**Lecture Notes for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice**

The goal of generalist practice is to address problematic interactions between persons and their environments or surroundings. The knowledge, theoretical perspectives, roles, and skills of generalist practice are described in this chapter. A generalist social worker needs problem-solving skills and the ability to determine a client’s strengths or potential to participate in a change effort. Generalist social workers must also be able to think beyond current situations and to devise change strategies that build on strengths and capitalize on existing and potential resources.

**Knowledge Base for Generalist Social Workers**

The BSW degree provides the knowledge base for generalist social work practice. Courses typically come from a liberal arts foundation and may include sociology, psychology, biology, economics, political science, and statistics. Additional courses may include:

* Human Behavior in the Social Environment - theory, research and practice issues related to human development
* Social Work Research - formulation of research questions, data collection and analysis
* Social Policy - social welfare system and the development, implementation and evaluation of policy
* Social Work Methods or Practice - framework for social work intervention and common elements of social work practice
* Field Education - placement in a social service agency; connects knowledge from the classroom with the opportunity to apply practice skills and knowledge in an agency setting
* Electives - addictions, domestic violence, international social work, aging, child welfare

Exhibit 3.1 demonstrates the interplay between the Liberal Arts Foundation, Field Work, and various elements of the BSW curriculum.

Additional concepts that are emphasized throughout the social work curriculum include:

* Social work core values - individual rights and social justice
* Self-determination - the right of people, groups and communities to make choices, design a course of action, and live as independently as possible
* Critical thinking – the ability to reflect upon and integrate information from an array of sources in order to form a position, opinion or conclusion

**Theoretical Foundations of Generalist Practice**

Generalist practice is a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to social work that draws from a variety of intervention models and theoretical perspectives. Some of their concepts and content are taken from biological science, psychology, sociology and political science.

* Systems Theory - a client system might consist of an individual, important family members and friends, relationships with work, church, and other organizations, and elements of large-scale institutions such as the economy. It allows for a multidimensional analysis of function, cause and interrelations when considering avenues of change. The interactions among the elements in a system are an important point of focus during the process of change.
* Ecological Perspective - This aspect of social work focuses on people and their environments. An individual’s environment is comprised of the physical and social settings where a person resides or experiences life situations, including families and neighborhoods, communities and workplaces, and culture and institutions, like places of worship and the education system. The **person-in-the-environment** perspective highlights how people are affected in positive and negative ways by their surroundings. Various elements of a person’s environment may include:
  + Political-economic system: laws, political atmosphere, ideological trends, economic health
  + Faith based organizations, the marketplace, and human service systems: sources of the resources (goods and services) that can be tapped to sustain a good life
  + Education and employment systems: developers and users of human skills, which promote well-being by giving people a place in society
  + Family, fictive kin, and social support systems: the “home base” of friends and family (however family is defined by the individual) that provide a sense of safety and security and shape the person’s emotional life

How do social workers provide support?

* Help people who struggle with adaptation to changes in the environment and need help in the process
* Identify changes in the environment that would help the person function better
* Assist with communication between various elements of the environment
* Empowerment Theory - Empowerment provides people with the means to attain their goals. Empowerment links the strengths and potential of individuals, systems, and behaviors to social action and societal change. As individuals, families and communities enhance their capacity, they begin to feel a sense of control over their lives as well as their environment. Empowerment involves not only outward changes but also inward changes in self-esteem and the sense of personal value. Empowerment includes advocacy - activities that influence the allocation of resources and the decision-making that occurs within social systems, institutions, and the political and economic arena. Using advocacy as a vehicle for empowerment supports social justice.
* Strengths Perspective – Social workers recognize that every person has assets, resources and knowledge that may be useful in solving problems. These strengths may be indentified during the process of assessment. Some ways that the Strengths Perspective may be used include:
  + Listening to the ideas of clients and communities to identify resources and opportunities
  + Collaborating with clients as an equal partner in the assessment and change process
  + Recognizing the unique potential and resilience of clients in order to challenge barriers
  + Understanding that communities offer untapped resources that can be used individually and collectively
* Evidence-Based Practice – Social workers use interventions that have been demonstrated to be successful. The evidence of the success may come from large-scale experimental comparisons to document the effectiveness of the intervention against a control group that did not experience the intervention. Some social workers use evidence generated from non-experimental research.

