

# 1



## Generalist Social Work Practice

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“What’s working well that you would like to see continue?” With this question, Andrea Barry, a family preservation worker, shifts focus in her work with the Clemens family. She carefully studies the reactions to her question on the faces of the family members who are gathered with her around their kitchen table. She reads caution, apprehension, maybe even a little anger, and yes, there it is, a growing sense of surprise, of intrigue with her approach. As a social worker with the family preservation program of Northside Family Services, Andrea has seen this before. Preparing to fend off the blame of abuse or neglect, families involved with the program are often taken off guard by the careful, non-judgmental phrasing of her questions. With the query about “what’s working well,” Andrea recognizes family strengths and looks toward the future, toward things families can still do something about. In other words, she sets the stage for empowering families by focusing on their strengths and promoting their competence.

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

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

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

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

Clients have taught Andrea that individual differences themselves can be the keys to solutions. Social work practitioners accept the challenge to enable each client system to access its own unique capabilities and the resources of its particular context. Andrea's role in the professional relationship is that of partner to empower families with their own strengths, not to overpower families with her own considerable practice knowledge and skills. Andrea has learned to depend on each family system's special competencies to guide her in this empowering process.

Even though Andrea considers the Clemens family as a whole, she will not neglect her professional mandate to act in the best interest of the Clemens children. Ethical considerations and legal obligations compel Andrea to protect the children in this family. However, family service social workers simultaneously focus on the preservation of families and the protection of children. Andrea sees the needs of families and children as convergent. What benefits the family will help the children in their development. What benefits the children will contribute to the cohesiveness of the family. Theoretically, she sees the whole family system as her client and knows that any change in the family system will create changes for individual family members.

Andrea's work with the Clemens family reinforces her opinion that social policy that aims to keep families together is good policy. She always feels best when implementing a policy that reflects a professional philosophy that so neatly fits her own values. The policy of family preservation makes sense in Andrea's practice experience, as well. She has observed the trauma for families and children when children at risk are removed from their own homes. Reuniting them, even after positive changes occur, always seems to be a difficult transition. Research in the field of child welfare confirms Andrea's practice observations and lends support for the current policy of family preservation. Andrea believes that keeping families together makes good economic sense, too. She suspects that economic considerations are a major force motivating the development of policies that favor family preservation.

"What's working well that you'd like to see continue?" A simple question, yet it reflects Andrea Barry's empowerment orientation toward social work practice. Andrea has learned that even simple questions can have dramatic effects. Simple questions set the tone, bond relationships, and lead to successful solutions.

This chapter provides an overview of social work practice. It describes the underlying values, purposes, and perspectives that contribute to the empowering approach that Andrea Barry uses and explains what generalist social workers do. Specifically, this chapter

- ◆ Articulates the value base and purpose of the social work profession
- ◆ Defines generalist social work as an integration of practice, policy, and research
- ◆ Explains social work intervention activities at each system level of practice—micro-, mezzo-, and macrolevel, and the social work profession
- ◆ Differentiates the multiple functions and roles of generalist social workers at various system levels

The outcome is a foundation on which to build an understanding of social work practice from a generalist perspective.

## SOCIAL WORK VALUES AND PURPOSE



*Human dignity and worth* and *social justice* are the centerpiece values of the social work profession. How are these professional values reflected in the definition of human rights?

Andrea Barry practices in family services—one of many fields of social work. Other practice arenas include school social work, medical social work, probation and other criminal justice services, mental health, youth services, child welfare, and housing and urban development, to name a few. The predominant fields of social work practice, representing more than 70% of the professional workforce, are mental health, medical health, child welfare, and aging services (NASW, 2005a).

All social work practitioners, regardless of their particular field of practice, share a common professional identity and work toward similar purposes. The National Association of Social Workers (1999a), in its *Code of Ethics*, defines this unifying purpose, or mission, of all social work as “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” (Preamble). To meet this purpose, social workers recognize that private troubles and public issues are intertwined.

Thus, social workers strive to both strengthen human functioning and promote the effectiveness of societal structures. This simultaneous focus on persons and their environments permeates all social work practice. As a social worker, Andrea Barry works with the Clemens family to facilitate the adaptive functioning of their family and preserve their unity. She also works to create a resource-rich and responsive environment that will contribute to the development and stability of the Clemens family. Both of these activities reflect Andrea’s integration of the fundamental values of the social work profession. The overarching values of *human dignity and worth* and *social justice* shape her attitudes; the purpose of the profession directs her actions.

### Human Dignity and Worth

Valuing the inherent human dignity and worth of all people reflects a nondiscriminatory view of humankind. The *Code of Ethics* (1999a) charges social workers to “treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity,” “. . . promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination,” “. . . enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs,” and “. . . resolve conflicts between clients’ interests and the broader society’s interests in a socially responsible manner” (Preamble). Similarly, in their joint statement on ethics in social work, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) affirm that human rights follow from respect for the inherent dignity and worth of all people. As such, social workers are expected to defend and uphold the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual integrity and well-being of all persons by

1. Respecting the right to self-determination—Social workers should respect and promote people’s right to make their own choices and decisions, irrespective of their values and life choices, provided this does not threaten the rights and legitimate interests of others.
2. Promoting the right to participation—Social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives.

