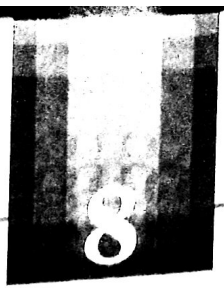

Social Work Practice in the Field

Working with Organizations, Communities, and Policy

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Discuss the skills needed in various areas of practice with organizations, communities, and policy.
- Discuss various elements of the context of practice with organizations, communities, and policy.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Although many social work practitioners focus on direct practice with individuals, families, and groups, the social work profession is also heavily involved in macro practice, or organizational, community, and policy practice (Netting, 2013). This system level has the goal of benefiting large groups of clients or general society. Macro practice presents opportunities for practitioners to make large-scale positive changes in the lives of many clients through systemic solutions. Students who are interested in macro practice may feel passionate about working on social justice issues at larger scales—changing laws, communities and neighborhoods, or organizations' policies or procedures to best serve clients. Even students interested primarily in micro-level social work may appreciate macro-level work as well—making change that affects a group or larger numbers of people and possibly preventing social problems before they start.

Given the growing complexity of client problems, becoming immersed in the practice issues that present themselves on the individual, family, and group levels is understandable. However, attention to the broader organizational, community, and policy issues that frame individual problems is important. The issues that individual clients present to social workers are often rooted in problems that affect large numbers of people in their communities. Some of these problems can be addressed, at least in part, at the individual, family, and group levels within social service agencies and neighborhoods (but others are best addressed at the macro level). The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredits social work programs and requires programs to include content that prepares students to "advance human rights and social and economic justice," and "engage in policy practice" (2015, pp. 7–8). Further, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) *Code of Ethics* (2008) requires social workers to embrace the value of social justice

and to be socially and political active. By this point in your coursework, you may have the opportunity in the practicum to apply your macro knowledge and skills.

Macro practice is a broad concept that covers a wide range of social work activities. Those social workers involved at the organizational level shape the way that human service policies are implemented as well as inform and influence the policy formation process (Patti, 2013). The skills needed for administrative social work practice include the following (Netting, 2013; Netting, Kettner, McMurtry, & Thomas, 2012; Patti, 2013):

- Budgeting and financial management
- Relationship building with boards
- Organizational design, development, assessment, and diagnosis
- Computer information systems and other technology
- Human resource management (selection, training/staff development, supervision, and compensation)
- Management (including use of affirmative action principles)
- Marketing management techniques
- Networking and partnership building with collaborators
- Financial resource development
- Media relations
- Policy practice (externally as well as within the agency)
- Fund-raising (through grant writing and other techniques)

Community practice social workers are engaged in development, organizing, planning, and action for progressive social change. Community practice skills include the following (Weil, Reisch, & Ohmer, 2013):

- Program development, implementation, and evaluation
- Fund-raising (through grant writing and other techniques)
- Coalition formulation and maintenance
- Planned change techniques
- Macro-level advocacy
- Community analysis
- Interorganizational planning
- Leadership development and citizen participation
- Small-group decision-making techniques
- Community organizing
- Task force membership
- Membership development and retention
- Social and economic development techniques
- Computer information systems and other technology
- Use of technology (social media, Geographic Information Systems, databases, etc.)

Finally, social policy practitioners analyze policy alternatives using data and research, select a preferred policy, and advocate for the preferred policy; they are also involved in policy implementation (Iatridis, 2013). Policy practice skills include the following (Iatridis, 2013):

- Legislative development (advocacy and lobbying skills)
- Policy analysis and management
- Issue analysis techniques

- Social policy research
- Legal analysis (including judicial and regulatory skills)
- Mobilization of citizens, organizations, coalitions, and communities (through writing letters to the editor, opposite editorials (op-eds)

Although these skills are grouped under discrete headings here for illustrative purposes, the three areas of macro practice share a symbiotic relationship in practice; practitioners in one area often need skills in other areas. For example, administrators of social service agencies are often involved in social policy development; community planners, organizers, and developers often work with boards and engage in lobbying; and policy practitioners may engage in leadership development and citizen participation.

This chapter will address the breadth of topics contained in macro practice, including student involvement in administrative activities; community planning, development, and organizing; and policy practice. Rather than reviewing macro content that is covered in your practice courses, this chapter will build on your knowledge of administrative, community, and policy practice to help you apply ethics to macro practice and clarify expectations for your learning. This chapter will also discuss the business and process of practice with organizations, communities, and policy.

Rose's Ethical Dilemma: Engaging in Advocacy

Rosa has approached her field instructor several times with questions about how she can implement her social work program's requirement to engage in some form of macro practice. Her field instructor has deferred discussion of any specifics for vague reasons but during the last supervision session admitted that she did not want Rosa to do any sort of advocacy because it might "take away from her commitment to her clients" and/or "rock the boat." Rosa knows that she must gain macro experience and would like to engage in political work regarding immigrants' rights. What should she do? Is this an ethical dilemma?

ETHICS IN PRACTICE WITH ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND POLICY

Critical Thinking Question

What are the ethical dilemmas that arise at the macro level that you can foresee at your practicum site? How might you resolve an ethical dilemma that pits the best interest of an individual client against the best interests of an organization or community?

Rosa is interested in political social work, which may include engaging in legislative advocacy, working on political campaigns or for elected officials, and possibly running for office someday. This work involves both micro skills (listening and negotiation skills) and macro skills (advocacy, policy analysis, and brokering skills). She has been told that social workers need to be more involved in decisions that affect clients and thinks that her background could shape policy in ways to better serve immigrants. She feels that she could best carry out the social work ethical value of "challenge social injustices" (NASW, 2008) through this sort of work. She understands that the typical career path involves doing volunteer work, helping others get elected or working for an elected official, and then perhaps getting appointed or elected to a position someday (Myers & Granstaff, 2013). She would like to start on that path now, while she's in practicum.

Rosa is experiencing the tension between her concern about the welfare of her individual clients and the societal and environmental structures that shape her clients' lives. While she wants to offer her clients as much assistance as possible, she is right to recognize the mandate of the social work profession to "promote the general welfare of society" (NASW, 2008) and to struggle with the need to also focus on the larger issues in clients' lives.