**Roles for Generalist Social Workers**

* **Advocate:** A champion of the rights of others with the goal of empowering the client system served.
* **Broker:** Assists clients in identifying, locating and linking to needed resources. Establishes a network of services and providers in collaboration with clients.
* **Case Manager:** Oversees the services provided to a client to ensure needs are met through quality interventions and in a timely fashion.
* **Counselor:** Provides direct services that help clients articulate their needs, problems, and goals. Explores options and strategies for change in light of the client’s strengths and resources.
* **Mediator:** Intervenes and resolves disputes in a fair and equitable fashion. Finds common ground, compromises while reconciling differences, and assumes a neutral role.
* **Navigator:** Assists clients in maneuvering through complex bureaucracies, such as the health care system, to gain needed services
* **Researcher:** Conducts research projects and program evaluations to gain evidence that informs practice and policy.

**Levels of Generalist Practice**

* Micro – Individuals: Direct practice with individuals requires skills in communication, cultural sensitivity, empathy, genuineness, and solution-focused decision making, as well as refined assessment and interviewing skills
* Mezzo/Meso - Families and Groups:
  + When working with families, social workers look at how well family members provide emotional, economic, and day-to-day, practical support to each other. These forms of support are resources that can buffer stress and facilitate clients’ adaptation to changing conditions.
  + When working with groups, a social worker may serve as a consultant, evaluator, facilitator, initiator, resource person, therapist, or a combination. Group interaction, support and interdependence have great potential to foster change, as group members experience and lend mutual aid one another. Support groups, family education groups, resident councils, social or life skills groups, and anger management groups are all possible forums where social workers can use group process or facilitation skills.
* Macro - Organizations and Communities:
  + Case advocacy - collaboration with individual clients to strengthen and maximize their opportunities at the organizational, community, societal, and global levels
  + Cause advocacy/ Community organizing - strengthening of higher order social systems (organizations, communities, societies)

**The Change Process**

Social workers us a framework of steps that outlines how they might best intervene in people’s lives and help them meet their needs. The interventions do not always occur in a step-by-step, linear fashion. For example, implementation and evaluation may reveal that another round of assessment and planning needs to occur. Many believe that the most important component of the change process is the client-worker relationship, which is based on a mutual bond of trust and confidence.

* Engagement - A key time for people getting to know one another and to begin developing rapport. Skills in verbal and nonverbal communication are very crucial for understanding the client and putting the client at ease.
* Assessment - Is bidirectional in nature – a two way street. A social worker is assessing the problems and strengths of a client while the client is assessing the personality, professional skills, and demeanor of the social worker.
* Planning - figuring out what to do – purposeful action. In many instances, a written case plan, a contract designed collaboratively by the social worker and the client, is developed. Case plans are comprised of short- and long-terms goals and corresponding strategies for achieving them. When appropriate, family members, friends and neighborhood can be included in the planning process and be part of the plan.
* Implementation - the actual doing of the activities outlined in the plan for reaching stated goals. The social worker and client monitor the plan during implementation to make sure their strategies are being followed and to make adjustments as necessary.
* Evaluation - The purpose of evaluation is to monitor implementation of the plan and assure that designated activities are effectively accomplishing intended goals. Evaluation marks progress, provides insight into the success of initiatives, and informs future plans – including aftercare activities. Although it is listed last, it is important to evaluate throughout the process.

**Advocates for Change**

Advocacy is the active support of client involvement and impact concerning decisions related to an idea, need, or cause. Both case and cause advocacy are expressed through strategies and methods that influence the opinions and decisions of people and organizations.

UNICEF identified the following activities that can generate influence:

* Defining the Problem: Examining the situation in detail to understand the underlying causes of the problem.
* Recognizing the Strengths: Assessing potential assets and resources within individuals, groups and organizations.
* Raising Awareness: Educating the individual or the public by presenting evidence-based and solution-oriented messages.
* Developing Partnerships: Generating organizational support and momentum behind the issue being addressed.
* Lobbying and Negotiating: Discussing the issues and desired changes with decision makers and people with power in the situation.
* Generating and Consuming Research: Examining the underlying causes and solutions to a problem.
* Facilitating Social Mobilization: Engaging allies and partners at multiple levels.
* Planning Events: Bringing together a variety of people to highlight the issue or concern and work toward solutions.