

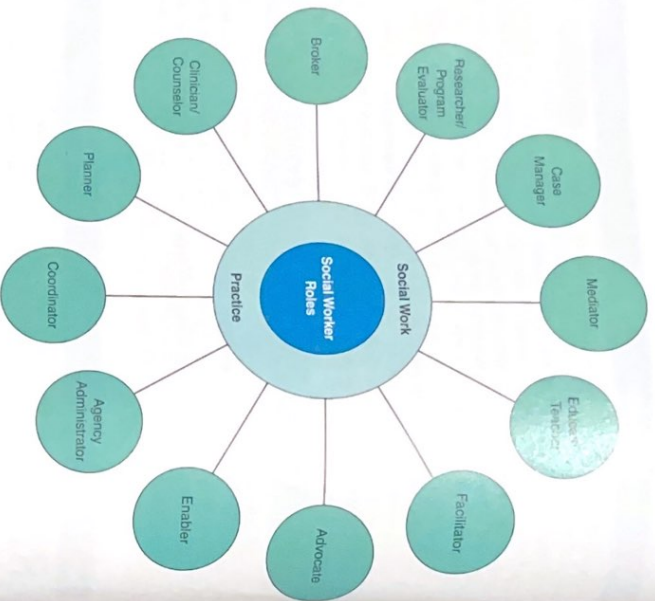


Figure 1.1
Concept Map of Social Work Practice Roles

Social work role is defined as expected professional behaviors and functions accepted by the social work profession and frequently employed in social work practice (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). Over the course of a career, a social worker may fulfill many social worker roles and over time will develop competency in most of these roles. Several factors influence which roles a social worker will fulfill, such as the goals of the given work setting, the needs of the client, and one's level of practice (see Box 1.3). The levels (micro, mezzo, and macro) roles will shift when the responsibilities of the social worker move across levels of practice (see Box 1.4). For example, Sarah's social worker in the scenario presented in Box 1.2 was required to practice at the micro and mezzo levels in order to serve the best interests of the client. At the **micro level**, the social worker took on the roles of *enabler* and *counselor*. At the **mezzo level**, the social worker acted as a *broker* where she connected Sarah to community resources (prenatal care, single-parent support group, GED classes, vocational training, parenting classes, Medicaid and TANF

benefits, housing assistance, and family planning). The social worker also served in the role of *mediator* (mezzo) in resolving the conflict between Sarah and her parents. If there had been no parenting classes available in Sarah's community, the social worker could have taken on the role of *planner* (macro level) and developed a parenting class for Sarah and other expectant teen mothers in the community. For definitions of common social worker roles, see Box 1.3.

On any given day, the social worker may find oneself in the role of advocate, educator, clinician, facilitator, mediator, and broker and executing these roles on many different levels of practice. For example, as a micro practitioner, you may find yourself advocating on behalf of an individual client (case advocate), a group of similar clients with the same problem (class advocate), or agencies or organizations trying to address the unmet needs of this group of clients (organizational advocate) or the community as a whole (community advocate) when it is discovered that the problem goes beyond your clients and agency to encompass the majority of similar people across the community. For example, as a case advocate, the social worker with a client who recently became disabled and was subsequently fired from his job (though still able to do the work) may advocate for the client by pursuing legal recourse on his behalf. A class advocate advocating for low-income disabled clients living in substandard housing may file a complaint with the local housing authority in an effort to improve the quality of housing for this group. On an organizational level, the social worker may advocate for more resources to meet the training and housing needs of disabled clients using the agency. As a community advocate, the social worker may lobby with other social workers for a more equitable application of the Americans with Disabilities Act to improve the plight of disabled people everywhere.

Ethical and Professional Behavior

Behavior: Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and oral, written, and electronic communication.

Critical Thinking Question: In the case study of Sarah (Box 1.2), how many roles can you identify that the social worker filled in her work with Sarah? Are there other roles that she could have filled that would have helped her client?

Box 1.3 Social Worker Roles

Activist: The social worker initiates and sustains change through social action. For example, in response to rising teen

crime rates, the social worker may pull together a coalition of concerned citizens to push for change in the police department, schools, religious community, and local agencies to address the growing gang problem in the community.

Advocate: The social worker champions the rights of others through empowerment or direct intervention. The social worker may advocate for a client, group, organization, or community.

Agency Administrator: The social worker is an agency director or assistant director and has responsibility for the functioning of an agency.

Broker: The social worker provides linkages between the client and other agencies or sources of needed resources.

For a client recently diagnosed as HIV positive, for example, the social worker investigates various medical and supportive services and assesses them in light of the client's insurance coverage and available financial resources.

Case Manager: The social worker creates and coordinates a network of formal and informal resources for the purpose of optimizing the functioning of clients with multiple needs. For example, as a case manager with a treatment program for severely mentally ill, polyaddicted drug addicts who are homeless, you will link clients with public supports and treatment services and pull together formal and informal supports, such as self-help groups, family members, and friends, for the purpose of keeping the client's mental illness well managed, limiting drug use

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