

Community practitioners need to find ways to balance both the process and the product goals of a group. This can be done by addressing process goals as a first priority when a group is formed. Social workers can conduct training sessions to pass on the skills needed to do effective community work, spend time on leadership development, and address internal group conflicts as they arise. If these issues are addressed early and consistently, group members are prepared to take on necessary roles when the need arises.

A second ethical challenge common in community work is the conflict between individual and community rights and responsibilities. Although the community practitioner values the autonomy and rights of an individual resident based on the values of self-determination and freedom, individual autonomy sometimes threatens the rights of others in the community. For example, a resident who likes to collect things has a house and yard filled with belongings that he treasures, but his neighbors see them as junk. Neighbors worry that the house and yard are a fire hazard and that they make the street look less desirable, therefore lowering the property value of their homes.

Differences over whose rights take precedence come up frequently in community practice settings. Practitioners must have strong mediation and negotiation skills to help people reach a compromise in such situations. If compromise cannot be reached, they must also be able to consider the ethical questions involved and critically weigh the two sides against the backdrop of the NASW Code of Ethics. Using the principle of the most good for the most people can be one helpful way to reach a decision in many situations.



EP 1c

The Role of a Global Perspective in Generalist Practice

The Council on Social Work Education emphasizes a **global perspective** in its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2015). In other words, generalist practitioners in the United States can draw on the knowledge and practice of other social workers across international boundaries. Since the earliest days of the profession, this has been true. Jane Addams was inspired by what she saw at Toynbee Hall in England and used their work to guide her in the development of the settlement residence of Hull House in Chicago in the 1890s. Social workers today see clients from all over the world, due to immigration and the United States' long serving as a refuge for people fleeing dangerous conditions in their countries of origin.

Interest in the global context of social work practice has grown in recent years. Higher education institutions are under more pressure than ever to increase curricula around global awareness (Sherman, 2016). Schools of social work are allowing students to do fieldwork overseas, sponsoring international study tours, conducting research internationally, and promoting cross-border collaborations (Leggett, 2008). The reality of our global culture is that today's social worker needs to expand his or her cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Box 6.8 From the Field

Social Work Takes Many Forms of Practice Diane McEachern, LCSW

Upon graduation from my MSW program, I accepted a position as a school social worker in remote western Alaska. Shortly after arriving in Bethel, Alaska, I decided that I needed to move out to a rural village and immerse myself in the culture of the region rather than remain based in Bethel. I was determined to break away from a relationship with villages in which I was the “expert” who flies in every week or two, sees children within the school, and then leaves. I wanted my work to have a deeper connection and relevance in terms of community organizing and cross-cultural collaboration. With Jane Addams on my shoulder, I made the move to a small village. My break from conventional social practice, at times breathtaking, began.

My first three years in western Alaska were spent living in Kwehtluk (pop. 650), a small Yup'ik Eskimo village. At the time, I was their school social worker. Although I did travel to other assigned villages, I spent more time with Kwehtluk. Working with children K-12 within the school building quickly became unsatisfying. I knew that children essentially bring their family and their community with them to school every day. Taking to heart that realization, I began to extend my social work practice out of the school and into the community, focusing first on families. I sat at many kitchen tables, eating dried fish dipped in seal oil and listening to parents tell me about their children. One of the first questions I would ask a parent was “What would you like the school to always remember about your child?” I would also ask the parent to share with me a story from when their child was a baby. Parents’ primary experience when hearing from the school was when their child was misbehaving. These two simple questions brought a noticeable relaxation and many times tender and culturally rich stories. Whenever parents grew angry with the school system or fearful of my role as an “outside” social worker, I would merely respond, “Tell me more! I want to understand better.” I absorbed these conversations and worked them through my mind and work experiences with the intention of broadening my understanding of not just cultural considerations but also the kinds of inevitable cultural changes that have been, at times, devastating to villages. Through ongoing dialogue with parents and extended families, a natural pathway developed for me to follow, which

led to working more closely with Kwehtluk’s own providers of social services.

I distinctly remember the day I walked to the end of the village where the small, blue, ramshackle Kwehtluk social services building was. I went in; there were a few people in their offices. They greeted me politely but remained somewhat cool and distant. I explained who I was and asked if we could all meet sometime to talk. I heartily suggested the day and time for us to meet, to which they cordially agreed. The next week, on the day and time of the meeting, I sat in the small blue building, proud of the snacks I had remembered to bring, but eating them alone. No one came. I was later told that they were in shock that the school social worker had actually come to their offices. That had never happened before, and they had no idea how to interact with me. Yet the roles they played in their community were critical partners to my role. One was the community suicide prevention counselor; another was the youth outreach counselor; and a third was the village alcohol education counselor. Within this particular school district of 24 K-12 village schools, we were about to create a collaborative cross-cultural work life that had not been tried anywhere else in the region.

We began a slow process of building rapport and trust with one another. Over time, we decided we wanted to form a Kwehtluk-based mental health collaborative team. We began outreach to those people in the village who could join our team. Two community health aides were selected by their peers to join the mental health team. An elder joined the team as well. The village police officer agreed to periodically join, if invited, when we needed his expertise. After almost three years of deliberate but steady work, the Kwehtluk mental health team consisted of 10 members who met regularly. My autonomy had eventually given way to an alignment of my work with these key practitioners.

As our group grew, we discussed often my role with the team in order to reduce any tendencies for dependency or disempowerment. Essentially, I asked them to design my skills, training, and degrees to fit their needs. My stance was that those areas of my professional life did not belong solely to me, but could be molded by them to best fit their needs. These discussions were vibrant and enlightening

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