

# ***Real Cases Project***

## **Generalist Social Work Practice**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. Overview of this Course within the Social Work Curriculum**

The course(s), Generalist Social Work Practice, are a part of the Foundation Curriculum in social work education programs, on both the baccalaureate and masters level. Depending on the organization of the curriculum, it is one course, or multiple courses. Generalist Practice addresses the common stages of work and skills across levels or methods of practice, as well as across populations and settings.

Overall, the generalist practice model is an integrative approach to practice, which attends to the profession's focus on person in environment. Through this approach, students can learn to see beyond the narrow boundaries of separate cases, and appreciate client troubles (e.g., inadequate income, substance abuse, domestic violence) in the context of public issues (e.g., policy debates on welfare reform and health insurance) and agency regulations (e.g., eligibility criteria, screening procedures). Students learn to move across system levels and among practice methods based on their assessment to improve the adaptive fit between person and environment.

Generalist social work is distinguished by a common base of knowledge (i.e. ecosystems approach & person in environment framework) and common practice principles (i.e. centrality of the client and worker relationship & professional use of self). A solid understanding and use of phases of assessment, planning, contracting, intervention, and evaluation permeate all generalist social work practice, and do so in light of changes in fields of practice, demographic trends, and in the reconfiguration of service delivery systems. This knowledge base is put into practice through the use of common skills (i.e. engagement and contracting) and roles (i.e. advocate and facilitator). Generalist practice skills and roles are those that are easily adapted to use in diverse settings, across client populations, and levels of intervention that include individual, family, group, organization, and community. This orientation serves graduates throughout their professional careers, underpinning the capacity to use their knowledge and skills in serving the needs of clients in a variety of social work venues.

## **B. Relevance of these Case Studies to this Course**

The case studies provide invaluable examples of real practice, in the social work setting of public child welfare. The cases provide enough detail to explore from a range of vantage points, multiple assessment activities, and a range of possible interventions and evaluations. Their vivid details and situations provide the opportunity for students to consider how family members and workers are doing and feeling within a larger organizational and community context.

## **B. Specific Learning Objectives Related to Using these Case Studies in this Course**

Three specific learning objectives related to using the three case studies in this course have been developed. They are:

- To deepen self-awareness and build knowledge and skills in preparing for work with clients, families, communities and organizations;
- To develop ability to conduct a multi-faceted psycho-social assessment of clients and their environments, with in partnership with clients;
- To expand capacity to plan multi-level interventions to serve client and community needs, within an organizational context and with an evaluation strategy.

## **D. Overview of What is Included in this Guide**

Included in this teaching guide are three potential strategies for integrating the case studies into a Generalist Social Work Practice course. Each of the following strategies is accompanied by discussion of cases, learning activities, materials needed, suggested readings and a suggested evaluation plan.

- Tuning In to Client, Families, Workers, Community and Organization.
- Multi-Faceted Assessment Strategies
- Planning Multi-Level Interventions and Accountability

# **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

## **A. Strategy One: Tuning In to Client, Families, Workers, Community and Organization**

### **1. Areas/issues of the case studies to be highlighted:**

Since these cases and teaching guide are intended for use by a broad range of students, it is important for all students to read the cases or particular case selected for this exploration of the tuning in process. For some students, these

cases will sound familiar, and for others, they will appear quite unfamiliar. The first area of inquiry in class can be a sharing of reactions, and previous experiences with similar cases. These initial responses may set the stage of the more structured tuning-in process that will deepen students' self-awareness and initial engagement with clients.

Looking at the cases in thinking about the preparatory stage of work will generate discussion about beginnings and the self-awareness of the worker. Faculty members can suggest that students try to put themselves in the role of family members and workers. In addition, students can be asked to identify moments and events depicted in the cases, in which the workers' "professional use of self" could be examined and mobilized.

As discussed in this section, self awareness is critical for all social workers, and generalist practice is often the time when social work students have the opportunity to grapple with their own ability to use themselves as "instruments of change" in their work with other people.

## **2. Timing within the semester:**

This learning strategy can be used in the early stages of the course, following discussion of overall course concepts, and as material to explore the preparatory phase of practice.

## **3. Teaching methods:**

This strategy contains three phases of work, all of which take may place within a single class session, or divided among sessions depending on time constraints.