According to the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), social workers have many ethical obligations that apply to work at the organization, community, and policy levels. These include ethical responsibilities in the practice settings, to the social work profession, and to the broader society. You might experience or observe situations in which social work ethical responsibilities must be carried out despite their difficulty. For example, you might experience a situation in which the policies or procedures of your practicum agency do not allow staff to work toward the client's best interest. You might also observe a situation in which effort taken to organize one part of a community could result in harm to another part of the community, as when, for example, drug activity moves from one neighborhood to another. You are encouraged to become familiar with the sections of the *Code of Ethics* that relate to macro social work and to keep a copy of the *Code* available throughout your practicum so that you can begin to recognize challenges in any of these areas and discuss them in supervision with your field instructor (Reamer, 2012).

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN PRACTICE WITH ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND POLICY

Generalist practice requires a wide range of skills for helping individuals, groups, families, organizations, and communities. Therefore, building on practice skills with individuals, families, and groups, social work practitioners must have both a clear understanding of the community and agency contexts for service delivery and the ability to intervene in order to deliver effective services. Unless you are in a practicum setting that focuses primarily on macro practice (i.e., is involved solely in administrative work, community organizing, community development, or policy practice), you will likely assume fewer macro-practice responsibilities as compared to responsibilities at other practice levels. Even if you consider yourself to be primarily a direct practitioner, you may find it necessary to engage in certain macro-level activities in order to meet your clients' needs effectively. Such activities may include the following:

1. Giving a fund-raising speech about your agency to a local church
2. Testifying before a local mental health funding board
3. Organizing an interagency group to develop needed services for homebound seniors
4. Working with a neighborhood group to rid the area of abandoned apartment buildings
5. Organizing a group of public housing tenants with the goal of persuading the local housing authority to hire tenants to provide maintenance to the buildings
6. Conducting policy research to learn about policy position papers and current research in preparation for policy advocacy
7. Using the Internet to track legislation and sending emails to local or state-level legislators or the White House regarding legislation
8. Signing an e-petition and forwarding it to others for their action
9. Presenting a budget to the board of directors of an agency for approval
10. Lobbying a legislator in person to support a piece of social legislation

Box 8.1 Use of Micro Skills in Community Practice

Micro practice skills are utilized in a variety of ways in macro practice. Below are examples of the use of micro skills in community practice (Hardina, 2012).

Assess

Observe community residents—Observe the appearance and verbal and nonverbal behavior of community residents.

Observe the community—Observe the geographic size, the number and demographics of residents, the physical condition of buildings, and the quality of city services provided.

Use interviewing skills to learn about community residents—Conduct one-on-one interviews to develop relationships, learn about motivation and values, and recruit participants.

Intervene

Develop relationships with media contacts.

Collaborate with community partners to recruit.

Use dialogue, storytelling, and structured group-work techniques to identify community problems.

Facilitate participant discovery, assessment, and documentation of community strengths and problems.

Facilitate leadership development and group decision making.

Engage participants in the development of community action plans.

Use group-work techniques for group maintenance and cohesion.

Evaluate

Use group-work techniques to reflect on group process and assess achievements.

Social work practitioners working in wide-ranging contexts must be prepared to use the various client system levels to address client needs. Practice skills with individuals, families, and groups provide a solid foundation for and must be utilized in macro practice (Hardina, 2014). For example, Box 8.1 provides an example of the micro skills utilized in community practice.

Just as you must know how to work with people as individuals to work effectively with them as a group, you must possess the ability to work with individuals, families, and groups to work with people as members of organizations, communities, and policy-making entities. In your interaction with individuals, groups of clients, agency administrators, community residents, other community agencies, and politicians, you may use such direct skills as effective verbal and nonverbal behaviors, warmth, empathy, genuineness, and other communication skills (such as rephrasing, reflective responding, and clarification) (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2015). Furthermore, the mezzo skills of networking, effectively functioning as a team member or leader, planning and conducting meetings, and facilitating group conflict resolution are frequently utilized by macro practitioners (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2015).

The skills distinctive to macro practice that are needed by social work students in practicum vary widely depending on the assignment and the agency context. Indirect skills you may wish to consider learning in the field include community planning, community organizing, use of social action techniques, community needs assessment, policy analysis, coalition building, program development, lobbying, grant writing, fund-raising, public relations, staff and board of directors development and training, supervision, organizational policy development, and strategic planning (Weil et al., 2013).

The following sections will discuss (1) the "business" of macro practice—administrative and task-related issues; and (2) the "process" of macro practice—commonly encountered issues related to student implementation of macro assignments. Additionally, the impact of recent social policy changes on social work practice and the student role in practicum will be examined.

LEARNING THE "BUSINESS" OF PRACTICE WITH ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND POLICY

Although many social work practitioners engage in community and organizational practice, recent research shows that most social work practitioners define their primary practice as direct practice (Weisman & Whitaker, 2013). Therefore, unless you are among the small percentage of students specializing in community organization, community development, social strategies, social justice, or political social work, your field instructor is probably a direct practitioner or an administrator. Direct practitioners are often involved, at least minimally, in some administrative-level responsibilities or may be involved in macro-level activities outside of work time. In many cases, students must be proactive if they wish to incorporate macro-level learning activities into the practicum experience.

Receiving a Macro Assignment

Cameron Seeks Administrative Experience

Thus far, Cameron is very pleased with his practicum experience in the substance abuse treatment center. However, he realizes that he would, at some point, like to assume some administrative duties in a social service agency. He was discouraged from pursuing this further at the interview with his field instructor, when he was told that the agency director has never worked with a student and is very "cautious" about delegating administrative responsibilities. He feels stymied and frustrated. What might he do to pursue this interest further?

Cameron is discovering institutional barriers that prevent him from becoming involved in social work within larger systems. Like Cameron, you will likely need to engage in negotiation and dialogue with your field instructor about your interests in and needs for macro practice, the types of skills you wish to develop at this point in your curriculum, and realistic possibilities for involvement in the agency. Even if your agency is eager to allow you to assume macro-practice responsibilities, planning and forethought are important to ensure that you have a meaningful and positive experience. Beyond your preference for an assignment and that of your field instructor, consider the following strategies for gaining macro-level experiences:

1. Work at the macro level in communities, in organizations, and with policy can have profound effects on the operation and the reputation of the agency. Therefore, permission from an administrator may be needed prior to launching

into a macro assignment. The extent of your experience in macro practice may play a part in the assignment of activities. If you are inexperienced at macro practice (as many students are) and will need a significant additional amount of task guidance and supervision, you may find that you are offered only a modest number of macro-practice choices.

