, a 15-year-old inner-city gang member. The gang is involved in drug dealing, which, of course, is illegal. However, when assessing the situation and what might be done about it, a broader perspective is necessary. Looking at how the environment encourages and even supports the illegal activity is critical in understanding how to solve the problem. Kevin's father is no longer involved with Kevin's family. Now only Kevin, his mother, and his three younger brothers remain. Kevin's mother works a 6-day-per-week, 9-hour-per-day second-shift job at Boogie's Burger Bungalow, a local all-night diner where she slings burgers. Although she loves her children dearly, she can barely make ends meet. She has little time for their supervision, especially Kevin's, as he is the oldest.

All of the neighborhood kids seem to belong to one gang or another. This gives them a sense of identity and importance and provides social support. In

5. *Organizations* are "(1) social entities that (2) are goal-directed, (3) are designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems, and (4) are linked to the external environment" (Daft, 2013, p. 12).
6. A *community* is "a number of people who share a distinct location, belief, interest, activity, or other characteristic that clearly identifies their commonality and differentiates them from those not sharing it" (italics omitted) (Homan, 2016, p. 133).
7. *Social forces* are values and beliefs held by people in the social environment that are strong enough to influence people's activities, including how government is structured or restricted.
8. *Economic forces* are the resources that are available, how they are distributed, and how they are spent.
9. *Political forces* are the current governmental structures, the laws to which people are subject, and the overall distribution of power among the population.

many instances, such support is almost completely lacking elsewhere. Easy access to drugs offers a readily available chance to escape from impoverished, depressing, and apparently hopeless conditions. Finally, gang membership gives these young people a source of income. In fact, they can get relatively large amounts of money in a hurry.

The gang members' alternatives appear grim. There are few, if any, positive role models to show them other ways of existence. They do not see their peers or adults close to them becoming corporate lawyers, brain surgeons, or nuclear physicists. In fact, they do not see anyone who is going or has gone to college. Finishing high school is considered quite a feat. Neighborhood unemployment runs at more than 50 percent. A few part-time, minimum-wage jobs are available—cleaning washrooms at Burger King or hauling heavy packages off trucks at Pick 'n' Save. These options are unappealing alternatives to the immediate sources of gratification provided by gang membership and drug dealing. Even if another minimal source of income could be found, the other rewarding aspects of gang membership would be lost. Also, there is the all-consuming problem of having no positive prospects to look forward to. The future looks pretty bleak, so the excitement of the present remains seductive.

This situation is not meant to imply that joining vicious gangs and participating in illegal activities is right for people such as Kevin. Nor does it mean that Kevin's plight is hopeless. Going beyond a focus on the individual to assess the many environmental impacts and interactions gives the social worker a better understanding of the whole situation. The answer might not be to send Kevin to the state juvenile correctional facility for a year or two and then put him back in the same community with the same friends and same problems. That focuses on the individual in a limited manner.

A generalist social work practitioner views Kevin as a person who's acting as part of a family and a community. Kevin is affected, influenced, supported, and limited by his immediate environment. Continuing along this line of thought, other questions can be raised. For example, how might Kevin's environment be changed? What other alternatives are available to him?

Many potential alternatives would involve major changes in the larger systems around him. Neighborhood youth centers with staff serving as positive role models could be developed as an alternative to gang membership. Kevin's school system could be evaluated. Does it have enough resources to give Kevin a good education? Is there a teacher who could single Kevin out and serve as his mentor and enthusiastic supporter? Can a mentor system be established within the school? Are scholarships and loans available to offer Kevin a viable alternative of college or a trade school? Can positive role models demonstrate to Kevin and his peers that alternative ways of life may be open to them? Where might the resources for implementation of any of these ideas come from?

Concerning Kevin's family environment, can additional resources be provided? These resources might include food and housing assistance, good day care for his younger brothers, and even educational opportunities for Kevin's mother so that she, too, could see a brighter future. Is there a Big Brother organization to provide support for Kevin and his siblings? Can the neighborhood be made a better place to live? Can crime be curbed and housing conditions improved?

There obviously are no easy answers. Scarcity of resources remains a fundamental problem. However, this example is intended to show how a generalist social work practitioner would look at a variety of options and targets of change—not just at Kevin.

Critical Thinking Questions 1.1

EP 7a, 8a

- How would you evaluate Kevin's situation?
- What changes in Kevin's environment and his support system do you think would be most helpful to him?
- Where might resources to support change come from?

(Critical thinking is explained and examined later in this chapter. Critical thinking questions like these will be interspersed throughout the text. Chapter 11 examines in greater depth ethical dilemmas such as Kevin's situation.)