### Phase One: Open Discussion

This strategy begins with discussion of reactions, feelings, concerns and exposure to social work practice in public child welfare settings. Students with experience in this area should be encouraged to help fellow classmates understand some of the basic case practice and jargon when needed. The instructor should encourage all students to participate and find ways to connect their own experience in previous practice and in field education, with the case studies. The purpose of this stage is to universalize the cases, as valuable learning tools for all students in the class.

### Phase Two: Understanding the Tuning In Process

This strategy continues with a lecturette on the Tuning-In process, as originally developed by William Schwartz, and then further elaborated by Lawrence Shulman and Carol Germain and Alex Gitterman. This process is discussed in highly useful detail in the following sources:

Gitterman, A. & Germain, C.B. (2008). *The life model of social work practice: Advances in theory and practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: Columbia University Press

Schwartz, W. (1971). On the use of groups in social work practice. In W. Schwartz & S.R. Zalba (Eds.) *The practice of group work* (pp.3-24), New York: Columbia University Press.

Shulman, L. (2009). *The skills of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

The key components of the Tuning-In process involve workers and students preparing to meet clients by asking the following questions:

- a. Identification: What are the facts, what do we know?
- b. Incorporation: If I was \_(the client/s)\_\_\_\_, I would feel \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. Reverberation: When something happened to me like what happened to \_(the client/s)\_\_\_\_, I felt \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Detachment/Analysis: What can we learn from this exercise?
- e. Openness: What do I need to do to be open to this client/s and family?

The detachment and analysis stage is used to inventory the feelings and ideas generated by the questions and to remember that Tuning-In only helps the student understand their own feelings and ideas – not those of the client. Openness is the stage in which the student moves toward a true understanding of the clients' perspectives. This is essentially a self-awareness, or mindfulness exercise that allows students to understand and separate their own feelings (and biases) from the real story of the clients.

### Phase Three: Tuning-In to the Families and Workers Presented in the Case Studies

Students can be divided into three small groups, and given the task to Tune-In to the key family members in each of the three cases, or one case can be used and each group directed to Tune-In to a different family member and worker.

A representative of each group should then share their findings with the larger class group, guided by the instructor. Instructors can use this experience to address broader themes of the strengths perspective, and initial engagement skills and challenges. The issue of vicarious traumatization can be introduced and discussed at this point in the semester.

If instructors wish to extend this activity, they can ask each small group to develop a role play to present to the class, focusing on the initial engagement with the family, focusing a particular moment in the case study. In that event, students can focus on preliminary sessional skills, including those identified by Shulman (2009, pp.116-121) as:

1. Tuning In to the Client's Sense of Urgency
2. Tuning In to the Meaning of the Client's Struggle
3. Tuning In to the Worker's Realities of Time and Stress

#### Phase Four: Tuning In to the Worker's Own Life Experiences

Lastly, as Shulman (2009) points out, "tuning In to the authority theme" is one of the critical factors in building initial relationships with clients. It would be difficult to identify a more compelling instance of this phenomenon in practice. Shulman connects this theme with the importance of understanding the impact of diversity in initial encounters, and the need to develop culturally competent practice. These make fruitful areas of class discussion as students relate the experiences in the case study to the authority theme, cultural competence, and the professional use of self.

#### **4. Materials:**

Other than the case studies, no special materials are needed.

#### **5. Supporting readings:**

In addition to the aforementioned readings, the following are recommended:

Kirst-Ashman, K & Hull, G. H. (2006). *Understanding generalist practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education.

Barak, M. E. M. (2000). The inclusive workplace: An ecosystems approach to diversity management. *Social Work*, 45 (4), 339-352.

Bell, H., Kulkarni, S., & Dalton, L. (2003). Organizational prevention of vicarious trauma. *Families in Society*, 84(4), 463-470.

Bride, B. E. (2007). Prevalence of secondary traumatic stress among social workers. *Social Work*, 52 (1), 63-70.

Freedberg, S. (2007). Re-examining empathy: A relational-feminist point of view. *Social Work*, 52 (3), 251-259.

Miley, K. K., O'Melia, M.W., & DuBois, B.L. (2007). *Generalist social work practice: An empowering approach*. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Radey, M. (2008). Frontline welfare work: Understanding social work's role. *Families in Society*, 89 (2), 184-192.

Lemienny, C. (2001). The challenge of empowerment in child protective services: A case study of a mother with mental retardation. *Families in Society*, 82 (2), 175-185.