2. You may find that your involvement in macro-level activities is highly dependent on forces outside the control of your field instructor or practicum site (e.g., lobbying may be possible only within a seasonal legislative session in your state, fund-raising events may already be scheduled, or a community organizing opportunity may occur only after a crisis). You might seek those opportunities available during your practicum timeframe, even if they are not your first choice.

Despite these barriers, exposure to all three client-system levels is critical so that you can be prepared for social work practice at the conclusion of your studies. The following sections identify possible activities you can perform as a practicum student. Some of these activities may be possible within your practicum agency, while participation in others may entail the involvement of another agency, group, or coalition.

Critical Thinking Question

Most social workers work primarily at the micro level, providing direct services to individuals, families, and groups. How might you generate ideas about administrative, community, and policy practice that would benefit your clients through micro-level work?

Administrative Practice Many MSW field instructors are involved in the administrative structures or procedures of their employing agencies in addition to having direct service responsibilities to clients. Therefore, you will likely find that exposure to administrative practice will occur naturally through your field instructor throughout your practicum. However, taking an active, responsible role in administrative activities will offer you the greatest rewards relative to your learning goals. This may require you to make an explicit request of your field instructor. Consider requesting one or more of the following administrative tasks/responsibilities:

- Assuming an active role with the board of directors (e.g., presenting a report, facilitating client representation on the board, or participating as a member of a board committee)
- Preparing part or all of the agency's annual report (e.g., contributing to the preparation of the budget, developing a description of the program in which you are most heavily involved and interviewing clients to gain their perspective, or drafting the cover letter to be edited and signed by the executive director)
- Working with a staff member to develop and gain approval for a new program for the agency (examples of program ideas include the use of students and volunteers for a summer leadership camp or jobs programs for low-income teens and the use of students to train homebound seniors to participate in a peer-to-peer telephone support network)
- Advancing the technology/communications resources of the agency (e.g., researching and presenting information about needed computer hardware and software, participating in the creation or modification of a website or webpage, training staff in the use of a new software program to provide services online, or training staff about the use of social networking sites for agency promotion)
- Participating in staff recruitment and retention activities (e.g., participating in the selection of a new staff member, participating in the design and delivery of staff training on diversity issues, or supervising short-term volunteers for the agency)

- Assisting with media relations and marketing efforts (e.g., drafting a new program brochure that targets an immigrant population; drafting an op-ed piece focusing on a timely issue and, after approvals, submitting the piece to a local newspaper; or working with others to create a brief video about the agency to be used as a promotional piece)
- Taking part in agency networking efforts (e.g., attending a local chamber of commerce meeting, networking with local politicians at a legislative breakfast, or participating as a volunteer in a local United Way allocations process)
- Contributing to the agency's resource development efforts (e.g., completing the literature search, needs assessment, project goals and objectives, and/or a portion of a grant proposal; researching new funding possibilities for a program; assisting in the search for potential major donors; or serving as an active member of a committee planning a fund-raising event for the agency)

Community Practice (Planning, Development, Organizing, and Social Action) Because a relatively small number of social work students specialize in the areas of community development, organizing, and social action (Weisman & Whitaker, 2013), you may find incorporating learning experiences in this area of macro practice more challenging than integrating administrative activities. Unless you have secured a practicum site with the goal of learning these skills, you may find that your field instructor has more difficulty offering a venue for you to observe, engage in, and receive resources needed to implement community planning, organizing, development, and social action skills. Opportunities to engage in community practice activities in direct service agencies may be very seasonal (i.e., prior to, during, or after the state legislative session), random (e.g., during an unexpected community crisis or when an agency is in need of community assessment), or highly dependent on the orientation of the members of the board of directors or agency administrators (i.e., the board's or administration's philosophy regarding the importance of involvement in political activities on behalf of clients). Many community planners, organizers, and developers and those involved in social action are from disciplines other than social work. The goal of practice within these areas is to empower people affected by policy in order to effect change on a scale wider than a single agency can hope to do. In addition to the administrative activities listed earlier, the following activities can help you learn community practice skills:

- Participating in coalition formulation and maintenance (e.g., taking responsibility for researching organizations that may be interested in working with a coalition on a particular issue, attending a coalition meeting as a representative of your practicum agency [Bobo, Kendall, & Max, 2010], or integrating technology [the Internet, email lists, databases, and social networking sites] into coalition-building efforts [McNutt, 2013])
- Assisting with planned change techniques and interorganizational planning (e.g., assisting in organizing community hearings to allow community input into a new employment project sponsored by local government, supporting efforts to arrange meetings of community professionals to solve problems around a community-wide public transportation issue, or working with government officials to plan a new summer employment and mentoring program for the county)
- Engaging in macro-level advocacy efforts (e.g., organizing a large meeting of neighborhood residents and inviting local elected officials to the meeting to hold

them accountable for their voting records on key issues in the last legislative session [Bobo, Kendall, & Max, 2010], participating in a demonstration, working with a group drafting legislation to fight against the building of a superhighway through the neighborhood of your clients [Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2015], or lobbying a state legislator on a particular bill)

- Helping with a community needs assessment/analysis (e.g., interviewing key members of the community using a structured interview to ascertain the most pressing community needs, engaging in community mapping, using a capacity inventory tool with individuals involved in your agency to ascertain the strengths and capacities inherent in local community members [Mulroy, 2013], or attending neighborhood public meetings to learn more about the issues most affecting the neighborhood)
- Becoming involved in leadership development and citizen participation (e.g., conducting a leadership training session on the legislative process with low-income residents, organizing a letter-writing campaign by neighborhood residents, assisting clients with voter registration efforts, or assisting in planning a conference [Johnson Butterfield & Chisanga, 2013]).
- Taking part in community organizing (e.g., organizing and recruiting for a neighborhood meeting to discuss the problem of absentee landlords in the neighborhood; participating in the recruitment, training, and organizing of a group of low-income clients to testify at a county hearing on local spending priorities for federal funds; or inviting people to join in your organization's efforts to reform health care for the poor) (Bobo et al., 2010)
- Assuming a role in membership development and retention (e.g., engaging in door-to-door canvassing to recruit new members, gathering signatures for a petition drive at a central location in the community and recruiting new members, or planning a volunteer recognition event)
- Working with economic development activities (e.g., working with low-income women to start a small business sewing infant baptismal dresses, recruiting low-income minority men to join a worker-owned cleaning company, or providing technical assistance to teen parents in their development of a cottage industry)

