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Practice**

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# Introduction to The Journal of *Advanced Generalist Social Work Practice*

One of the goals of the social work profession is to ensure that individuals and social environments fit together so that people can function well and achieve life's goals. In defining oneself as an advanced social worker, professionals often put more emphasis on working with either the individual or with macro social issues and institutions. The way the social worker integrates work with individuals and the macro influences is a matter of choice and decision-making connected to the work the social worker will do. The integration of micro and macro practice, however, is at the heart of the social work profession.

From the individual perspective, imagine that a 5-year-old African American boy is referred to a child guidance clinic with a concern that he is "overactive" and "disobedient" at home. After completing an assessment of the problem, the social worker must next decide how to proceed. It is possible that the social worker might meet with the parents, explore the details of the problem, and offer suggestions on a parenting approach that could change the behavior. It also is possible that the social worker might decide to see the boy alone for play therapy. Still another choice might be to focus on the family's struggles with the stressors of living in a racially segregated neighborhood where there are inadequate food or childcare resources. All, and other approaches, are valid. In part, they depend upon the social worker's training and preferential way of working.

From the macro perspective, in a different situation, imagine that this social worker knows that her state's voting districts limit the voting power of African Americans by creating procedures that impact access to the polls. Once again, after assessing the situation, the social worker might decide to act. She might plan to intervene by meeting with individuals or small groups to draft new legislation for redrawing voting districts. She might meet with individuals to teach them political action techniques. Or perhaps she will organize educational events to improve community awareness of this issue.

Now imagine a social worker undertakes all or portions of these interventions. She decides to see her client, affirm that there is a social justice issue impacting the family, and consider social activism. Would she seem to be “all over the place” and “out of focus”? Would it seem she has not attained an advanced practice level of specialization as a professional social worker? Or, has she decided that the best way to go is to **integrate** multiple concepts of social work theories and methods into her practice?

The question to be posed is: Shouldn't a profession such as social work guide its practitioners toward approaches that map out the steps to be taken by its practitioners? The answer is yes, of course and no, of course! It is possible to say the 5-year-old boy's symptoms come from internal conflict about a developmental struggle and that individual psychotherapy will help relieve that conflict, so his development progresses well. It's very likely he will improve. But what if he doesn't? Why not, then, adjust the approach and try something else? In doing this, the social worker, expanding her thinking and entertaining multiple theories to address the problem, draws from these theories about the social and political world to reconceptualize the problem and the method she will use. She can then make a formulation built upon her professional beliefs and drawn from social work knowledge. For example, she might decide the boy's difficulties are about the community's difficulties and then assert that a change in the community would relieve his symptoms.

Advanced generalist social work practice (AGSWP) requires that the social worker **integrate** knowledge about psychological and developmental theories, practice approaches, social policies, and political action. **Advanced generalist social work practice could be called integrative social work practice.** The breadth inherent in viewing problems and solutions from multiple perspective is a benefit. The action of combining them into an intervention also is a benefit.

So, is it a freefall similar to the idea of a social worker doing whatever she wants? No, clearly, this is not the case. The AGSWP social worker, like other professional social workers, working in integrated practice, takes an approach based on the profession's values that reinforce that fit between a person and society. This is the essence of the advanced practice of the advanced generalist social worker.

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