Whitley, D. M., White, K. R., Kelley, S. J., & Yorkes, B. (1999). Strengths-based case management: The application of grandparents raising grandchildren. *Families in Society*, 80 (2), 110-119.

**6. Evaluation plan:**

Instructors may find that this exercise continues to be relevant throughout the course, and so there will be numerous points to evaluate its impact. A full debriefing should take place in class before students move on. Assignments of logs and homework to bring back reports from the field will provide opportunities for students to think about this powerful content further.

**B. Strategy Two: Multi-Faceted Assessment Strategies****1. Areas/issues of the case studies to be highlighted:**

This strategy will use all (although instructors may choose one or two) of the case, and use classic assessment strategies of Genograms and Ecomaps. Following introduction of these strategies, instructors will discuss how they can be used With clients and communities, rather than On clients and communities.

**2. Timing within semester:**

This strategy can fit well at the point that assessment strategies are first introduced and discussed, or later in the course for application to work with families and communities.

**3. Teaching methods:**

Good descriptions of these methods are available in Generalist Practice texts. A classic, clear description of the ecomap and genogram is available as follows: Hartman, A. (1995). Diagrammatic assessment of family relationships. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 76 (2), 111-122.

Students may be interested to hear that Ann Hartman developed the Ecomap tool for use in child welfare settings. It has since become extraordinary useful across settings and populations, and can be used for work with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations. It is also used as a research strategy, to depict relationships in micro, mezzo and macro systems.

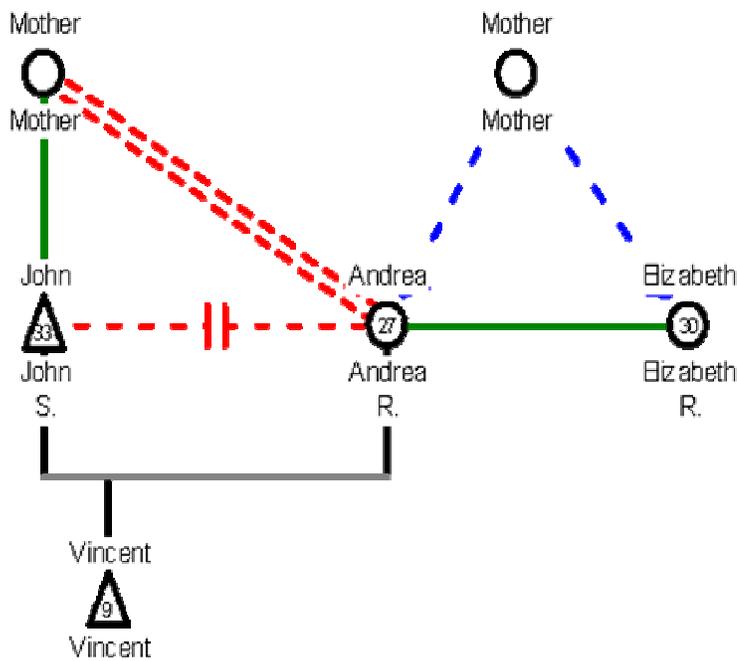
The Genogram is primarily a family tree, that can also be used for a range of system sizes. Traditionally, when the family is the unit of attention (which is compatible with the *Real Case* studies, students can draw the family relationships over generations that they can glean from the texts. Students can also discuss the relevance and usefulness of using this tool with the families presented in the case studies, and if there are opportunities, how they would proceed to implement the strategy. Role plays would be useful, especially those presenting an assessment partnership approach for the worker and clients.

With the Genogram in the center, an Ecomap for each family can be developed. Again, participatory approaches with families are recommended. My experience has been that the development of an Ecomap with clients is among the most potent relationship building and assessment activities. As a snapshot of the family over time, Ecomaps can be saved, re-drawn, and used on an ongoing