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Welfare Policy and Policy Practice

EP 5c, 8d

Social workers must be knowledgeable about social welfare policy in order to be competent practitioners. Policy, in its simplest portrayal, might be thought of

as *rules.* Our lives and those of our clients are governed by rules. There are rules about how we drive our cars, when we must go to school, and how we talk or write sentences.

Policies, in essence, are rules that tell us which actions among a multitude of actions we may and may not take. Policies guide our work and our decisions. In its broad sense, **social welfare policy** includes the laws and regulations that determine how resources are distributed and what opportunities are made available so that people may lead fruitful and fulfilling lives; this includes numerous dimensions ranging from how taxes are levied to how the educational system is structured (Herrick, 2008). Social welfare policies also govern which social programs exist, what categories of clients are served, and who qualifies for a given program. Such policies set standards regarding the type of services to be provided and the qualifications of the service provider.

Basically, social welfare policies dictate how money can be spent to help people and how these people will be treated. There are policies that determine who is and who is not eligible for public assistance. Likewise, policies specify what social workers can and cannot do for sexually abused children.

Generalist practitioners must be well versed in social welfare policy. Social workers must know what is available for a client and how to get it. In order to get what is needed, they must understand the rules or policies for getting it. For example, Adam, a social worker for a county social services department, has a young client with three small children who has just been evicted from her apartment. Although the rent was relatively low and the apartment small (one bedroom), she had been unable to pay the rent for the past 3 months. All her money had gone to clothing and feeding her children.

Adam needs to know what other resources, if any, are available for this client and whether or not she is eligible to receive these resources. Policies determine the answers to these questions. Will the client qualify for some temporary additional public assistance in order to help her relocate? Is there a local shelter for the homeless available whose policies will allow the client and her children admission? If so, what is the shelter's policy for how long she and her children can stay? Is there any low-rent housing available? If so, what does its policy designate as the criteria and procedure for admittance? Such questions may continue on and on.

In addition to broader social welfare policies, there are agency policies concerning social service delivery. A **social services agency** is an organization providing social services that typically employs a range of helping professionals including social workers in addition to office staff, paraprofessionals (persons trained to assist professionals), and, on occasion, volunteers (Barker, 2014). Social service agencies (also sometimes referred to as *social agencies*) generally serve a designated client population experiencing a defined need. Examples of social services agencies include a family service agency, a Department of Human Services, and a nursing home.

Agency policies are those standards adopted that govern how the organization is structured, the qualifications of supervisors and workers, the services that are provided, and what staff including social workers may or may not do. For example, an agency providing services to families might have an agency policy concerning the proper procedures for practitioners to follow when conducting a family assessment.

The point here is that knowledge about policy is vitally important. An organization's policy can dictate how much vacation an employee can have and how raises are earned. An adoption agency's policy can determine who is and is not eligible to adopt a child. A social services agency's policies determine who receives and does not receive needed services and resources.

Social workers are professionally responsible to become actively involved in establishing and changing policies on multiple levels, including social welfare and agency policy, for the benefit of their clients. Sometimes, resources are unavailable or inadequate to meet clients' needs. Social workers should be able to "analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights, and social, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2015, p. 8).

At times, for whatever reason, policies are unfair or oppressive to clients. Sometimes, a social worker will decide that a policy is ethically or morally intolerable. In those events, the worker may decide to advocate on the behalf of clients to try to change the policy.

Generalist practitioners require the ability to analyze policy and undertake change when it is needed. In other words, they have responsibility for undertaking policy practice. **Policy practice** involves "efforts to change policies in legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones, or defeating the policy initiatives of other people" (Jansson, 2011, p. 14). Policy practice

may also concern advocacy on behalf of "relatively powerless groups, such as women, children, poor people, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, gay men and lesbians, and people with disabilities, [to] improve their resources and opportunities" (Jansson, 2011, p. 15). Later chapters will say more about advocacy and making changes in larger systems and their policies.

Additionally, generalist practitioners need a sound foundation of knowledge concerning social services. This includes a historical perspective about how services have been developed and an analytical perspective concerning how well services "advance social well-being" for those in need (CSWE, 2008, EP 2.1.8).

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Work Practice


EP 6

Social work practice is what this book is all about. It is the *doing* of social work. It involves how to form relationships with clients, help them to share information with you, define issues and problems, identify strengths, collect and assess information, identify and evaluate numerous alternatives for action, make specific plans, implement these plans, evaluate progress, terminate your client-worker relationship, and do follow-up to make certain intervention is no longer necessary.