3. Treating each person as a whole—Social workers should be concerned with the whole person, within the family, community, societal and natural environments, and should seek to recognise all aspects of a person's life.
4. Identifying and developing strengths—Social workers should focus on the strengths of all individuals, groups and communities and thus promote their empowerment. (IFSW, 2004, Sec. 4.1)

Respectful interaction with others affirms their sense of dignity and worth. Social workers treat people with consideration, respect their uniqueness, appreciate the validity of their perspectives, and listen carefully to what they have to say. Ultimately, according people dignity and worth affords them the opportunities and resources of a just society.

## Social Justice

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*Charity begins at home  
and justice begins next  
door.*

—Charles Dickens

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Social justice refers to the manner in which society distributes resources among its members. “Social justice prevails when all members of a society share equally in the social order, secure an equitable consideration of resources and opportunities, and enjoy their full benefit of civil liberties” (DuBois & Miley, 2008, p. 16). The IFSW and the IASSW (2004) detail the fabric of social justice:

1. Challenging negative discrimination—Social workers have a responsibility to challenge negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, racial or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs.
2. Recognising diversity—Social workers should recognise and respect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies in which they practise, taking account of individual, family, group and community differences.
3. Distributing resources equitably—Social workers should ensure that resources at their disposal are distributed fairly, according to need.
4. Challenging unjust policies and practices—Social workers have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where distribution of resources, policies and practices are oppressive, unfair or harmful.
5. Working in solidarity—Social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive society. (Sec. 4.2)

Social injustice prevails when society infringes on human rights, holds prejudicial attitudes toward some of its members, and institutionalizes inequality by discriminating against segments of its citizenry. Encroachments on human and civil rights deny equal access to opportunities and resources, limiting full participation in society. Collectively, the injustices enacted by advantaged groups create conditions of discrimination and oppression for disadvantaged groups. Members of oppressed groups often personally experience dehumanization and victimization. Social workers understand the consequences of injustice and intervene to achieve individual and collective social and economic justice.

## Defining Social Work

Social work is a profession that supports individuals, groups, and communities in a changing society and creates social conditions favorable to the well-being of people and society. The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) defines social work:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IFSW, 2000)

Similarly, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), which accredits undergraduate and graduate social work programs, describes the purpose of social work:

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person and environment construct, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, social work's purpose is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons. (CSWE, 2008, p. 1)

Framing social work's commitment to respect for the dignity and worth all people and the profession's quest for social justice, the core values of social work also set the standards for what is desirable in practice. The National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics* (1999a) describes the professional values that guide social work practice:

- Service: helping people and solving social problems
- Social justice: challenging injustices
- Dignity and worth of the person: respecting inherent dignity
- Importance of human relationships: recognizing the importance of belongingness
- Integrity: being trustworthy
- Competence: practicing competently

## Achieving the Purpose of Social Work

Social work focuses on releasing human power in individuals to reach their potential and contribute to the collective good of society; it emphasizes releasing social power to create changes in society, social institutions, and social policy, which in turn create opportunities for individuals (Smalley, 1967). This view conceptualizes the purpose of social work in relation to both individual and collective resources. The trademark of the social work profession is this simultaneous focus on persons and their impinging social and physical environments.

To this end, practitioners work with people in ways that strengthen their sense of competence, link them with needed resources, and promote organizational and institutional change so that the structures of society respond to the needs of all societal members (NASW, 1981). Additionally, social workers engage in research to contribute to social work theory and evaluate practice methods. To achieve these purposes, social workers engage in a variety of activities.

### Box 1.1 The Ethic of Justice

**S**ocial justice describes circumstances in which all members of a society have equal access to societal resources, opportunities, rights, political influence, and benefits (Barker, 2003; Finn & Jacobson, 2003; Healy, 2001; Parker, 2003; Pease, 2002). Social justice prevails when all members benefit from the resources that a society offers and, reciprocally, have opportunities to contribute to that society's pool of resources. In contrast, social injustice is evident when a society denies certain population groups civil rights by excluding them from full participation in decision making, when it distributes institutional resources in deference to privilege and power, or when its members show prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions toward each other.

The philosophy of social justice is deeply rooted in the social work profession; however, political realities and ethical dilemmas confound workers' attempts to apply the principles of social justice in practice. As an example, Reisch (2002) describes problems associated with relating social justice principles to the social policy debates taking place in today's political and economic environment.

Two fundamental problems are often overlooked, however, in discussions of applying justice principles to contemporary social policy debates. The first is the paradox of attempting to develop principles of justice within a political, economic, and social context based largely, if tacitly, on the preservation of injustice. . . . The second problem relates to the application of justice concepts based largely on the expansion of individual rights and individual shares of societal resources to the development of policies, programs, and modes of intervention that address group needs and concerns. (pp. 346–347)

Reisch highlights the tension between asserting individual rights and advancing the common good in allocating societal resources. Group and individual interests do not always converge. Social workers face dilemmas in choosing actions in practice that promote a social justice ideal.

Despite competing values, privileged interests, ethical contradictions, and political realities, social work ethics compels workers to promote social justice and challenge injustices through social change, particularly in their efforts with the most vulnerable groups in society. Empowerment-based practice principles also demand that workers address injustice and inequality as they affect all practice domains, processes, and activities. "Part of what is involved in becoming empowered is that people are not cowed into hopelessness and inaction by these existing inequalities. Thus is empowerment intrinsically linked to fighting against oppression and social justice" (Breton, 2002, p. 26). Guaranteeing access to services, the opportunity to experience social and economic privilege, an awareness of due process, a voice in policy formulation and implementation, and the power to influence resource allocation—all are trademarks of justice-centered and empowerment-based social work practice.