Policy Practice Social policy impacts and shapes the lives of clients. Social workers must advocate for clients within the policy-making process. Even though policy practice may constitute a small portion of your time in practicum, seek avenues for incorporating it into your field experience. Consider the following options for gaining policy practice experiences:

- Becoming involved in the legislative process (e.g., researching, preparing, and presenting testimony in support of or in opposition to a bill during a public hearing; meeting with legislators individually to lobby for more funding for human services; or strategizing with a coalition of advocates regarding the defeat of a harmful bill)
- Taking part in policy analysis and management (e.g., assisting others in providing an analysis [fiscal or human cost] of proposed legislation to a local legislator [Haynes & Mickelson, 2010], assisting others in analyzing the impact on vulnerable populations of proposed regulations issued by a government entity, or writing an article for the agency newsletter relating the effects of new legislation on agency clients)

- Engaging in social policy research (e.g., participating in an evaluation of a new Medicaid outreach program by appraising and synthesizing multiple sources of information, compiling the results, drafting a report, and sending the final report to decision makers for advocacy purposes; researching the development of government policy related to homelessness to assist in advocacy efforts; or assisting a professor in analyzing the impact of welfare reform on rural elderly caretakers)
- Participating in legal proceedings or issues relevant to policy making (e.g., helping a social worker from your agency to prepare testimony as an expert witness for a legislative committee, providing testimony to a legislative committee, or communicating with an administrator of the county human service agency to request clarification on a policy negatively impacting your clients [Haynes & Mickelson, 2010])

Orientation

After learning about the services your agency provides, your first task is to orient yourself to the macro-level work (administrative, community, and policy practice) implemented by the agency. Second, you will need to be oriented to the resources needed to carry out a macro assignment. Many macro assignments entail large projects that can be time-consuming. You will likely find that you are able to work on a small macro project at the same time that you carry out your direct practice responsibilities. You may find that your work with individuals, families, or groups provides you with an issue or with case scenarios that you can use (with permission) in advocacy efforts. If, however, you would like to be involved in a large project, you may consider either (1) transferring most or all of your direct practice responsibilities to another staff member so that you can devote most of your time to the project or (2) negotiating a role within a large project under the direction of a staff member. Consider these issues concerning orientation to a macro-level project:

- What level of access do you have to the resources needed to carry out this task (i.e., administrators or staff, financial resources, or multiple sources of information)?
- Do you have the permission, support, and guidance from the agency (administrators, board of directors, or staff) that you need to carry out this task?
- Does the task you are completing involve a significant risk (public relations, political, or otherwise) to the agency? Are you prepared for this risk?
- How much time and energy will the task take? If needed, will you be able to carry out your direct practice activities and your new task effectively?
- How can you influence the degree to which other organizations with which you will be working take your role seriously and treat you as a professional?
- What is your ability to be an effective team player on a large project, in which you may receive little to no recognition for your contribution to the larger project?
- What is your ability to contribute to a project for which you may not see evidence of a resolution?
- How will you be able to maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid triangulation if different members of a group try to "recruit" you to advocate for their position about next steps?

Identifying Yourself as a Student

Your student status can be both a strength and a limitation in macro-level activities. As a student, you can explain the limits of your experience in macro-level activities to others

Practice Application 8.2 Socialization into Macro Practice

Because many social work programs devote more time to direct practice skills than to indirect practice skills, many students feel unsure of their macro skills and experience anxiety contemplating a macro project. Discuss any anxieties and questions you may have with a member of your practicum team while you are arranging for task guidance to assist you throughout your macro-level work. Questions to consider include these:

1. What knowledge and skills will I need for a macro assignment?
2. Do I feel that my social work program has prepared me with the knowledge and skills that I need?
3. What resources will I need from the agency and the social work program, and are they available?
4. What challenges do I anticipate as I engage in macro work?
5. How will I evaluate my work in this area? How will my field instructor evaluate my work?
6. What competencies and practice behaviors will I gain by involvement in a macro activity?

with whom you will be working and ask whether you can turn to them for assistance. Being forthright about your rookie status can allow you to question strategies, tactics, procedures, and assumptions within the framework of learning without necessarily appearing to challenge the wisdom of experienced staff members. However, your student status may also limit the tasks for which you may take responsibility. For example, you may wish to assume complete responsibility for a new marketing brochure but may be given permission only to draft certain sections.

Cultural Humility in Community Practice

As discussed in Chapter 2, cultural humility involves self-awareness and an understanding of the values, beliefs, and traditions of clients, whether these clients are individuals, a group, a population, or a community. Utilizing cultural humility in community practice involves the same self-awareness and understanding at the community level, which may mean learning about several populations within the community. Additionally, understanding the historical forces and status of various populations within a community can assist in understanding the disparate acquisition of resources among the populations. It might help to explain, for example, why the houses in one part of the community are pricier or why businesses in some parts of the community appear to be struggling. When interacting with community residents, community practitioners should attempt to learn about their history, the history of the community, and the sources of problems in the community. Practitioners should carefully consider the nondominant populations, which may be marginalized as a result of their social status and self-perception of privilege or oppression. To promote cultural humility within the community, community practitioners can seek to create opportunities for nondominant groups to act as teachers and play a primary role in community efforts (Hardina, 2012).

Practice in Smaller Communities

Developing your community practice skills is critical to becoming a competent generalist practitioner. However, if you are working in a nonurban or smaller community, you will likely find that these skills are of even greater importance. Smaller communities generally have fewer formal resources to which you can refer clients, and many services are provided on an informal basis by family, friends, neighbors, or church members. As a social work professional (maybe the only social work professional in the community),

Practice Application 8.3 Professional Socialization in a Smaller Community

If you are completing a practicum in a smaller community, this practice application will assist you in the process of socialization into the community, an essential aspect of macro practice.