Practice involves working with individuals, families, groups, organizations (both large and small), and large social and governmental structures. The acquisition of practice skills is what makes social work useful and practical. Skills provide the muscle to make social work practice effective.

The social work knowledge base includes knowledge about skills in addition to knowledge of problems and services. A social worker must know which skills will be most effective in which situation.

Consider a family whose home suddenly burns to the ground. Its members need immediate shelter. The social worker decides that using brokering skills is necessary; such skills involve seeking out and connecting people with the resources they need. The immediate crisis must be resolved by finding a place for the family to stay. In this situation, brokering skills take precedence over other skills. For instance, using less directive counseling techniques to explore the relationship between the spouses is inappropriate at this time. There is no current evidence of need. Such intervention may be necessary in the future, but only after the immediate crisis has been resolved.

There are multitudes of practice techniques and theories about these techniques from which social workers can choose. Social workers' skills are truly eclectic. Knowledge about the effectiveness of techniques is critical in order to select those that can accomplish the most in any specific situation. Regardless of techniques chosen and used, emphasis is currently placed on client strengths and empowerment, appreciation of diversity, and the use of practice approaches proven effective by empirical evidence (Corcoran, 2008; Parsons, 2008).

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Research-Informed Practice and Practice-Informed Research


EP 4a, 4c

Research accompanies human behavior and the social environment, social policy and policy practice, and social work practice as necessary components of the knowledge base for generalist practice. Knowledge about social work research is important for at least three basic reasons (Tripodi & Lalayants, 2008). First, it provides a scientific orientation to identifying, evaluating, and choosing intervention approaches that are effective. **Research-informed practice** is social work practice based on empirical evidence. (Highlight 1.4 discusses a related term—evidence-based practice.) Framing social work interventions so that they can be evaluated through research imparts information about which specific techniques work best with which specific problems. **Practice-informed research** refers to scientific investigation designed to attain results related to successful social work practice.

The second reason research is important is that, with this scientific perspective, it can guide social workers to become more effective in their practice. It can help them get better and clearer results. When work with a client is clearly evaluated, social workers can determine whether they are really helping a client with his or her problem. Additionally, practitioners can monitor their progress during the actual implementation process. Similarly, whole agencies can use research to evaluate their programs' effectiveness.

HIGHLIGHT 1.4 Evidence-Based Practice

A term related to research-informed practice is *evidence-based practice.* Rubin and Babbie (2014) explain:

> ***Evidence-based practice*** *(EBP) is a process in which practitioners make practice decisions in light of the best research evidence available. But rather than rigidly constrict practitioner options, the EPB model encourages practitioners to integrate scientific evidence with their practice expertise and knowledge of the idiosyncratic circumstances bearing on specific practice decisions. . . .*
>
> *Evidence-based practice also involves evaluating the outcomes of practice decisions. Although EPB is most commonly discussed in regard to decisions about what interventions to provide clients, it also applies to decisions about how best to assess the practice problems and decisions practitioners make at other levels of practice—such as decisions about social policies, communities, and so on. For example, a clinical practitioner following the EPB model with a newly referred client will attempt to find and use the most scientifically validated diagnostic tools in assessing client problems and treatment needs and then develop a treatment plan in light of the best research evidence available as to what interventions are most likely to be effective in light of that assessment, the practitioner's clinical expertise regarding the client, and the client's idiosyncratic attributes and circumstances. At the level of social policy, evidence-based practitioners will attempt to formulate and advocate policies that the best research available suggests are most likely to achieve their desired aims. Likewise, evidence-based practitioners working at the community level will make practice decisions at that level in light of community-level practice research. Moreover, evidence-based practitioners at each level will utilize research methods to evaluate the outcomes of their practice decisions to see if the chosen course of action is achieving its desired aim. If it is not, then the evidence-based practitioner will choose an alternative course of action—again in light of the best research evidence available and again evaluating its outcome.* (p. 28)

The third reason is that accumulated research helps to build an effective knowledge base for the social work profession. This helps to define social work practice, increase the effectiveness of interventions, and enhance the profession's accountability. Research forms the basis for the development of whole programs and policies that affect large numbers of people. Such knowledge can also be used to generate new theories and ideas to further enhance the effectiveness of social work.

Necessary Research Skills for Social Workers

Each social worker must master three dimensions of basic research skills. First, social workers need research skills to effectively evaluate the work they do with clients on all levels. (Evaluation is the fifth step of the planned change process emphasized in this book. It involves determining whether what you do as a practitioner is effective or not. On a micro level, are your clients' needs being met? Are they generally attaining their goals? On a mezzo level, is the group you are running effective? Are individual members and the entire group as a whole accomplishing their respective goals?)