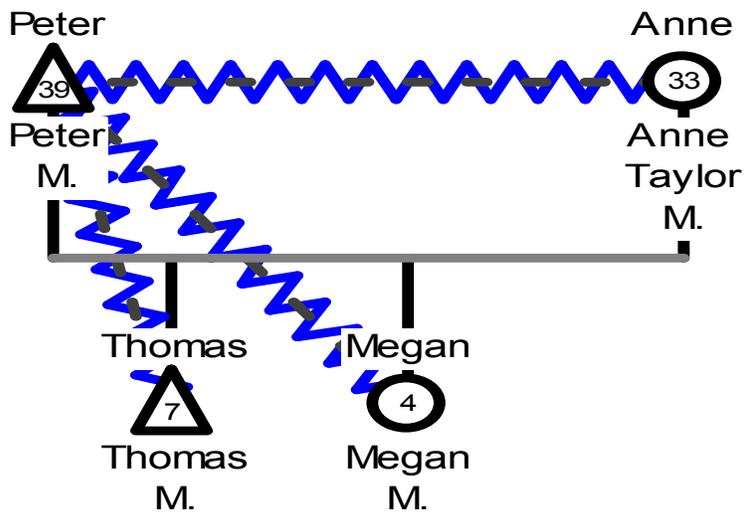
basis as a practice intervention and record. Ecomaps can also be used to depict the relationships of a community or neighborhood with the wider environment.

The following section includes Genograms and Ecomaps drawn by Tara Bulin from the three case studies.