Social workers further the social justice ideal by expanding institutional resources such as adequate education, political participation, and economic self-sufficiency. Justice-centered workers also strive to promote fair health, education, employment, and social welfare policies and to organize social service delivery networks for client access, respect, and acceptance. Ensuring people equal access affirms human dignity and worth and creates an environment reflective of a just society.

First, social work practitioners engage with clients to assess challenges in social functioning, process information in ways that enhance their ability to discover solutions, develop skills to resolve problems in living, and create support for change.

Second, social workers link people with resources and services, a vital strategy in any change effort. More than simply connecting people with services, workers advocate optimal benefits, develop networks of communication among organizations in the social service delivery network, and establish access to resources. When necessary resources do not exist, practitioners generate new opportunities, programs, and services.

Third, the NASW charges practitioners to work toward a humane and adequate social service delivery system. To accomplish this, social workers champion

the planning of pertinent programs by advocating client-centeredness, coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency in the delivery of services. Importantly, they strengthen lines of accountability and ensure the application of professional standards, ethics, and values in service delivery.

Fourth, social workers participate in social policy development. In the arena of social policy, workers analyze social problems for policy ramifications, develop new policies, and retire those that are no longer productive. They also translate statutes, policies, and regulations into responsive programs and services that meet individual and collective needs.

Finally, practitioners engage in research to further the knowledge and skill base of social work. Effective and ethical social work depends on practitioners using research-based theory and methods as well as contributing to the knowledge base of the profession through their own research and evaluation activities.

## GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK



Generalist social workers practice in the context of personal and collective issues. Why is policy practice important to their work in direct practice?

Generalist social work provides an integrated and multileveled approach for meeting the purposes of social work. Generalist practitioners acknowledge the interplay of personal and collective issues, prompting them to work with a variety of human systems—societies, communities, neighborhoods, complex organizations, formal groups, families, and individuals—to create changes that maximize human system functioning. This means that generalist social workers work directly with client systems at all levels, connect clients to available resources, intervene with organizations to enhance the responsiveness of resource systems, advocate just social policies to ensure the equitable distribution of resources, and research all aspects of social work practice.

The generalist approach to social work practice rests on four major premises. First, human behavior is inextricably connected to the social and physical environment. Second, based on this linkage among persons and environments, opportunities for enhancing the functioning of any human system include changing the system itself, modifying its interactions with the environment, and altering other systems within its environment. Generalist practitioners implement multilevel assessments and multimethod interventions in response to these possible avenues for change. Third, work with any level of a human system—from individual to society—uses similar social work processes. Social work intervention with all human systems requires an exchange of information through some form of dialogue, a process of discovery to locate resources for change, and a phase of development to accomplish the purposes of the work. Finally, generalist practitioners have responsibilities beyond direct practice to work toward just social policies as well as to conduct and apply research.

### Levels of Intervention in Generalist Practice

Generalist social workers look at issues in context and find solutions within the interactions between people and their environments. The generalist approach moves beyond the confines of individually focused practice to the expansive sphere of intervention at multiple system levels. “In this process, all social work methods—traditional and innovative—are utilized, singly or in combination, to meet reality needs and to alleviate stresses in ways that enhance or strengthen the inherent capacities of client systems” (Brown, 1982,



p. 123). In generalist social work, the nature of presenting situations, the particular systems involved, and potential solutions shape interventions, rather than a social worker's adherence to a particular method.

The view of generalist social work is like the view through a wide-angle lens of a camera. It takes in the whole, even when focusing on an individual part. Workers assess people in the backdrop of their settings, and interventions unfold with an eye to outcomes at all system levels. Visualize potential clients and agents for change on a continuum ranging from micro- to mezzo- to macrolevel interventions, small systems to large systems, including the system of the social work profession itself (Figure 1.1). Generalist social workers view problems in context, combine practice techniques to fit the situation, and implement skills to intervene at multiple system levels.

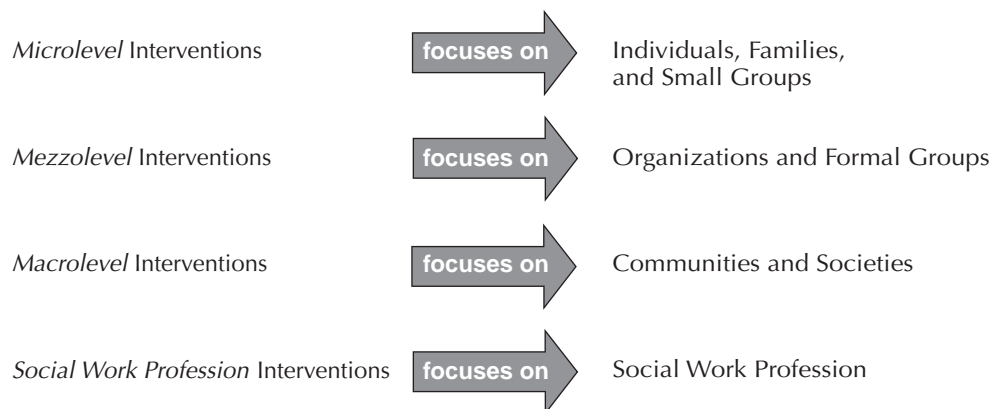
### Working with microlevel systems

Microlevel intervention focuses on work with people individually, in families, or in small groups to foster changes within personal functioning, in social relationships, and in the ways people interact with social and institutional resources. Social workers draw on the knowledge and skills of clinical practice, including strategies such as crisis intervention, family therapy, linkage and referral, and the use of group process. For instance, in this chapter's introductory example, Andrea Barry could work with Mr. and Mrs. Clemens to improve their parenting skills or refer them to a parent support group.