Ask your field instructor to help you meet other human service professionals. Some possible avenues include (1) spending a few hours being introduced around the town or county, (2) attending interagency meetings, (3) participating in "Law Day" at the courthouse, (4) having social lunches with professionals from other agencies/organizations/churches, and (5) attending office openings or parties. To gain credibility as a professional, make certain to accompany another professional known by the community when being introduced.

Developed by Ellen Burkemper, PhD, LCSW

you may find that you must learn about and use this informal network. Moreover, you may find that you must creatively access, utilize, and develop resources to meet client needs.

In addition to understanding the dynamics of service provision in a rural setting, you must focus on developing your relationship with key people within the community. While knowing the elected officials, business owners, bankers, and health care providers in an urban area may enhance your ability to provide services, you will learn that such knowledge is absolutely essential in a smaller community. These groups can prove to be assets in your efforts to obtain funding, influence policy, access resources, and organize and deliver services.

Critical Thinking Question

How might working in collaboration with other social workers and staff help you to provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery that would improve the quality of those services? What barriers might exist for you to exhibit leadership in this area?

Confidentiality and Self-Determination

Client empowerment and involvement in macro-level activities are important elements of social work practice. An essential component of client empowerment is emphasizing the situational, environmental, political, and organizational solutions to problems in an effort to raise clients' consciousness about the limits of personal solutions and to avoid blaming the client (Haynes & Mickelson, 2010). Although encouraging clients to share their experiences with agency programs and social policies is essential to competent social work practice, equally important are the basic social work principles of confidentiality and self-determination. If you are sharing information about an individual client with other agencies or decision makers, you must be careful to protect his or her privacy. Unless you have received permission from the client to use identifying information outside the agency, you should share information only in the aggregate. Likewise, clients should be encouraged but never be pushed to be involved in macro-level activities inside or outside the agency. The choice to be involved must be a product of the client's free will.

Working with social work staff from other areas of the agency or staff from other disciplines, other agencies, or other sectors of society (such as public agencies, businesses, private agencies, and schools) can constitute a significant portion of practice with communities and organizations.

Interprofessional Collaborative Practice/Working in Coalitions

Working with social work staff from other areas of the agency or staff from other disciplines, other agencies, or other sectors of society (such as public agencies, businesses, private agencies, and schools) can constitute a significant portion of practice with communities and organizations. Working with those from other disciplines who may have different perspectives, philosophies, and skills can make reaching agreement on strategies and tactics for initiating change challenging (Aronoff, 2013). As noted in Chapter 6, encountering different jargon, different professional socialization practices, and lack of

clarity regarding roles and expertise can challenge even the most dedicated practitioner (Moxley, 2013). Although working with professionals with a diversity of interests, educations, backgrounds, and perspectives in collaborative practice or within a coalition can bring the most comprehensive analysis and approach, as well as strength and power, to change efforts (Lawson, 2013), it can also mean that the group has to make too many compromises to work together and cannot accomplish a worthy goal (Bobo et al., 2010).

Facilitation of coalition or interagency meetings often requires a high level of facilitation skill. Because interdisciplinary work is central to macro practice and is growing in importance, try to be involved in a collaborative, coalition, or interdisciplinary effort if possible. Even if you are able only to observe meetings, note the facilitation style, how conflict is handled, and the methods by which consensus is built and agreements are made. Learning from an observation role will serve you well in the future.

Writing/Documentation Skills

Strong writing skills are as important at the macro level as in practice with individuals, families, and groups. Effective writing skills are needed for such activities as writing grant proposals; preparing budgets and agency annual reports; conducting policy research and policy analysis; developing flyers and action alerts; creating public relations materials (e.g., agency newsletters, press releases, press packets, and brochures); preparing reports for the board of directors; completing program evaluation reports; recording minutes of meetings; and writing policy position statements and testimony for public hearings. You may be asked to engage in process recordings for your macro-level work, to include documenting your weekly progress on activities and assignments, challenges encountered and strategies utilized to address challenges, personal insights gained, key persons with whom you interacted, theory–practice integration, future plans for the projects, and other topics (Ward & Mama, 2010).

Many of the rules regarding documentation presented in Chapter 6 also hold true for macro practice. These include the use of accurate grammar and punctuation, focused writing, and appropriate client information and the inclusion of only nonjudgmental and factual information. Macro-level writing often involves condensing and organizing a large amount of information into a useful, efficient, and easily readable document. If your project involves a written product, review previous editions of similar documents to guide you. Additionally, you will need to know the completion dates for drafts of the document, the completion date for the final document, the editing process (who will need to review the document?), and the audience (who will receive or approve the final document?). Even if no review process by others is involved, ask that someone review the document and give you critical feedback. You will improve your writing skills if you receive feedback.

In addition, documentation of unmet needs and needed services is an important task when advocating for policy changes. Most agency systems that document direct service work with individual clients, families, and groups are designed to capture information needed for reimbursement, clinical interventions and progress, and administrative purposes (Haynes & Mickelson, 2010). If the documentation system of your agency is designed to inject information into the political process, you may wish to take advantage of the opportunity to engage in this process. Ask to be involved in working with data to be used in the policy-making process. Another way to gain experience is to provide testimony at a legislative hearing. To increase the effectiveness and impact of your testimony, use the statistics, scenarios, and case illustrations that have emerged from documentation efforts.

The documentation efforts of practitioners may enable the clients themselves to be involved in advocacy. Effective documentation can help identify clients who may be willing to share their stories for media reports or legislative testimony. Personal stories from clients can make a dramatic and effective impact on the policy-making process, at both the administrative and the legislative levels (Haynes & Mickelson, 2010). Macro-level social workers can help clients to prepare for legislative advocacy by rehearsing testimony and role-playing the follow-up questioning process. This rehearsal can help prepare clients for the possibility of an intimidating atmosphere, questions about their personal lives, or an adversarial process.

Ongoing Evaluation

As you develop your plans for involvement in macro practice, identify points at which your work will be evaluated. Because involvement in macro-level activities is typically a lengthy process, using benchmarks to assess your growth and development is critical for your success. For example, if you are writing an annual report for the agency, consider negotiating due dates for sections of the product so that you can receive feedback along the way. If you are working with a group of rural farmers to fight development of condominiums in the area, include benchmarks in your plan to assess progress, such as obtaining meetings with important people and gathering signatures on petitions. This discussion of the business of macro practice has touched on several key issues commonly encountered in the process of assuming macro-level responsibilities. Once you are engaged in obtaining macro skills, the "process" of implementing macro activities raises new issues.

