JOSEPH WALSH

Generalist Social Work Practice

INTERVENTION METHODS





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Intervention Methods

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To all of my undergraduate students, past and present, at Virginia Commonwealth University, and to my first five students at Ohio Dominican University

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Preface

G eneralist social work practice can be defined as the comprehensive assessment of a problem situation in a client system, followed by planning and intervention at any of five levels including those of the individual, family, group, organization, or community. The generalist perspective assumes an interdependence between individuals and their social environments, and requires that social workers have a broad base of knowledge about the functioning of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, and the ways in which they may reciprocally support or inhibit functioning. *Generalist Social Work Practice: Intervention Methods* is a textbook that provides undergraduate social work students with a wide range of specific intervention strategies for use with client systems at all levels of generalist practice. Six of the 12 chapters are so focused, and all of the other chapters include sections on practice implications of the topic material as well. Thus, the major strength of this book is its emphasis on intervention.

Regarding practice applications, this book is based on a strengths-based problem-solving model that can apply across all levels of intervention. Students are introduced to *cognitive* and *behavioral* theory for use with individuals and groups, and *structural theory* for use with families. These approaches have been selected because they are clearly understood by undergraduate students, practical in most social work settings, and have demonstrated effectiveness with a range of problems in living. Students are also introduced to the *contingency, community systems*, and *social support* theories for larger scale interventions. All of these intervention perspectives are consistent with each other, and thus provide the social work student with a systematic set of strategies for generalist practice. Each chapter also includes a list of classroom discussion topics and ideas for assignments.

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Generalist Social Work Practice: Intervention Methods is divided into three sections, as follows:

- An introduction to generalist practice, including attention to the special nature of social work, the problem-solving process, and the process of managing professional relationships
- Intervention theories and applications, with special attention to behavior theory, cognitive theory, and social support theory
- Specific intervention methods for use across all five levels of generalist practice

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Parts I and II consist of seven chapters that lay out a theoretical perspective for generalist practice. The well-known problem-solving model, with a clear strengths focus, is presented as the underlying conceptual framework for intervention. This model is practical for generalist practice because it is applicable across the five levels. Another advantage of the problem-solving model is that it provides a basis for client empowerment. A major theme of the book is that clients are always helped by the social worker to become better problem solvers. The cognitive, behavioral, and social support theories for practice are introduced in Part II. These theories and their related intervention strategies help practitioners to focus their work on a client system's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning, including its development of new knowledge or new ways of approaching the environment. Concepts of community are also given special attention in Part II. Social support theory is presented with this material as it provides a link between work with smaller and larger systems.

Part III, focused more specifically on intervention methods, provides sets of strategies for use with client systems at all five levels of generalist practice. Each chapter includes at least four distinct strategies, and many of them build on each other. There are three reasons for taking this approach. First, it enables the instructor to cover as much material in each chapter as fits with the scope of the course. Thus, instructors who teach a practice course for only one semester may use half of the intervention strategies covered in each chapter. Secondly, an instructor may choose to emphasize some levels of practice more than others, if such an approach fits with the nature of his or her program. Thirdly, the instructor may want to cover some intervention strategies at all levels of practice early in the academic year, and then go through the sequence again to teach additional strategies later in the year. This way, students who are given caseloads or other practice assignments in their agencies early in the year (agencies are quite variable in this regard) do not have to wait long before getting to course material that lends guidance to their field activities.

An in-depth discussion of agency-based practice is reserved for Part III. The first half of that chapter is theoretical and may be used earlier in the semester. At that time students will be adjusting to their field placement agencies and will probably experience many orientation activities before they are in a position to provide interventions. This content will help the students to make a successful adjustment to the field, and the recommended assignments and questions for discussion will help the instructor take advantage of the opportunity to teach students about large-systems practice. This concept is emphasized in the chapter on agency-based research, which provides students with the ability to develop empirical rationales for their interventions at that level.

PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND ETHICS

Many textbooks include separate chapters about professional values. *Intervention Methods* incorporates attention to a single social work value principle in each chapter of Part III. This enables the instructor to place the teaching of values into a context of the other text material, and students can integrate this learning into their range of practice activities. A case vignette representing a value dilemma is included in each of the last six chapters, based on the intervention principles from that chapter, for student reading and discussion.

A RANGE OF INTERVENTION METHODS

Figure 1 outlines all of the theories and intervention activities for generalist practice that are described in the book. Each theory and activity is listed beneath the target of intervention to which it applies. If a line moves from the topic across a portion of the page, that topic is intended to be applicable to several levels of intervention. What should be evident from this table is that each level of intervention may call for the practitioner's application of different roles and interventions. A major principle of *Generalist Social Work Practice: Intervention Methods* is that, while generalist practice provides an overarching perspective for service delivery, the effective practitioner needs to be able to call on special knowledge and intervention skills to help clients resolve problems and challenges at each of the five levels of practice.

Social work is a challenging profession, one in which even the most seasoned practitioners face new dilemmas every day that test their abilities to help clients solve problems. This book can help new social workers develop the competence, confidence, and sense of optimism to embark on a lifelong career in service to others.

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FIGURE 1 Generalist Social Work Practice Interventions

Target Systems

Individuals	Families	Groups	Organizations	Communities
mannaaans	rannies	Groups	organizations	communicies

Theories and Interventions

Problem-solving theory

Problem-solving model, Task-centered practice

Cognitive–Behavior theory

Cognitive restructuring, Skills training, Stress management, Stress prevention, Behavioral reinforcements, Crisis intervention

Social support theory

Formal and informal linkage development and maintenance

Family systems Structural (includes communications) Educational

> Group process Five types, Four stages, Leadership strategies



Approach:Policy, Program,
Project, Personnel,
PracticeStrategy:Collaboration,
Campaign,
ContestResearch:Needs assessment,
EvaluationSocial action
Collaboration,
Collaboration,
Campaign,
Contest

People, Processes, Structures

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Joseph Walsh is a professor of social work at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has been a direct service practitioner in the field of mental health for many years, first in a psychiatric hospital and later in community mental health center settings. He has mostly specialized in services to people with serious mental illnesses and their families. Since 1993 Joe has been at VCU, teaching courses in generalist and clinical practice, human behavior, research, and social theory. He was the 1998 recipient of the National Mental Health Association's George Goodman Brudney and Ruth P. Brudney Social Work Award, given annually to recognize significant contributions to the care and treatment of people with mental illnesses. Joe is the author or coauthor of six other books related to social work practice.

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