Although microlevel interventions create changes in individual, familial, and interpersonal functioning, social workers do not necessarily direct all their efforts at changing individuals themselves. Often, workers target changes in other systems, including changes in the social and physical environments, to facilitate improvement in an individual's or family's social functioning. These activities involve work with systems at other levels.

### Working with mezzolevel systems

Mezzolevel intervention creates changes in task groups, teams, organizations, and the network of service delivery. In other words, the locus for change is within organizations and formal groups, including their structures, goals, or functions. For example, if, in working with the Clemens children, Andrea learns of their embarrassment at receiving lunch subsidies because the school physically segregates the "free lunch" students from the "full pay" students in the cafeteria, she can



help them and other families who report similar concerns by working directly on the school's policy. Andrea's work with the school to address this demeaning and discriminatory practice represents a mezzolevel intervention. Effecting change in organizations requires an understanding of group dynamics, skills in facilitating decision

**Figure 1.1**  
System Levels for Social Work Intervention

making, and a proficiency in organizational planning. Working with agency structures and the social service delivery network is essential for developing quality resources and services.

### **Working with macrolevel systems**

Macrolevel intervention addresses social problems in community, institutional, and societal systems. At this level, generalist practitioners work to achieve social change through neighborhood organizing, community planning, locality development, public education, policy development, and social action. A worker's testimony at a legislative hearing reflects a macrolevel strategy to support a comprehensive national family welfare policy. Working with neighborhood groups to lobby for increased city spending on police protection, street repair, and park maintenance is another example of a macrolevel intervention. Social policy formulation and community development lead to macrosystem change.

### **Working with the social work profession**

Finally, generalist practitioners address issues within the system of the social work profession itself. These activities project a professional identity, define professional relationships with social work and interdisciplinary colleagues, reorient priorities within the social work profession, or reorganize the system of service delivery. For instance, by supporting social work licensure and the legal regulation of practice, practitioners use their collective influence to ensure the competence of those persons who become social workers. Standard setting and accountability call for social workers to be actively involved in the system of the social work profession.

## **Policy and Generalist Practice**

Social policy determines how a society distributes its resources among its members to promote well-being. Social policies direct the delivery of health and human services. Policies particularly relevant to social work include government plans and programs in the areas of social welfare, economic security, education, criminal justice, and health care, among others (Barker, 2003). Social workers press for fair and responsive social policies that benefit all persons and advocate changes in policies affecting disenfranchised and oppressed groups whose dignity has been diminished by injustice.

Social welfare policies affect all facets of social work practice (Schorr, 1985). First, value-based policies implicitly guide how we orient social workers to the profession, the ways we educate workers for practice, and the choices we make to define the dimensions of practice activities. Second, policy shapes bureaucracy and the structure of agency practice—a culture that ultimately defines who gets services and what services they get. And, finally, in their own practice activities, social workers unavoidably make policy judgments by attending to or overlooking constantly changing social realities. To this list, Specht (1983) adds other major policy decisions that arise in the sociopolitical context of social work practice. These policy choices determine eligibility requirements, the array of programs and services offered, the structure of the social service delivery system, financing for health and human services, the form and substance of educating social work practitioners, and the regulation of social work activities.

To understand the impact of social policies on social work practice, consider how policy affects all aspects of Andrea Barry's practice in family preservation.

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*We must become the  
change we want to see.*

—Mahatma Gandhi

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**Box 1.2 Professional Image and a Social Justice Identity: A Policy–Practice Connection**

The social work profession today faces a confusing and inaccurate public image, an image perpetuated by the portrayal of social work in the media (Freeman & Valentine, 2004; Zugazaga, et al., 2006). To address this concern about image, social work professionals may need to look inward. The bifurcation of the social work profession into two mutually exclusive divisions, one focusing on clinically based (micro) practice, and the other, on policy-oriented (macro) practice dilutes the social justice image of social work (Bisman, 2004; Dennison, et al., 2007; Dessell, et al., 2006; Johnson, 2004; Macdonald, et al., 2003; Olson, 2007; Reisch & Andrews, 2004; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Social workers debate questions that reinforce the notion of a dichotomy in social work practice. Should social work's emphasis be clinical work or policy practice? Does facilitating individual adaptation mean succumbing to social injustice? Do the long-range solutions of macropractice address the immediate needs of social work clients? Are social work solutions best found at the microlevel or macrolevel?

