Instructor’s Manual: Chapter 3

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# Learning Objectives for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

After reading this chapter, you should be able to  
1. Describe the knowledge base for generalist social work and direct practice.  
2. Describe the five theoretical bases of generalist practice.  
3. Define roles available for generalist social workers.  
4. Identify the five steps in the client change process.  
5. Explain how the advocacy program and policy model applies to the change process.  
6. Explain how generalist social workers can advocate for change across client systems.

# 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.

# Key Concepts for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

client system

direct practice

ecological perspective

empowerment theory

evidence-based practice

generalist social work practice

person-in-environment perspective

self-determination

strengths perspective

systems theory

# Case Study for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

Amy, a generalist social worker in a Mid-Atlantic State, works with girls in the criminal justice system charged with status offenses including truancy, curfew violations, and running away. Through her work, Amy discovered that each year a disproportionate number of status offenses are brought against girls. Amy wonders why this occurs and what she can do to better understand this trend. Consider how Amy can use the change process to learn about the needs of the girls she works with and how that information could be used to change gender–responsive choices of the criminal justice system.

1. Whom would it be important for Amy to engage with during the first stage of the change process? Consider both people who can help her to effect change and those who can help her have a more accurate scope of the problem.
2. What roadblocks might Amy encounter in her efforts to both define and address this problem?

# Discussion Questions for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

Discussion Question #1

Do you think there are certain classes that should be mandatory as part of a social work degree that aren’t mentioned in your book? For example, it’s possible at many schools to get an MSW without ever having to take a class in addictions, or a class in human sexuality—two areas that come up in many social work fields. Do you think those classes—or any others not noted—should be mandatory?

Discussion Question #2

Think of a major change that could take place in a client’s life (e.g., losing a job, the end of a relationship, stopping one’s drug use). Look at the ecological map in your book and imagine someone whose life experienced one of these changes. What other areas on their own ecological map would be impacted by that major change? Selecting one of those changes, think how it might have negative impacts for some and positive impacts for others, depending on circumstances and their own specific ecological maps.

Discussion Question #3

Your book mentions the idea of “fictive kin.” Do any of you have fictive kin? On a related note, social workers tend to frown on the use of the term “real family” or “real parents,” preferring terms like “biological family” or “birth parents.” Why do you think that is?

Discussion Question #4

Empowerment is key to working with our clients. Somewhat ironically, as social workers, we also recognize that people often find themselves in very difficult situations due to factors that are completely out of their control. How can we both show empathy for clients who are in situations they couldn’t have prevented and empower them to feel like they have significant control over their own lives?

# Chapter Exercises for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

1. Investigate the baccalaureate social worker licensing procedures for your state. What do the licensure requirements tell you about the roles of generalist social workers?

2. Interview a generalist social worker to better understand how he or she applies generic skills to individual problems. Write a brief description of your findings.

3. Volunteer at a community agency such as a homeless shelter, food pantry, or used clothing store. Analyze your experience as a volunteer in terms of the information you read in this chapter. What information from this chapter was most relevant to your volunteer experience?

4. Research a national or international advocacy group, such as Amnesty International or

Green Peace. Describe how the organization links individual concerns to national and

global causes.

# Class Activities for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

**Class activity #1**

Break the class into groups and provide them with the following vignette and the questions accompanying it. This is an opportunity for them to take a realistic problem and apply the change process to it. After they have completed their group discussions, have them share both their definitions of the problem and their approach to that problem with the rest of the class. Compare and contrast.

Twenty-five girls at the local public high school (enrollment 800) have come up pregnant this school year, much more than the previous high of 11. The school has a sex education program that focuses primarily on abstinence and includes little information on STIs or contraception use. The school social worker contacted the parents of the twenty-five pregnant girls to offer support services but found herself met with resistance and requests for privacy. The school board wants the social worker to be part of an interdisciplinary team aimed at addressing this situation and reducing the number of student pregnancies in the next year.

Keeping in mind you can look at this problem from a micro, mezzo, or macro perspective, answer the following questions:

1. With whom would you engage to get an idea of the true extent of the problem?
2. What do you believe are the possible causes of this problem?
3. What possible strategies could you follow to combat this problem?
4. What do you see as the merits and shortcomings of each of these strategies? What will be the challenges you may face with particular plans you have devised?
5. Which of these strategies would you select to combat the problem you have identified? Why?

**Class activity #2**

Break your class into groups and have them read the following vignette. Ask them to discuss what the appropriate actions are for the social worker to take. Listen in on their discussions to get an idea of the ideas being expressed. It’s likely some will want to try to convince Jenna that she needs to get an abortion for the good of her other kids. It’s also likely that some students will agree with Jenna’s stance on abortion. The key point, of course, is that the social worker’s view on abortion and morality in this situation is irrelevant. Can they help Jenna to come to a decision without trying to influence her toward their preferred outcome?

Jenna is a single mother of 6 (ages 10, 8, 5, 4-year-old twins, 18 months). She is pregnant with her 7th child and none of the fathers of her six children (nor the father of the 7th) are in the picture financially or otherwise. She has no family to speak of. Her doctors have told her she has a medical complication that will likely result in her death if she goes through with this pregnancy. Jenna is strongly opposed to abortion. She believes it is murder. You recognize that she is likely to die in childbirth if she goes through with her pregnancy, leaving 6 parentless children to the system. As her social worker, what is the best course of action for you to take?

**Class activity #3**

Break your class into groups and have them read the following vignette. They will use this to practice the strengths perspective. Note that when they come up with Jim’s list of problems and strengths, they are likely to have some parallel concepts on each list (e.g. manipulative and persuasive, obsessed and determined, survivor and victim). This can lead to a valuable discussion of how the strengths perspective is just a way to recognize someone’s skills, even if those skills might be used in unhealthy ways. If the client can learn to use those skills to improve their lives instead of using them to stay entrenched in unhealthy patterns, that will be quite empowering.