The second dimension of basic research skills necessary for generalist practice involves the evaluation of macro system effectiveness. On a macro level, is your agency generally effective in its provision of services? Are clients really getting what they need? Practitioners, thus, need research competence in evaluating the effectiveness of service provision at all three levels of practice.

A third dimension is the ability to understand, analyze, and critically evaluate social work literature and research. Wide varieties of competing intervention approaches and techniques are available. Practitioners require research competence to make effective choices in their own generalist practice. How much faith can you place in some specific research findings, considering the research methodology used? How useful is the research for your particular client population? How relevant are the findings for your own generalist practice?

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Values and Principles That Guide Generalist Practice

Knowledge, skills, and values in social work have many overlaps. For example, consider the values and principles that guide generalist practice. These include the broad category of professional values and ethics in addition to the principles of client empowerment, understanding and appreciation of human diversity, and advocacy for human rights, along with the pursuit of social, economic, and environmental justice. There is much vital information in the eclectic *knowledge* base concerning each of these areas that is necessary for competent social work practice. Such knowledge should be applied via *skills* during implementation of planned change. However, each concept is an important component in the definition of generalist practice. Therefore, subsequent sections involving primary *values* and principles in generalist social work will address each concept more thoroughly in its own right.

Defining Generalist Practice: Professional Values and Ethics LO 1-6

Not only must generalist practitioners have substantial and diverse knowledge at their disposal, but they must also have assimilated professional values and ethical principles, the 2nd concept in the definition of generalist practice. **Values** are principles, qualities, and practices that a designated group, individual, or culture deems inherently desirable. Values, then, give direction concerning what is considered right and wrong. Subsequently, values provide guidelines for behavior. Ideally, one should behave in accordance with the values one holds.

Ethics are standards based on a set of values that serve to guide one's behavior. Values reflect what you consider to be right and wrong; ethics involves how you behave based on these values. Generalist practitioners must have a sound basis for making ethical decisions that are in accord with social work values. Highlight 1.5 introduces several aspects of professional values and ethics critical for social workers to address.

Social work values focus on "a commitment to human welfare, social justice, and individual dignity" (Reamer, 1987, p. 801). This focus frames the perspective with which social workers view their work with people. In other words, the well-being of people is more important than making the largest business profit or becoming the most famous actor. Social workers care about other people and spend their time helping people improve the conditions of their lives.

Social work values address individual needs and concerns, those of communities, and those of society in general. Professional values are interwoven throughout the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. The individual well-being of a person with a severe physical disability is critical, as is the way public services and laws generally treat such persons.

Superficially, this situation appears simple. The profession provides ethical guidelines for how to help people. Theoretically, then, all you should have to do is closely adhere to those guidelines, and ethical practice should be easy. You are simply supposed to look out for the well-being of your clients, right?

To say that people are complicated, as is life in general, is a cliché. However, one can also say that the application of ethics to actual decision making is often tremendously complicated. Many times, the monster of ethical conflict will raise its hoary head: Adherence to one aspect of ethics will effectively contradict adherence to another aspect of ethical conduct.

For example, the NASW *Code of Ethics* states that "social workers should respect clients' right to privacy" and "should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service" (NASW, 2008, §§1.07a, 1.07c). However, the *Code* goes on to state that confidentiality should be protected, "except for compelling professional reasons" or "when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person" (NASW, 2008, §1.07c).

Consider the situation in which a client, Bob, reveals that he has recently been given the diagnosis that he is HIV-positive. This condition can be fatal in the long run, and the social worker, Mia, knows that the client has been having unprotected sexual relations with several people over the past months. During their meetings, Bob has specifically named these people. After discussing options, he refuses to tell his sexual partners about his diagnosis. Additionally, for a variety of reasons, Mia doubts that Bob will begin to use precautions against spreading the disease. Agency policy mandates that social workers may not violate clients' confidentiality, which means that according to policy a social worker may not tell anyone about the

HIGHLIGHT 1.5 Achieve Competency in Ethical Practice by Applying Ethical Standards

EP 1a, 1b, 2c

Aspects of professional values and ethics for generalist practice include the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) *Code of Ethics;* the International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work (IFSW/IASSW) *Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles;* awareness of personal values; and management of ethical dilemmas. Chapter 11 will discuss each in much greater detail.