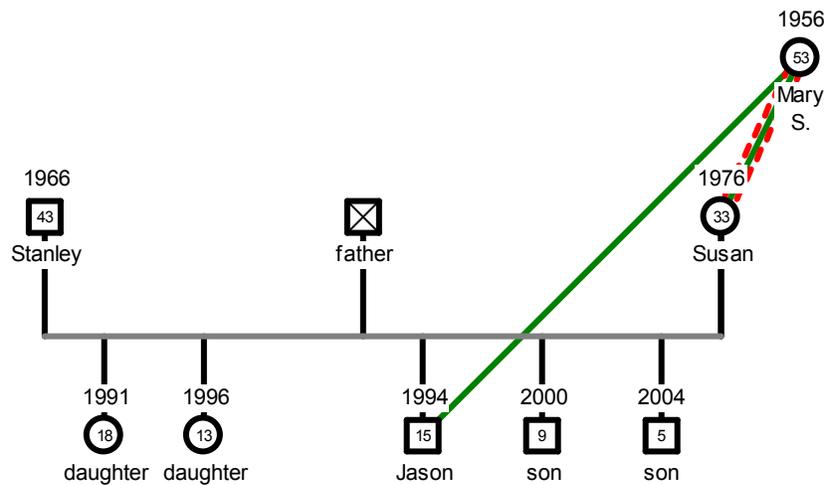
### Andrea R. Case Study Genogram



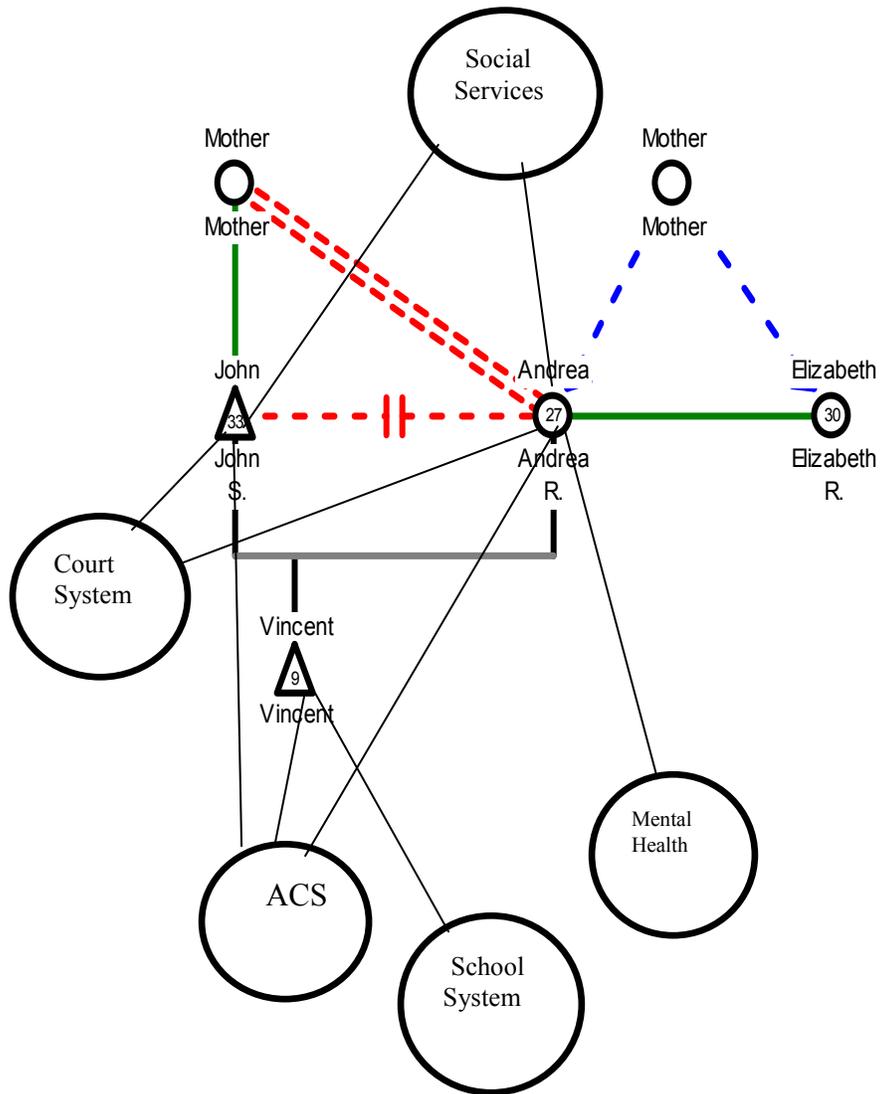
### Ann M. Case Study Genogram



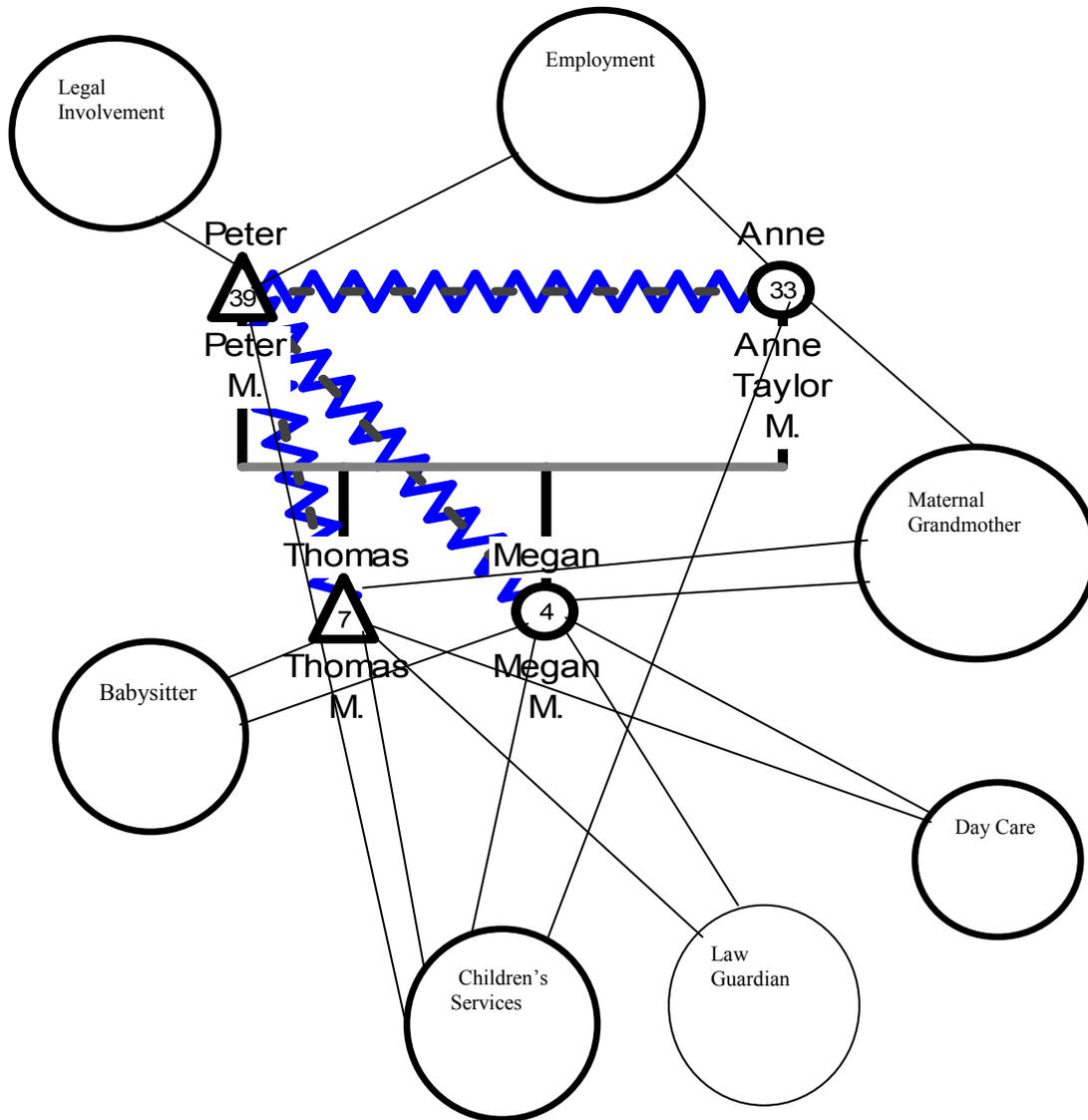
### Mary S. Case Study Genogram



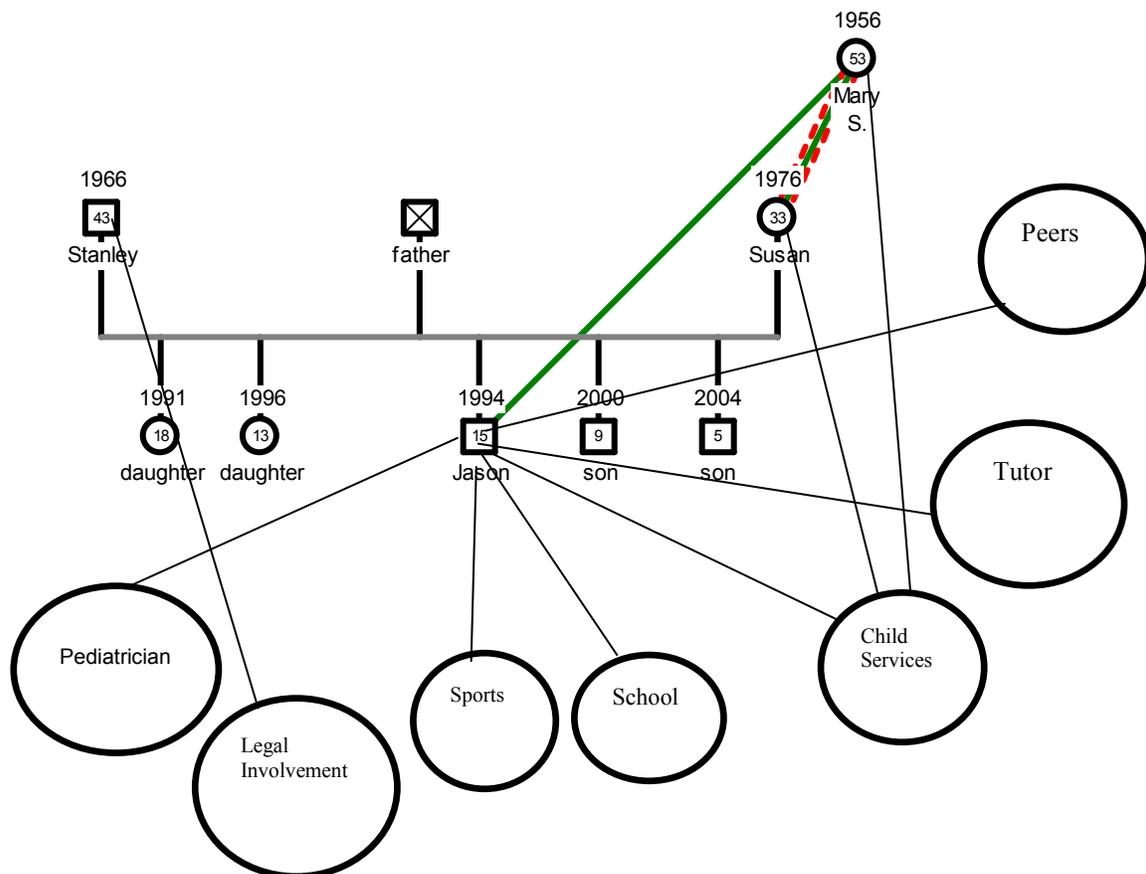
### Andrea R. Case Study Ecomap



### Anne M. Case Study Ecomap



## Mary S. Case Study Ecomap



As the preceding illustrations indicate, there is rich data and a fruitful area for engagement through the process of developing these artifacts.

#### 4. Materials:

Other than the case studies and paper, no special materials are needed. Instructors may want to develop handouts on both assessment strategies.