The past several decades show social work leaning more toward clinical than political practice, leading Karger and Hernandez (2004) to suggest that the profession has abandoned its engagement in public discourse, social commentary, political and social activism, and intellectual life. As a result, social workers “have little influence on the pressing issues of the day” (p. 51), particularly with respect to policy concerns about social justice. Searing (2003) charges social work “to reclaim its radical tradition. This asserts that the assessment of client's ‘needs’ should not only be driven by the availability of resources but should also be concerned with the reduction of inequality and social justice” (¶14) Furthermore, “if we want the profession of social work to pursue a social justice mission, which our official and espoused position suggests, then we need to take steps

to ensure that the way we frame and conceptualize our practice is congruent with, and furthers, social justice principles” (Hawkins, et al., 2001, p. 11).

A generalist, empowerment method bridges the micro/macro split within the social work profession; it frames social work practice to meet the social justice mandate based on the following principles:

- ◆ The unifying purpose of social work is to enhance human well-being and to promote a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society
- ◆ The social work profession maintains an integrated view of persons in the context of their physical and social environments
- ◆ Social workers practice at the intersection of private troubles and public issues
- ◆ Social workers work with people to enhance their competence and functioning, to access social supports and resources, to create humane and responsive social services, to influence social policy, and to expand the structures of society that provide opportunities for all citizens
- ◆ Social workers have a partisan commitment to people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. The mandate of the social work profession is to ensure the fulfillment of the social justice contract between individuals and society, particularly for those groups that are disenfranchised
- ◆ A just society is one in which all members of society share the same rights to participation in society, protection by the law, opportunities for development, access to social benefits, and who, in turn, contribute to the resource pool of society
- ◆ Empowerment social work is simultaneously clinical (personal) and critical (political) (Miley & DuBois, 2005)

Social policies, framed at the legislative level in the amendments to the Social Security Act and implemented through state administrative procedures, define the goals and processes that Andrea implements in family preservation. Agency-level policy to design programs and services consistent with empowering principles and a strengths perspective further refines Andrea's approach to working with families. As a professional social worker, Andrea's direct practice with families falls within the policy guidelines established by the NASW standards for child protection. Policy choices at many levels—federal, state, agency, and worker— influence the day-to-day practice of social work.

## Research in Generalist Practice

Research is a method of systematic investigation or experimentation, the results of which can enrich theory and refine practice applications. When clients are integrally involved in designing and implementing research, research processes themselves empower clients. Research informs social work practice in several ways. It contributes to the theoretical base for understanding human behavior and change. Further, research is a tool for designing intervention strategies, measuring intervention effectiveness, and evaluating practice. Research is essential for program development and policy analysis. Aware of the integral relationship between theory and practice, generalist social workers use research-based knowledge to support practice activities and directly conduct their own research and analysis. The press for evidence-based practice attests to the importance of the research–practice connection. The goal of evidence-based research is to identify effective intervention strategies and robust program models. Based on rigorous client outcome studies, best practices are emerging in all fields of social work practice.

Research enhances social work effectiveness, as illustrated in the example of Andrea Barry’s work with clients in family preservation. Her coursework on empowerment-based practice, theories about families, and the dynamics of child abuse and neglect—all information rooted in decades of social work research—informs Andrea each time she interacts with her clients. Andrea regularly reads professional journals, especially *Social Work*, *Child Welfare*, *The Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, *The Journal of Evidence-Based Practice*, and *Families in Society*, to keep up with best practices within the field of child welfare. She also uses evaluation and research techniques to monitor her clients’ progress toward goals and to assess her own practice effectiveness. Additionally, Andrea’s work presents opportunities to add to the knowledge base of the profession as she and other family preservation workers carefully document the results of a new intervention program piloted by her agency. Research supports practice, and practitioners conduct research.

## Advantages of a Multifaceted Approach

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*A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words, and deeds is like that. We won't sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do.*

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—Dorothy Day

Social workers realize many advantages from their generalist practice approach. Inevitably, changes in one system ripple through other interrelated systems as well. In other words, a significant improvement in a client or environmental system might precipitate other beneficial changes. A single policy change may have far-reaching benefits for an entire society. Research demonstrating effective change strategies in one situation may lead to broader implementations to assist others in similar situations. Because of their multidimensional perspectives, generalist practitioners are likely to uncover more than one possible solution for any given problem.

Generalist social workers see many possible angles from which to approach any solution. They analyze the many dimensions of any challenging situation to discover entry points for change. They also align the motivations and efforts of client systems with systems in their environments, synchronizing the movements of all involved to achieve the desired outcome. Generalist social work frames a way of thinking about both problems and solutions in context, and it describes a way of working with clients at a variety of system levels.



Generalist social workers use best practices with culturally diverse families.

## SOCIAL WORK FUNCTIONS AND ROLES



Social worker roles direct the nature of interaction between practitioners and client systems. What is the common denominator of the roles associated with each of the functions of consultancy, resource management and education at the various client system levels?

Generalists work with systems at many levels, but what does that actually mean in their daily practice of social work? As a family preservation worker, Andrea Barry intervenes directly with individuals and families. She provides them with education, counseling, and linkage to needed community resources—activities associated with roles at the microlevel. Yet Andrea’s work encompasses more than microlevel intervention. In her position, Andrea identifies gaps in the social service delivery network when resources families need are not available. As a result, she works with other professionals in child welfare to address social service delivery issues—a mezzolevel intervention. She and her interdisciplinary colleagues are developing a community education plan to promote effective parenting—a macrolevel strategy. Finally, Andrea systematically evaluates the effectiveness of her work and keeps abreast of child welfare policy initiatives. In doing so, Andrea demonstrates the integration of research, policy, and multilevel intervention that characterizes generalist social work practice.