NASW *Code of Ethics*

Social work has a clearly delineated set of professional values reflected in the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2008). The *Code's* mission "is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (NASW, 2008, Preamble). The *Code of Ethics* addresses six aspects of professional responsibility: social workers' ethical responsibilities "to clients," "to colleagues," "in practice settings," "as professionals," "to the social work profession," and "to the broader society" (NASW, 2008). The *Code* has the following six core values that reflect ethical principles, which social workers should seek to follow:

1. *Service:* Social workers should provide help, resources, and benefits so that people may achieve their maximum potential.
2. *Social justice:* Social workers should pursue social justice, the idea that in a perfect world all citizens would possess equal fundamental "rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits," regardless of their backgrounds and membership in diverse groups (Barker, 2014, p. 399).
3. *Dignity and worth of the person:* Social workers should hold people in high esteem and appreciate individual value.
4. *Importance of human relationships:* Social workers should value supportive interpersonal interaction, effective communication, and collaboration to achieve positive changes with clients and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
5. *Integrity:* Social workers should be responsible, honest, and reliable.
6. *Competence:* Social workers should possess the necessary skills and abilities to perform work with clients effectively.

IFSW/IASSW *Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles*

Although the NASW *Code of Ethics* is the primary code followed by social workers in the United States, note that other ethical codes also are available in other nations and on an international basis. IFSW and IASSW have developed an *Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles.* The *Statement* focuses on international and global issues concerning human rights. Additionally, it stresses the need for social workers around the world to work together on a global basis.

Develop Awareness of Personal Values

Before you are able to prevent personal values from interfering with ethical professional practice, you must clearly identify those personal values. This proposition stems directly from the fourth NASW *Code of Ethics* core value, cited earlier, concerning "valuing human relationships" (NASW, 2008, Preamble). Valuing the client-worker relationship means keeping it clear of personal opinions. You certainly have the right to maintain personal values and opinions. However, a generalist practitioner is professionally obligated to prevent personal values that conflict with professional values from interfering with practice.

Tolerate Ambiguity, Address Ethical Dilemmas, and Make Principled Decisions

An **ethical dilemma** is a problematic situation in which ethical standards are in conflict. In other words, sometimes it is not possible to make a perfect choice and abide by all ethical guidelines. For example, consider a client who tells you he plans to murder his girlfriend, yet forbids you to tell anybody. You cannot maintain the primary ethical standard of protecting human life (namely, your client's girlfriend) and confidentiality at the same time. (**Confidentiality** is the ethical principle that workers should not share information provided by or about a client unless that worker has the client's explicit permission to do so.)

HIGHLIGHT 1.5 *(continued)*

You are in the midst of an ethical quandary. Generalist practitioners must be vigilant and prepared to address such ethical dilemmas, because they occur regularly. Often, potential answers are unclear, confusing, and ambiguous. Generalist practitioners must be able to tolerate imperfect alternatives to arrive at the most effective solution. Each dilemma is unique. Social workers must learn to work through such situations and "apply principles of critical thinking" to arrive at ethical decisions (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). Chapter 11 addresses a wide range of ethical dilemmas occurring in generalist practice and discusses how practitioners might make strategic decisions about what to do in such situations.

HIV-positive diagnosis without Bob's clearly expressed written permission. Mia worries that, among other things, prior sexual partners unaware of the HIV diagnosis and their potential exposure may continue to spread the disease.

Which ethical conceptions are more important: respect for Bob's privacy, compliance with agency policy, or the general welfare of society and the well-being of other people? The worker cannot fulfill all of her responsibilities. However, in this case the *Code* provides some guidance by directing Mia to determine whether or not the situation is "compelling" or involves "imminent harm." If so, confidentiality takes a backseat. Another section of the *Code* states that "workers generally should adhere to commitments made to employers and employing organizations" (NASW, 2008, §3.09a). It continues that "social workers should not allow an employing organization's policies, procedures, regulations, or administrative orders to interfere with their ethical practice of social work" (NASW, 2008, §3.09d). Therefore, the *Code* directs Mia to use her own best ethical judgment.

Ethical dilemmas are numerous. For instance, the law may dictate a lengthy procedure for removing the perpetrator in a case of alleged sexual abuse. However, what about the immediate, critical safety needs of the victim? For instance, a public assistance agency may require that applicants maintain residency for a specified time period before they become eligible for help. The single parent of a family of five comes in and says her children are starving. She has not lived in the area long enough to satisfy the residency requirement. What should the social worker do? Should the family be allowed to starve? Highlight 1.6 provides an exercise that addresses an ethical dilemma.

The potential variety of ethical dilemmas is endless. Professional values and ethics do provide some basic guidelines. However, many times, a social worker will have to make choices about what is more ethical or more critical to do. Chapter 11 will further address the issue of making ethical decisions by evaluating problems, breaking down potential solutions, and prioritizing ethical principles.