After the individual groups come up with their answers, list the strengths and weaknesses on the board. Have them look at the list of strengths apart from the list of weaknesses. What kind of person have they described? Those strengths are real, despite the unsettling nature of some of Jim’s behavior. He has a lot to work with, even though many people likely judged him immediately in a strongly negative way.

Vignette:

Jim is a resident at a treatment facility for adolescent sex offenders. He has been a resident for the last eighteen months. You are his newly assigned clinical social worker/case manager. Jim has a history of severe physical and mental abuse suffered at the hands of family members. He was repeatedly beaten with objects and locked in closets for hours when he was young, even for the slightest infraction. He began stalking young girls in his early teens and was charged on three separate occasions with sexual assault, spending time in juvenile detention. He’s never raped anyone—his sexual assault charges were for walking up to these girls, touching them inappropriately, and trying to kiss them. He ended up at the facility after he was discovered in the bushes outside a neighborhood girl’s home looking in her window. This was considered a violation of his probation, the terms of which mandated Jim’s relocation to the facility until he finished high school.

When Jim selects an individual to stalk, he carefully observes their day-to-day behavior from a safe distance, recording their activities in great detail in a spiral notebook. Only after significant time has passed may he make an effort to approach them. Jim’s notebook was not discovered until after the arrest that led him to his current placement.

Tendencies toward some of these behaviors have been observed at the facility as well, as he has become fixated on particular female staff members. Jim is often able to gain his information through talking to other residents and getting them to report things back to him about his chosen individual. At times he does this through offers of material goods, promises of returned favors, or even blackmail about reporting inappropriate behavior he has observed on the part of other residents. He has also, in the past, been able to blackmail staff members of the agency using information he gathered about them, giving him the opportunity to break certain rules while staff looked the other way. (Those staff members were, of course, fired upon discovery of this.)

Jim does not have very good hygiene. He tends to wear the same shirt for several days consecutively. These are usually shirts featuring classic rock bands such as Led Zeppelin and the Moody Blues. Jim can eagerly speak at length about his musical tastes.

Jim’s parents have attempted to get involved in his treatment at the facility but Jim has consistently refused their visits and phone calls.

* What can you identify as Jim’s problems?
* What can you identify as Jim’s strengths?
* Would you struggle to use the strengths perspective in working with Jim?
* What problems would be caused if Jim's worker did not operate from the strengths perspective?

# Video and Multimedia for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

#### Video Clips

* [Field education](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ieZsa1ybRs)   
  A look at what the process of field education at one university is like.
* [Strengths Perspective in a Nutshell](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnR5fmhdWNY)   
  Social work’s strengths perspective, explained from a different angle.
* [Critical thinking](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3AuStymweQ)   
  The basics and benefits of critical thinking, a key component of the social work change process.

Audio Clips

* [Decoding Nonverbal Behavior and What It Means](http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=248198314&m=248198627)   
  Nonverbal behavior—does it reveal how we see ourselves?
* [A Look at the Stages of Change, a More Advanced Model](http://www.socialworkpodcast.com/StagesOfChange.mp3)   
  The stages of change social workers may see in their clients.

# Web Resources for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

* [Embracing the Strengths Perspective](http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/embracing-strengths-perspective)   
  The key principles of the strengths perspective and why they are vitally important to social work.
* [Change Process](http://societalvogue.blogspot.com/2011/08/planned-change-in-casework-social-work.html)   
  The social work planned-change process in a bit more detail.
* [Evidence-based Practice (EBP) Resources](http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history)   
  A list of links to resources compiling information about evidence-based practice in many arenas of social work.

# SAGE Journal Articles for Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice

[**SAGE Journal User Guide**](http://www.uk.sagepub.com/sageEdge/orvis3e/files/SJ-userguide.pdf)

Article 1.

[Feit, M. D. (2003). Toward a definition of social work practice: Reframing the dichotomy. Research on Social Work Practice, 13(3), 357-365](http://rsw.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/13/3/357?ijkey=xwpHEknO/Vazk&keytype=ref&siteid=sprsw). doi:10.1177/1049731503013003010

This article focuses on how the historical tendency to define social work in dichotomous terms (direct/indirect, clinical/administration) fails to acknowledge the reality that in a job, social workers are engaged in a variety of tasks and responsibilities that draw on a continuum of skills.

#### Questions:

1. How has the complexity of social work jobs and the variety of settings in which social work occurs contributed to strain and confusion about the definition of social work?
2. In advancing the idea of an occupational continuum, what does the author suggest about the role of direct and indirect social work tasks and responsibilities?
3. How does a generalist perspective contribute to a more holistic view of social work practice?

Article 2.

[Guo, W., & Tsui, M. (2010). From resilience to resistance: A reconstruction of the strengths perspective in social work practice. International Social Work, 53(2), 233-245.](http://isw.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/53/2/233?ijkey=TiFCkS2wVLayk&keytype=ref&siteid=spisw)doi:10.1177/0020872809355391

This article provides a critique of certain elements of mainstream generalist practice.  Drawing on elements of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the authors suggest ways for social workers to engage in self-reflection and “frame analysis” as a way to move beyond the emphasis on resilience and acknowledge the possibility of resistance.

#### Questions:

1. What is the relationship between strengths-based practice and resilience in mainstream social work?
2. What are the authors’ central critiques of the strengths-based approach and the emphasis on resilience?
3. Explain the importance of “reflection-in-action” in addressing the identified weaknesses of the mainstream approach to practice.