Activities of generalist social work practice fall broadly into three related functions—consultancy, resource management, and education (DuBois & Miley, 2008; Tracy & DuBois, 1987). Within each function are associated roles that explicate the nature of the interaction between clients and social workers at various system levels. These roles define responsibilities for both client systems and practitioners. Interventions designed within this model cover the range of issues presented to generalist social workers by clients at all system levels.

## Consultancy

Through consultancy, social workers seek to find solutions for challenges in social functioning with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Within the roles of the consultancy function of social work, workers and clients confer and deliberate together to develop plans for change. Practitioners and clients share their expertise with one another for the purpose of resolving personal, family, organizational, and societal problems. Consultancy acknowledges that both social workers and client systems bring information and resources, actual and potential, that are vital for resolving the issue at hand.

As a collaborative process, consultancy draws on the knowledge, values, and skills of social workers and clients to clarify issues, recognize strengths, discuss options, and identify potential courses of action. As consultants, social workers empower clients by respecting their competence, drawing on their strengths, and working with them collaboratively to discover solutions. These consultancy activities cast workers into the roles of enabler, facilitator, planner, and colleague (Table 1.1).

### Enabler role

As enablers, social workers engage individuals, families, and small groups in counseling processes. An enabler encourages action by engaging in a helping relationship, framing solutions, and working for constructive and sustainable change. In other words, enablers are change agents who “use varying approaches in order to provide the conditions necessary for clients to achieve their purposes, meet life challenges, engage in their natural life development processes, and carry out their tasks” (Maluccio, 1981, p. 19). In the context of work with groups, social workers enable supportive interactions among group members to facilitate problem solving. As enablers, practitioners consult with individual and family client systems to improve social functioning by modifying behaviors, relationship patterns, and social and physical environments.

### Facilitator role

Facilitators activate the participation of organizational members in change efforts. By facilitating group processes, social workers encourage competent group functioning, stimulate intragroup support, observe group interaction, offer constructive feedback, and share information about group dynamics. As facilitators, social workers enhance linkages within organizations and help them counteract apathy and disorganization (Pincus & Minahan, 1973). In

**Table 1.1**      **Consultancy Roles**

Level	Role	Strategy
Micro-	Enabler	Empower clients in finding solutions
Mezzo-	Facilitator	Foster organizational development
Macro-	Planner	Coordinate program and policy development through research and planning
Social Work Profession	Colleague/Monitor	Mentor, guide, and support professional acculturation

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this role, practitioners may even target their own agency settings to increase the cooperation of staff and ensure the effectiveness of social service delivery.

### **Planner role**

As social planners and community organizers, social workers understand community needs, recognize gaps and barriers in service delivery, and can facilitate a process for community-based or social change. Social planners use research and planning strategies to collect data systematically, explore alternative courses of action, and recommend changes to community leaders (Barker, 2003). Techniques for planning include needs assessments, service inventories, community profiles, community inventories, environmental scans, and field research to understand social problems and develop innovative solutions at the macrolevel.

### **Colleague and monitor roles**

Through their colleague and monitor roles, social workers uphold expectations for the ethical conduct of members of their profession. Consultative relationships among social work practitioners lead to sound practice and professional development. As colleagues, social workers develop working partnerships with other practitioners through their participation in professional organizations such as the NASW and its local membership groups, and through their everyday contacts with other professionals. The *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1999a) specifically casts social workers as monitors, charging them to review the professional activities of peers to ensure quality and maintain professional standards.

## **Resource Management**

In the resource management function, social workers stimulate exchanges with resources that client systems already use to some extent, access available resources that client systems are not using, and develop resources that are not currently available. Resources are sources of power and provide the impetus for change at any system level. Resources are found within individuals, in relationships, and in social institutions.

Resources are not gifts bestowed by social workers. Instead, both social workers and clients play active roles in managing resources. Clients, as resource managers, take action to explore existing opportunities, activate dormant supports, and assert their rights to services. Social workers bring the resources of professional practice—the value imperative of equitable access to societal resources, the broad knowledge of the availability of resources, and a repertoire of skills to access and develop resources. Resource management is empowering when it increases the client system’s own resourcefulness through coordinating, systematizing, and integrating rather than through controlling or directing. Social workers as resource managers function in the roles of broker, advocate, convener, mediator, activist, and catalyst (Table 1.2).

### **Broker and advocate roles**

The professional mandate of the social work profession, “to help people obtain resources,” lays the foundation for the roles of broker and advocate. As brokers, social workers link clients with available resources by providing information about resource options and making appropriate referrals. Competent brokers assess situations, provide clients with choices among alternative resources, facilitate clients’ connections with referral agencies, and follow up to evaluate their efforts.

**Table 1.2 Resource-management Roles**

Level	Role	Strategy
Micro-	Broker/Advocate	Link clients with resources through case management
Mezzo-	Convener/Mediator	Assemble groups and organizations to network for resource development
Macro-	Activist	Initiate and sustain social change through social action
Social Work Profession	Catalyst	Stimulate community service through interdisciplinary activities

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As advocates, social workers act as intermediaries between clients and other systems to protect clients' rights. Frequently, advocates function as spokespersons for clients in the bureaucratic maze of governmental structures. Advocates intervene with social service delivery systems or policy-makers on behalf of clients. Circumstances often press social workers to take on advocacy roles because the rights of social service clients have often been abridged.