Critical Thinking Question 1.2

- As a social worker, what would you do if you were working with a client who made choices that were clearly bad for him or her (e.g., abusing alcohol or other drugs or refusing to leave a violent, physically harmful relationship)?

EP 7a, 8a

Defining Generalist Practice: Application of a Wide Range of Practice Skills to Target Systems of Any Size LO 1-7

EP 6

We have reviewed the knowledge base practitioners need as part of their foundation for generalist practice and emphasized the significance of social work values and ethics. The 3rd and 4th concepts in the definition of generalist practice are the *wide range of skills* needed to implement the planned change process and the use of these skills to target and work with a *system of any size.* These two concepts are so intertwined that we will address them together.

Historically, social work skills were clustered into three major categories. First, **casework** was practice that primarily involved direct interaction with individual clients. This is analogous in many ways to the *micro* level of practice. Second, **group work** was practice that entailed organizing and running a wide variety of groups (e.g., therapeutic groups or task groups). The *mezzo* level of practice might be said to

HIGHLIGHT 1.6 Learn to Make Difficult Ethical Decisions

One of the ethical dilemmas commonly faced by social workers is deciding who is to get help when there are limited resources. In many instances, there is a given amount of money, and a social worker must choose who will and will not receive help. Answers can be vague and ambiguous. No perfect solution may exist.

The following is an exercise designed to help you understand how difficult ethical dilemmas can be. (Later, Chapter 11 will help you work through some of the dilemmas social workers commonly face. It will also provide suggested structures for making difficult decisions.)

The Exercise

You have $60,000 to spend. From 10 possibilities, you must choose one situation where the money will be spent. Each situation requires the full amount of $60,000 in order to do any good. Dividing the money up would be useless and would help no one.

Which of the following persons should have the $60,000 made available to help him or her?

1. A premature infant (born 3 months early) who needs to be maintained in an incubator and receive medical benefits
2. A 52-year-old man who needs a heart transplant in order to survive
3. Your 52-year-old father who needs a heart transplant to survive
4. A 5-year-old child who has a rare genetic disease that requires extremely expensive medication and therapy
5. You, who recently graduated and have been out of work for 6 months
6. A divorced single mother with three children, a 10th-grade education, and nothing but the clothes on her back
7. A person who has an intellectual disability (formerly referred to as mental retardation) who needs the money to live in a group home with others who have similar disabilities
8. A 14-year-old runaway, addicted to cocaine and alcohol, who has been prostituting herself to survive and needs the money to enter a drug treatment program
9. A man convicted of child sexual abuse who was himself sexually abused as a child and seeks rehabilitation
10. A dispossessed urban family—a couple in their late 20s with three small children

There are no easy answers.

comprise this cluster of skills. Third, **community organization** was practice that concerned working with organizations and communities. This skill is analogous to the *macro* level of social work practice.

Under this old model of practice, social workers considered themselves experts in basically only one approach. They were either caseworkers, group workers, or community organizers. They did not see themselves as having a sound basis of skills in all areas for working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities as generalist practitioners do.

Generalist Practice Skills for Working with Individuals (Micro Skills)

Micro skills are those used in working with individuals. Such skills provide the foundation for work with larger groups, organizations, and communities. They involve basic interpersonal skills, including good communication and interviewing skills.

Endless scenarios come to mind that illustrate the use of micro skills. Social workers counsel people addicted to alcohol or other drugs. They try to find places to live and other resources for homeless families. They manage service provision for older adults who are ill or for people who have developmental disabilities (e.g., intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, visual impairment, or autism spectrum disorders) and require numerous resources. They investigate potential child abuse situations. They help displaced homemakers and their families who are survivors of domestic violence. Chapter 2 focuses on micro-level skills.

Generalist Practice Skills for Working with Groups (Mezzo Skills)

Mezzo skills are those used to work with small groups. Generalist practitioners learn and use mezzo skills to work with a wide range of groups. They run support groups for people who have been diagnosed with cancer. They run treatment conferences to evaluate progress and establish treatment recommendations for young people with serious emotional and behavioral problems living in group homes and residential treatment centers. They participate in educational groups in schools to talk about birth control. They facilitate activity groups in nursing homes for older adults. They run agency meetings aimed at developing new treatment programs or a new policy manual. Building upon the basic interpersonal skills established in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 examines skills for working with groups in greater detail.

Generalist Practice Skills for Working with Families (Micro/Mezzo Skills)

Because of the special and intimate nature of families, skills for working with them include both skills for working with individuals and skills for working with groups. Chapters 9 and 10 explore understanding and working with families in greater detail.