LEARNING THE "PROCESS" OF PRACTICE WITH ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND POLICY

This discussion of the process of practice with organizations, communities, and policy will focus on theory–practice integration, managing adverse relationships and conflicting goals, and developing reasonable expectations regarding the completion and effectiveness of a macro-practice assignment. Also discussed is the policy context for macro practice.

Theory-Practice Integration

Just as integrating theory and practice is imperative for effective social work practice with individuals, families, and groups (see Chapters 6 and 7), theory must provide the framework for macro practice. As discussed earlier, macro practice entails the use of individual, family, and group practice skills; therefore, you should consider theories you have learned at both of these levels within your macro activities (Gamble & Weil, 2013). Furthermore, if you have not already done so in your curriculum, you may wish to investigate community practice theories (Streeter, 2013), management theories (Patti, 2013), and policy theories (Haynes & Mickelson, 2010) and to discuss the theories that relate to your activities with your field instructor. In your discussions with your field instructor, consider the following questions:

1. In what way do the perspectives offered by the various theories in macro practice help frame your work?
2. Does a particular theory help guide your work?

3. Does a combination of theories best explain the development of the organization, community, or policy with which you are working?

Managing Adverse Relationships and Conflicting Goals

Ben Works to Manage Conflicting Goals

Ben has been working on an assignment from his field instructor since the second week of the practicum and feels stuck. The community-based outreach program in which he works is located in a low-income community with poor-quality housing stock. A developer, with the support of the county government, wishes to purchase a significant amount of real estate in the area (displacing low-income residents in the process), rehabilitate the buildings, and sell them as owner-occupied buildings. Ben's field instructor, at the prompting of the agency administrator, has assigned him to organize a group of neighborhood residents to oppose the gentrification efforts. Ben is facing at least two problems: (1) The developer has a great deal of power and money and the support of the county, and Ben wonders whether he will be wasting his time fighting the development; and (2) Ben is unsure whether he is well suited to engage in neighborhood advocacy that involves confrontation and politics. Should he ask to be released from the assignment?

Like Ben, you may experience issues that are unique to macro-level practice. You may doubt that advocacy efforts are worthwhile given your resources, the length of time you will be placed in the agency, and the influence of your opponents. You may also doubt whether you can assume the role of agitator. As a social worker, you are accustomed to seeing the various perspectives involved and working toward conflict resolution and unaccustomed to taking on an adversarial role that may involve confrontation. The inertia, fear, and anxiety raised by these issues can be significant barriers to involvement in community practice.

As a social worker, you have a professional responsibility to work to strengthen the community's capacity to respond to injustices and promote change.

Social workers have a professional responsibility to "act to expand choice and opportunity for all people" (NASW, 2008) and must work through their struggle with confrontation (Reisch, 2013). As a social worker, you have a professional responsibility to work to strengthen the community's capacity to respond to injustices and promote change. The power of a group of concerned, organized citizens may surprise you. The integration of the right information, timing, and strategy (and a little luck!) may enable even a group of marginalized people to affect social policy (Haynes & Mickelson, 2010). Although conflict resolution techniques and consensus building are important parts of social work (Mayer, 2013), conflict is often the essential ingredient for social change (Bobo at al., 2010). If conflict is difficult for you, you may wish to role-play with and receive feedback from your field instructor on situations that involve expression of differences and tension. To learn about the important historical role conflict has played in social change efforts, you may also want to read about early unionizing efforts, the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, and other social change efforts that used conflict techniques successfully.

Developing Reasonable Expectations

Macro practice often entails long-term projects. Administrative tasks can be lengthy, policy practice activities can require several months of work, and community practice

Practice Application 8.4 Reflections on the Use of Conflict in Social Advocacy

Interview a social worker involved with social policy advocacy efforts about working with or promoting conflict and adversarial relationships. Among other questions, ask the following:

1. What techniques do you use to work toward social change?
2. Does conflict play a role in the efforts?
   a. If conflict does play a role, how? Do these efforts produce adversarial relationships? As a social worker, how do you come to terms with contributing to adversarial relationships? How successful have your efforts to promote social change been? How do you define success?
   b. If conflict does not play a role, why is conflict not an element of your efforts? How successful have your efforts been?

Discuss the results of your interview in a journal entry, and share them with a member of your practicum team or with other students in your integrative practice field seminar.

goals can take several years to achieve. Successful engagement in macro practice involves the ability to accept that your efforts may not result in a desired outcome for a long time, perhaps long after your involvement has ended. Macro-practice efforts often involve teamwork, and there may be little to no recognition of individual efforts.

What can you expect to achieve as a student? Setting realistic goals and objectives (achievable within a semester or two) is imperative to your sense of accomplishment and your learning. Having unrealistic expectations can lead to frustration, a loss of self-confidence and perspective, and burnout. You may consider choosing several pieces of one large project if your macro-level interests lie in only one particular area or selecting small portions of several projects in order to gain skills in different areas of macro practice. In the negotiation process, be clear about your interests in macro practice so that appropriate, reasonable activities can be planned that meet specific competencies and demonstrate appropriate practice behaviors.

Contexts That Shape Practice

The Affordable Care Act, managed care, current administrative trends, the financial capability and asset development field, and recovery from the Great Recession are policy contexts that shape and affect contemporary social work practice. These topics and their impact on social work practice and social work practica are discussed in the following sections.

Affordable Care Act The Affordable Care Act (ACA), which took effect in 2014, was a major revamping of health care policy and practice. Individuals are now required to have health insurance, employers must now offer health insurance to most workers, and Medicaid has been expanded in many states to new populations. Two important changes in the health care delivery system are patient-centered medical homes and accountable care organizations (ACOs). The medical homes are physician-directed teams that are strive to meet the holistic needs of clients and coordinate care. ACOs are groups of providers that are accountable for meeting quality-of-care and expense targets in their management of patient health care. ACOs have been piloted with Medicare beneficiaries and, under the pilot, share in any cost savings resulting from the coordinated care. These and other revisions are designed to make health care more accessible and affordable (Gorin, Darnell, & Allen, 2014).