### Convener and mediator roles

Social workers often serve as conveners and mediators with formal groups and organizations to coordinate resource distribution and development. Conveners promote interagency discussion and planning, mobilize coordinated networks for effective service delivery, and advocate policies that promise equitable funding and just service provisions. As conveners, social workers use networking strategies to bring together diverse representatives to address collective goals such as in the examples of community task groups, interagency committees, and United Way panels. When controversy or conflicts of interest arise, social workers as mediators use their skills for negotiating differences and resolving conflicts. Conveners-mediators ally service providers in identifying service delivery gaps and encouraging proactive interagency planning, activities that are central to prevention efforts in social work.

### Activist role

Generalist social workers are in positions to identify societal conditions detrimental to the well-being of clients—a view that informs the social worker as activist. According to Barker (2003), social activists alert the general public about social problems or injustices and garner support to alleviate these conditions. Social activists mobilize resources, build coalitions, take legal actions, and lobby for legislation. They create just social policies as well as initiate new funding or funding reallocations that address their identified priority issues. Engendering community support, activists empower community-based efforts to resolve community issues, redress social injustice, and generate social reform.

### Catalyst role

As catalysts for change, social workers team with other professionals to develop humane service delivery, advocate just social and environmental policy, and support a worldview acknowledging global interdependence. Through professional organizations, social workers lobby at the state and federal levels and provide expert testimony. As catalysts, social workers initiate, foster, and sustain interdisciplinary cooperation to highlight client, local, national, and international issues.



## Education

The social work function of education requires an empowering information exchange between a client system and a social work practitioner. Mutual sharing of knowledge and ideas are central to the educational function. Educational processes at all system levels reflect partnerships of co-learners and co-teachers. Collaborative learning presumes that client systems are self-directing, possess reservoirs of experiences and resources on which to base educational experiences, and desire immediate applications of new learning. The education function of social work respects the knowledge and experience that all parties contribute. Functioning as educators involves social workers in the activities of teaching, training, outreach, and research and scholarship (Table 1.3).

### Teacher role

The teaching role in social work empowers client systems with information to stimulate competent functioning in all domains of living. Through teaching strategies, social workers strengthen clients with information to resolve current issues and to prevent other difficulties from emerging. To affirm clients' existing knowledge and skills, social workers select collaborative learning strategies to implement educational activities. Educational exchanges may occur in structured client-worker conferences, in formalized instructional settings, or in experiential exercises such as role plays.

### Trainer role

As educational resource specialists for formal groups, trainers make presentations, serve as panelists at public forums, and conduct workshop sessions. Sometimes, trainers are organizational employees; at other times, organizations contract with social workers to provide specific training experiences. Effective trainers select methods and resource materials based on research about adult education, attitude change, and learning modalities. Successful training strategies require a careful assessment of staff-development needs, clear goals of what the organization seeks, the ability to convey information through appropriate training formats, and a concrete evaluation process.

### Outreach role

In outreach roles, social workers inform a variety of audiences about social problems, describe social injustices, and suggest services and policies to

**Table 1.3 Education Roles**

Level	Role	Strategy
Micro-	Teacher	Facilitate information processing and provide educational programming
Mezzo-	Trainer	Instruct through staff development
Macro-	Outreach	Convey public information about social issues and social services through community education
Social Work Profession	Researcher/Scholar	Engage in discovery for knowledge development

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As illustrated in Table 1.4, Andrea Barry engages in the functions of consultancy, resource management, and education at all client system levels. What specific verbal and written communication skills would Andrea need for her interventions with client systems?

address these issues. Workers disseminate information to inform the community about public and private social service organizations, thereby enhancing service accessibility. At the macrosystem level of community and society, the outreach role supports the prevention of problems. Increasing awareness of such issues as poverty, health care, disease control, stress, suicide, infant mortality, substance abuse, and family violence leads to early intervention and stimulates support for preventive actions. Using mass media, distributing posters and leaflets, conducting mailings, staffing information booths, and engaging in public speaking all bolster community members' awareness about programs and services. Sensitive to the unique needs of potential clients, outreach social workers provide multilingual, signed, Braille, and large-print announcements.

### Researcher and scholar roles

The social work *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1999a) specifically describes how professional knowledge and scientific research form the basis for practice. The *Code of Ethics* obligates social workers to contribute to the profession by conducting their own empirical research and sharing their findings with colleagues. Professionals also critically examine the social work literature to integrate research findings with their practice. Social workers contribute to and draw on research related to human behavior and the social environment, service delivery, social welfare policy, and intervention methods.

## Integrating Generalist Functions

In practice, social workers interweave the functions of consultancy, resource management, and education. For example, in addition to counseling, consultancy may involve linking clients with resources and teaching them new skills. Similarly, even though education is identified as a separate function, educational processes are inherent in all other social work activities as well. Rather than compartmentalizing these roles, this trilogy of social work functions provides an organizing schema for generalist social workers to construct and integrate multifaceted interventions. Table 1.4 offers examples of how family service worker

**Table 1.4 Family Service Interventions. Case Example: Andrea Barry**

	Microlevel	Mezzolevel	Macrolevel	Social Work Profession
Consultancy	Counseling with families	Facilitating organizational change to prevent burnout in child protective workers	Participating in child welfare community planning	Addressing ethical and legal issues in mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect
Resource Management	Linking families with additional community resources	Coordinating service delivery planning among local agencies	Developing a stable funding base for child-welfare services	Stimulating interdisciplinary cooperation to develop resources
Education	Providing opportunities for learning anger control and positive parenting	Leading staff development training on mandatory reporting at local day care centers	Initiating public education regarding child-protective resources	Presenting family preservation research at a regional conference

Andrea Barry engages in consultancy, resource management, and educational interventions at all system levels.