Generalist Practice Skills for Working in and with Organizations and Communities (Macro Skills)

Building upon the mastery of skills for working with both individuals and groups, **macro skills** are those used to work with large systems, including organizations and communities. Working with macro-level problems requires working with other individuals and groups of individuals. Chapter 4 discusses macro skills and the types of situations social workers frequently encounter in working with organizational and community systems.

Macro practice most frequently involves issues concerning a number of people or a specific group of people. For example, illegal drug use might be identified as a major difficulty in an urban neighborhood. Violence over drug sales is escalating. More and more people, including teens, are being shot as dealers and users squabble. The incidence of persons diagnosed as HIV-positive is abruptly increasing as addicts share needles and contaminate each other. Child neglect and abuse are skyrocketing. Truancy rates are soaring. Parents on a "high" fail to attend to their young children. Parents' anger at themselves, at unsatisfied needs, and at the world in general is taken out on the easiest scapegoats: their children.

Approaches to solving these problems may reach far beyond helping an individual break a drug habit. Drug rehabilitation programs may be needed. Policies regarding the treatment of dealers may need to be addressed. Alternatives to a drug-related lifestyle may need to be pursued and developed for community residents. A youth center may be needed as a place for younger people to socialize, participate in activities, and have fun. Community residents may need job training and help in finding adequate employment.

The list of needs and possibilities is endless. A social worker involved in the community needs skills for organizing residents to come together and plan solutions. Skills in approaching community leaders and policymakers are important so that they may be persuaded to support and help finance needed services. Highlight 1.7 illustrates some case scenarios where macro practice skills may be useful.

Defining Generalist Practice: Emphasis on Client Empowerment, Strengths, and Resiliency LO 1-8

An emphasis on empowerment, strengths, and resiliency is the 5th concept in the definition of generalist practice and a primary value inherent in practice. We have defined *empowerment* as "the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their life situations" (Gutierrez, 2001, p. 210). Empowerment means emphasizing, developing, and nurturing strengths and positive attributes. It aims at enhancing individuals', groups', families', and communities' power and control over their destinies.

The Strengths Perspective

EP 7c

Cowger maintains that social work historically has focused on dysfunction, pathology, and "individual inadequacies" (1994, p. 262). He states that "if assessment focuses on deficits, it is likely that deficits will remain the focus of both the worker and the client during remaining contacts.

HIGHLIGHT 1.7 The Macro-Level Approach

EP 6a, 7b, 8a

It's very easy for social workers, especially when they are just beginning in practice, to focus on changing the individual. Using interviewing and planned change techniques with an individual in a practice situation is exciting. Figuring out how an individual client thinks and functions is fascinating. Additionally, the individual is right in front of you. The other systems with which the individual client is involved are much more abstract. Their interactions and effects may seem vague and distant. Because of the complexity of outside systems, pinpointing targets of change often seems more difficult.

However, generalist social work practitioners must also think in terms of needed changes beyond the individual client system. The individual is only one focus for potential change.

Macro-system changes are seldom easy. They often involve influencing large numbers of people or key decision makers. Sometimes conflict is necessary. However, focusing on large system change is a unique aspect of social work that may open up multitudes of new planned change alternatives.

The following three scenarios put you in various situations. For each one, think in terms of how the problem might be solved through macro-level changes. For this exercise, do not change or move the individual. Think in terms of what major organizations or community groups can do to effect change. What policies might be changed? What community services might be developed? What strategies might achieve these changes? Remember, do not change the individual—focus only on macro-system change.

What Might You Do When:

1. You are a public social services worker in a rural county. Your job includes doing everything from helping older adults obtain their Social Security payments to investigating alleged child abuse. Within the past 6 months, six farm families in the county have filed for bankruptcy. Government farm subsidies that used to be available have been withdrawn, and the past 2 years have been hard on crops. Now the banks are threatening to foreclose on the farm mortgages. Thus, the six families will literally be put out in the cold with no money and no place to go. What do you do?
2. You are a social worker for Pinocchio County Social Services. It is a rural county with a few towns and no large cities. Your job as intake worker is to do family assessments when people call up with problems (anything from domestic violence to coping with serious illnesses). Your next task is to make referrals to the appropriate services.

   You have been hearing about a number of sexual assaults in the area. Women are expressing fear for their safety. People who have been assaulted do not know where to turn. The nearest large cities are over 80 miles away. You have always been interested in women's issues and advocacy for women. Now what do you do?
3. You have a 70-year-old client named Harriett who lives in an old inner-city neighborhood in a large city. Since her husband died 7 years ago, she has been living alone. She has no children, is still in good health, and likes to be independent.