Impact of the ACA on Social Work Practice. Under the ACA, social workers have new roles in the health care delivery system. They can assist people in signing up for health insurance, serve as ombudsmen, and assist in coordinating care across settings. They can

also advocate for Medicaid expansion in those states that have opted out, for expansion of health insurance for undocumented immigrants, and for coverage of dental services (Gorin et al., 2014).

Managed Care The onset of managed care in the private and public sectors has created turbulence in many areas, including health care, mental health care, and the management of nonprofit and for-profit organizations. *Managed care* is a term used to describe the prepaid health sector, in which care is provided under a fixed budget. It includes health maintenance organizations and preferred provider organizations, which are used to control costs. Managed care is having a growing influence on the lives of clients as well as on the delivery of social services, and social workers and other health providers exhibit wide range of opinions about managed care. Managed care has been the subject of both praise for implementing care coordination and promoting evidence-based practice and criticism for withholding needed medical services to control costs (Vandiver, 2013).

Impact of Managed Care on Social Work Practice. The impact of managed care on social work practice depends primarily on the type of agency, services provided to clients, and client populations. In addition to serving as mental health providers, social workers play a variety of roles within the framework of managed care—for instance, they are case managers, executives, administrators, and utilization management staff (Vandiver, 2013). In general, social work has experienced increases in the following areas as a result of managed care (Simmons & Enguidanos, 2006; Vandiver, 2013):

1. Emphasis on the short-term, behavioral modalities of mental health practice
2. Emphasis on evidence-based practice
3. Emphasis on documentation and evaluation of practice
4. Use of less costly services
5. Presence in primary health care settings

Box 8.2 shows a list of managed care terms used in social work practice.

Impact of Managed Care on Practicum Experiences. The impact of managed care on the practicum experience can vary widely among programs. Some programs have lost a modest number of placements due to managed care, and some programs have also experienced a loss of supervision time because supervisors are required to bill for all of their time and student hours may not be reimbursable. Furthermore, while some organizations have opened new opportunities for students as a result of managed care (for example, in utilization review, authorization of services, and case management), others have eliminated some learning experiences for students (by not allowing students to carry their own caseloads or restricting group work). Changes in organizations due to managed care may require changes to programs and services, as many agencies have merged with or been purchased by other agencies. To prepare for the field as it has been impacted by managed care, students are encouraged to learn about financing and insurance (Kane, Hamlin, & Hawkins, 2000; Vandiver, 2013).

If the effects of managed care have not been discussed in your supervision, take the opportunity to discuss this topic with your field instructor. The pace of change in managed care is rapid, and you may find that your knowledge about managed care is already outdated. Even if your practicum site (or practicum activities) has not been directly

Box 8.2 Guide to Managed Care Terms

As social workers are increasingly influenced by managed care, you may encounter the following terms in your practice (Karger & Stoesz, 2006; Moniz & Gorin, 2010; Vandiver, 2013):

- *Capitation*—a monthly payment made to a health care provider prior to service delivery. The provider agrees to provide certain services as needed for a certain length of time (usually a year) and to accept this flat fee regardless of service usage.
- *Carve-out plans*—specialized mental health and chemical dependency care plans.
- *Case management*—the comprehensive management of a person's health care needs.
- *Employee assistance programs (EAPs)*—counseling and referral programs sponsored by employers that are designed to offer treatment for problems that affect workplace performance (such as chemical dependency and family issues). Employees may voluntarily consult an EAP manager or may be referred by their supervisors as a condition of their continued employment. EAP managers may offer assessment and intervention or may refer to a provider who offers specialized services.
- *Fee for service (FFS)*—a system in which the health care provider is paid a fee for each service delivered.
- *Gatekeeper*—the primary care physician whose responsibility it is to authorize all medical services and referrals for a patient in order for those services to be covered under the patient's managed care plan.
- *Health maintenance organizations (HMOs)*—corporations that offer health insurance and medical care. Patients in an HMO can be reimbursed only for care they receive from providers employed by the HMO.
- *Preferred provider organizations (PPOs)*—a network of providers who are in individual practice and receive payment on a fee-for-service basis. If a patient chooses to see a provider outside the preferred provider network, the patient pays a higher cost for that provider's services.
- *Utilization review*—a process whereby the provider typically must submit written documentation of the need for and progress of care to a utilization reviewer employed by a managed care company. The patient is not eligible for reimbursement for services and products unless they are authorized by the reviewer.

involved in managed care, you will benefit from a knowledge of the topic as one that will continue to affect both social work practice with clients and the organizational context of practice.

Administrative Trends among Social Service Agencies The organizational context for social work practice is undergoing significant changes. The catalysts for change among nonprofit, for-profit, and public social service agencies include a context that is increasingly competitive, is privatized (or contracting with private agencies to deliver services), requires increased use of technology, and is outcomes-oriented. Some areas are experiencing a growth of collaborative arrangements to share information and resources and the merging and consolidation of smaller agencies into larger agencies (Patti, 2013). Another trend of note is the increasing numbers of nonprofit agencies engaging in for-profit commercial activity. For many agencies, the development of for-profit businesses helps offset deficits that might otherwise result from their nonprofit activities (Germak & Singh, 2009). Finally, due to continued federal and state budget cuts for social services (and other factors leading to decreased revenue), many nonprofit agencies are spending more resources on fund-raising (Grønbjerg, 2013).

You may notice some evidence of these trends and their effects in your practicum. For example, your agency may be undergoing transition in terms of its structure, resulting in increased or decreased roles for students. You may notice that staff members are discussing increased workloads or that the organization is considering a collaboration or

merger. In the face of budgetary constraints, some agencies may strongly encourage you to spend a significant portion of your time assisting with fund-raising. In some public social service settings, services previously delivered by staff and students are now contracted out to private agencies or performed by volunteers. Organizational changes can occur suddenly (e.g., the closing of a practicum site mid-semester) or slowly.

Financial Capability and Asset Development Since the late 1980s, financial capability and asset development programs to address poverty have been promoted on the state and federal levels. Since the 1990s, *individual development account (IDA)* programs have begun as the implementation of the financial capability and asset development approach and demonstrate a social policy shift to encourage saving and investment among the poor. IDA programs emphasize potential, opportunity, and investment rather than just the transfer of income and are designed to produce a range of positive social, economic, and civic effects. Social welfare programs have historically discouraged the poor from saving by enforcing eligibility rules for assistance programs that disallowed such savings (Sherraden et al., 2015).