## LOOKING FORWARD

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Generalist social work is a multifaceted approach to helping people overcome the challenges in their lives. Generalist social workers play many practice roles, contribute to social work research, and improve social policy in their efforts to promote human dignity and ensure social justice—the core values of social work. It is these core values that call people to social work. Adhering to these values becomes the litmus test for determining one's fit with the profession.

Proficiency as a social worker requires a coherent practice framework, resourceful ways to look at human and social system functioning, and dynamic processes for change. This book explains the perspectives and processes that are essential for the effective practice of an empowerment-oriented method of generalist social work. This chapter provides an overview of the purposes and values of the social work profession and descriptions of practitioner roles. The orientation to empowerment social work provides a foundation for examining an ecosystems perspective for generalist social work, infusing multicultural and strengths perspectives in practice, and implementing social work processes at many levels described in later chapters. Chapter 2 discusses social work theory in practice and articulates how various views, such as the ecosystems perspective and social constructionism, support an empowering generalist approach. Chapter 3 describes how values, expectations, and diverse cultural and ethnic influences filter our perceptions and affect our work. Chapter 4 explains the strengths perspective and empowerment and discusses their implications for generalist practice.

Chapter 5 introduces this empowering method of social work practice framed within three concurrent phases—dialogue, discovery, and development—each explicated by discrete practice processes. Through dialogue, workers and clients develop and maintain collaborative partnerships, exchange relevant information, and define the purposes of the work. In discovery, practitioners and clients locate resources on which to construct plans for change. Through development, workers and clients activate resources, forge alliances with others, and create new opportunities to distribute the resources of a just society. Chapters 6 through 16 delineate these phases, examine each process in full detail, and offer applications at the micro-, mezzo-, and macrosystem levels.

Log onto **www.mysocialworklab.com** and click on the link to view the Interactive Skill Module videos. Answer the questions below. (If you did not receive an access code to **MySocialWorkLab** with this text and wish to purchase access online, please visit **www.mysocialworklab.com**.)

1. Watch page 22 of the school social work module where worker Terry suggests a micro-level intervention

for a client's family. What other actions might Terry take that would indicate she is a generalist social worker?

2. Watch social work client Faye in the domestic violence module, pages 5 and 11. What do you see and hear that supports the hypothesis that Faye's situation is affected by social and economic oppression? What must change to create a more just society?

## PRACTICE TEST



1. Evaluate the perspectives of the following social workers and determine which perspective most closely aligns with the unifying purpose of social work:
- Bob says the social work's unifying purpose is to facilitate social action that results in social change
  - Adreana believes that, as a social worker, her main focus of activity is providing advice to people with problems.
  - Jake describes social work as including counseling and linking families with resources.
  - Maria indicates that she helps individuals, groups, or communities to enhance their capacity for social functioning and to create societal conditions that support this goal.



2. Andrea Barry applies the ethic of justice to her practice of empowerment-based social work. Which of the following is LEAST characteristic of her thinking about the ethic of justice?
- Clients should be aware of their rights to due process.
  - Clients should have a voice in formulating policies.
  - Clients should be involved in decisions about allocating resources.
  - The ethic of justice relates to issues of dignity and worth but not to oppression.
3. Duane Jackson facilitates a parenting group for young couples. This represents a(n) \_\_\_\_.
- a microlevel intervention
  - a mezzolevel intervention
  - a macrolevel intervention
  - working with the social work profession
4. As a social worker at the Northside Family Agency, Jane coordinates a public education initiative on preventing child abuse. This activity represents a \_\_\_\_.
- a microlevel intervention
  - a mezzolevel intervention



- a macrolevel intervention
  - working with the social work profession
5. Joel Diamond's work in organizational planning is most likely a \_\_\_\_.
- a microlevel intervention
  - a mezzolevel intervention
  - a macrolevel intervention
  - working with the social work profession
6. Maria Garcia regards social justice as an integral facet of her professional identity as a social worker. Which of the following is MOST likely true?
- Her professional activities are clinical but not political.
  - Her professional activities are political but not clinical.
  - Her professional activities are neither clinical nor political.
  - Her professional activities are both clinical and political.
7. Carolee Goode links clients with the community-based services they request. Her work represents the social work role of \_\_\_\_.
- resource management
  - enabler
  - broker
  - catalyst
8. Tim Stein lobbies for extending health care benefits to families who are uninsured. His lobbying activities reflect the \_\_\_\_ role.
- trouble maker
  - activist
  - enabler
  - outreach worker
9. Dorothy Martin runs support groups for adolescent clients. Her work reflects the role of \_\_\_\_.
- facilitator
  - enabler
  - advocate
  - outreach

Log onto **MySocialWorkLab** once you have completed the Practice Test above to take your Chapter Exam and demonstrate your knowledge of this material.

### Answers

1) d 2) d 3) a 4) c 5) b 6) d 7) c 8) b 9) b