   The problem is that her house has been condemned for new highway construction. The plans are to tear it down within 6 months. There is no public housing available for older adults within 5 miles of where she lives. She would like to stay in the area because she has a lot of older adult friends there. Now what? (Remember, do not move Harriett.)

A Commentary

The preceding scenarios are difficult to solve. They are not designed to frustrate you but rather to encourage you to think about interventions beyond the micro and mezzo levels. Sometimes, macro-system service provision is inadequate, ineffective, or simply wrong. The generalist practitioner's unique perspective is one of potential system change at all levels.

This text is designed to help you clarify that perspective and assimilate a wide variety of practice skills. The dimension of macro skills focuses on targeting the environment, not the person in the environment, for change.

Concentrating on deficits … can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies" (1994, p. 264). However, concentrating on strengths can provide "structure and content for an examination of realizable alternatives, for the mobilization of competencies that can make things different, and for the building of self-confidence that stimulates hope" (1994, p. 265).

Focusing on strengths in this way is sometimes referred to as the *strengths perspective*, an orientation focusing on client resources, capabilities, knowledge, abilities, motivations, experience, intelligence, and other positive qualities that can be put to use to solve problems and pursue positive changes (Blundo, 2008; CSWE, 2008, EP B2.2; Kim, 2008; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012). This perspective can provide a sound basis for empowerment. Saleebey (2013) proposes that the following principles are among those underlying the strengths perspective:

1. "Every individual, group, family, and community has strengths."
2. "Trauma and abuse, illness, and struggle may be injurious, but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity."
3. "Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change and take individual, group, and community aspirations seriously."
4. "We best serve clients by collaborating with them."
5. "Every environment is full of resources." (pp. 17–20)

Resiliency: Seeking Strength amid Adversity

We have established that a notion related to the strengths perspective and empowerment is *resiliency*, the ability of an individual, family, group, community, or organization to recover from adversity and resume functioning even when suffering serious trouble, confusion, or hardship (Clark, 2013; CSWE, 2015, p. 11; Greene & Conrad, 2012). For example, Norman (2000) provides an illustration of this notion:

> *When a pitched baseball hits a window, the glass usually shatters. When that same ball meets a baseball bat, the bat is rarely damaged. When a hammer strikes a ceramic vase, it too usually shatters. But when that same hammer hits a rubber automobile tire, the tire quickly returns to its original shape. The baseball bat and the automobile tire both demonstrate resiliency.* (p. 3)

Resiliency involves two dimensions—"risk factors" and "protective factors" (Greene & Conrad, 2012; Norman, 2000, p. 3). In this context, *risk factors* involve "stressful life events or adverse environmental conditions that increase the *vulnerability* [defenselessness or helplessness] of individuals" or other systems (Norman, 2000, p. 3). *Protective factors*, on the other hand, concern those factors that "buffer, moderate, and protect against those vulnerabilities" (p. 3).

The following situation provides a poignant example of resiliency at the micro level:

> *For 16-year-old Kameka, the turning point from risk to resilience occurred when she exclaimed to a school counselor, "Look, I'm not going home. I'll kill myself first." That comment signaled an important shift in her road to healing from a life filled with violence and victimization: sexual and physical abuse, severe neglect, extreme poverty, and subsequent self-abuse. Raised in a crime-ridden, inner-city environment by her drug-addicted mother, she adopted self-injurious behaviors as her way of coping, including multiple suicide attempts and self-mutilation. At the point that she recognized that her options had run out and that her only other choice was to return to a life she perceived as deadly, she found the inner resources to reach out for help. By 21 years of age, just 5 years later, Kameka was attending college and passionately committed to starting an art school for low-income African American youths. Especially noteworthy was her readiness to accept healing relationships in her life, such as intimate relationships with males. Articulate and insightful, she emphasized feeling grateful for what she had learned from all her previous life challenges* (Williams, Lindsey, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 2001).
>
> *How was this young woman able to transcend her early life of victimization and violence to access the inner strength necessary to adopt a seemingly positive life direction? In a qualitative study of former runaway and homeless youths, researchers explored pivotal factors that enabled young people who endured significant trauma over time to reclaim their personal power as survivors rather than as victims* (Williams et al., 2001). *Among the factors were determination, taking care of self, accepting help, and finding meaning in the person's experience, including a spiritual relationship with a benevolent, higher power. In the case of Kameka, it also appeared that she possessed innate qualities of intelligence as well as a solid sense*