IDA programs promote financial capability by providing both financial education and opportunity to access appropriate financial products, such as low-cost bank accounts (Sherraden, 2013). The mandatory education component teaches participants about such matters as budgeting, increasing credit scores, buying used cars, accessing affordable credit, purchasing a house, and starting and expanding a micro-enterprise (Birkenmaier, Curley, & Kelly, 2012; Green & Haines, 2011). This education is paired with access to a bank savings account wherein the participant must save money on a regular basis. The participant's savings are matched at the completion of the program (e.g., a participant saving $300 receives a match of $300) and can be used to buy an asset, such as postsecondary education, a home, or a small business. IDA-type savings accounts are monitored by the host, which is a credit union, a social service agency, the United Way, or another type of agency, and participants can access the funds only for specific predetermined purposes.

A second type of program is the *child development account (CDA)*. CDAs are also special savings accounts—with or without financial incentives—that promote lifelong asset building. Savings in CDAs can begin at birth or later and are used for individual asset building, such as for postsecondary education, homeownership, or small business development. CDA programs are being implemented and tested at the state and local levels (Huang, Nam, Sherraden, & Clancy, 2015).

Financial capability and asset building programs provide an opportunity for social workers to be involved in the economic and social development of clients. Many agencies offer practicum experiences working in such programs. If you are in an agency that has such a program, you may want to learn more about the philosophy and operation of such programs in general. Otherwise, you may want to become aware of the asset development programs in your area as potential resources for your clients.

Recovery from the Great Recession Although the Great Recession of 2006–2008 has officially ended, many families are still struggling financially. Despite the federal policies enacted during and after the recession to stabilize the economy and the additional federal funds allocated to assist with safety net programs (i.e., SNAP, TANF, and housing programs), Americans are still attempting to recover from their financial losses. After peaking, unemployment rates are dropping across the country, but certain populations, such as older workers and new college graduates, continue to face challenges in finding employment. Available employment opportunities are increasingly found

in lower-paying industries with few benefits, such as the service industry. More families, including formerly middle-class families, are less financially secure then before the recession, and income inequality is at an all-time high. Social workers are now serving families in programs for which they would have been ineligible prior to the recession (Herrick, 2013).

Practice Application 8.5 Community Analysis through Illustration

This practice application will enable you to create a graphic representation of the relationships between the community served by your practicum site and outside entities.

Create an eco-map of the community in which your practicum site is located or the community it serves, and include the following:

1. All entities external to the community with which the community (as a whole) interfaces (e.g., government entities, other communities, social service agencies, businesses, and community institutions and organizations)
2. A graphic description of the relationships between the community and outside entities using different types of connections (e.g., broken lines, thin lines, thick lines, and curving lines)
3. A legend/key that explains the types of connections

Explain and discuss your eco-map with a member of your practicum team or in integrative practice field seminar.

Practice Application 8.6 A Macro Approach to the Educational Needs of Children Who Are Homeless

Imagine that you are a social work student in a homeless shelter. When children come to the shelter, many must change schools, and many miss a number of days before they are enrolled again in school. You have been directed to work with a group that is drafting state legislation to remedy the situation. The group will also try to find a sponsor for the legislation and will work to pass the bill. Answer the following questions in a journal entry, and share your answers with a member of your practicum team:

1. What might be some solutions to the problem?
2. How would you begin to work on this issue within your practicum site?
3. What people or groups would you identify as important to this effort?
4. How might you go about engaging important people or groups in this effort?
5. What kinds of activities might be needed to pass this legislation?

Developed by Marian Hartung, LCSW

Practice Application 8.7 Role-Play: Social Advocacy

Choose a pressing social issue that you have encountered in your practicum. With a group of students, role-play a macro approach to the issue in an integrative practice field seminar. Options include (1) holding a press conference; (2) testifying before a legislative or funding body; (3) conducting a demonstration with picketing, songs, and slogans; (4) meeting with an elected official to request a specific action; (5) holding a sit-in; and (6) staging a rally and leafleting.

Practice Application 8.8 Contact with an Influential Person

Identify an issue (political, social, policy, or legal) that is relevant for your practicum work. Identify a key player that has affected/could affect your issue. Contact this person/body through a letter, phone call, or personal visit. State your position (reasons you are concerned, who is affected, and how this situation can be rectified/improved). Be sure to recognize other perspectives on the issue and other possible means of addressing the problem. Ask the person to let you know whether he or she will take the action you are requesting (e.g., cosponsoring legislation, contacting other influential persons, or introducing an amendment to legislation). Provide documentation of your key points (e.g., a copy of a letter or a fact sheet) to a member of your practicum team, and discuss your contact.

SUMMARY

This chapter discussed both the "business" and "process" of macro practice in practicum. Issues such as expectations for student learning in macro practice, receiving a macro assignment, identifying yourself as a student, role transition, confidentiality and self-determination, collaboration and coalition, writing and documentation skills, and ongoing evaluation were explored. Examples of administrative, community organizing and development, and policy practice activities that students can engage in were provided. Furthermore, theory–practice integration, managing adverse relationships and conflicting goals, and developing reasonable expectations were discussed. Finally, the impact of managed care, administrative trends among social service agencies, and asset development on social work practice and student learning in practicum were explored.

STUDENT SCENARIO POSTSCRIPTS

After further discussion with his field instructor about his frustrated attempts to gain some administrative responsibilities as part of his practicum, **Cameron** asked the field instructor about her administrative duties within the agency. She discussed her grant writing, administrative reports, and coalition meetings. They agreed that Cameron will take responsibility for many of her administrative duties under close supervision and that the field instructor will sign off on all the work.

Ben, after much thought regarding his discomfort with a macro assignment that entails use of adversarial relationships with a powerful housing developer and county officials, asked his field instructor to release him from the assignment. The field instructor denied his request, stating that this assignment will be an important learning experience. They discussed Ben's feelings of discomfort that arise with situations involving conflict. The field instructor discussed the importance of the effort to stop gentrification in the area as a contribution to the empowerment of the low-income residents of the neighborhood and as a mechanism for building community between low- and moderate-income residents. The field instructor agreed to work closely with Ben and to assist him in processing his feelings of discomfort along the way.