#### 5. Supporting readings:

In addition to Generalist Practice texts, the following readings are recommended:

Early, T. J. & Glenmayer, L. F. (2000). Valuing families: Social work practice with families from a strengths perspective. *Social Work, 45* (2), 118-130.

Gilgun, J. F. (2005). Chapter 2, (pp. 23-65), The ecosystem perspective and the use of knowledge. In B.R. Compton, B. Galoway, and B.R. Cournoyer. *Social Work Processes* (7th Ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Hodge, D. R. (2005). Spiritual ecograms: A new assessment instrument for identifying clients' strengths in space and across time. *Families in Society*, 86 (2), 287-296.

Silverstone, B. (2005). Social work with the older people of tomorrow: Restoring the person-in-situation. *Families in Society*, 86 (3), 309-319.

Strier, R. (2008). Client and worker perceptions of poverty: Implications for practice and research. *Families in Society*, 89 (3), 466-475.

Young, D. S. & Smith, C. J. (2000). When moms are incarcerated: The need of children, mothers, and caregivers. *Families in Society*, 81 (2), 130-141.

## **6. Evaluation plan:**

Generalist Practice courses often have a written assignment related to assessment in the early phase of work. Students can use the Genogram and Ecomap in their own work with clients, and compare that with their experiences in class with these case studies. Alternatively, students without applicable field experiences, can use the case studies and these assessment strategies as the basis for a written assignment or class exam.

## **C. Strategy Three: Planning Multi-Level Interventions and Accountability**

### **1. Area/issue of the case studies to be highlighted:**

The final strategy contained in this guide focuses on the critical area of planning interventions in Generalist Practice. There is an old saying: "When all you have is a hammer, everything you see is a nail." In social work practice, this relates to the tendency for organizations and agencies to see client problems and service needs in similar ways, leading to mechanized development of service delivery plans. The ChildStat Initiative is a direct antidote to this practice, and this strategy suggests a way for students to first look closely at the planning process in each case study, and then apply a system of inquiry to their own work in the field.

### **2. Timing within semester:**

This strategy can fit well at various points in the course, as it links with planning and organizational assessment.

### **3. Teaching methods:**

After reading and generally discussing the case studies, instructors can ask the following questions:

- How does the value and belief system of ACS influence the service delivery responses of staff in each of the cases?
- How do the skills and beliefs of workers influence service delivery?
- To what extent are family members partners in developing plans for service delivery?

Jumping off from this discussion, instructors can introduce a guide to assessing worker, agency, and client needs to be used in a multi-level planning process.

This activity is primarily informed by the Chapter on Agency Context in Wayne, J. & Cohen, C.S. (2001). *Group work education in the field*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education. At Adelphi University School of Social Work, we adapted this exploration/planning guide for use in expanding assessment, planning and implementation of macro practice interventions.

**The handout is contained in the Appendix to this guide.** It is important to note that the handout was developed to specifically focus on community and organizational interventions within a generalist practice framework. It has also been used successfully when focused on work with individuals, families and groups. This handout can be used in class or by students in their field placement of work settings. Alternatively, it can be used as an analysis tool regarding the service delivery to the families in the case studies.

**4. Materials:** Handouts and case studies are the only materials needed.

**5. Supporting readings:**

In addition to readings in Generalist Social Work Practice Texts, the following readings are recommended:

Barak, M. E. M. (2000). The inclusive workplace: An ecosystems approach to diversity management. *Social Work, 45* (4), 339-352.

Cohen, C. S. (1995). Making it happen: From great idea to successful support group program. *Social Work with Groups, 18* (1). 67-80.

Shulman, L., (2008). Supervision. In Mizrahi, T. & Davis, L. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social work, Vol. 4* (pp. 186-190). Washington, DC: NASW.

**6. Evaluation plan**

As in the case with Strategy Two, this activity lends itself for a paper or log assignment, as well as an in-class activity. Instructors can engage students in comparing service delivery planning among the cases and between a case study and their experience in the field.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **A. Recap**

This guide has presented three teaching strategies, building on the Generalist Social Work Practice framework, of multi-level, multi-population and multi-settings approaches to work with clients and communities.

### **B. Suggestions for Future Courses**

There is no question that Generalist Social Work Practice is a basic building block of social work education. Horizontally, the use of the cases in this course leads to connections with Human Behavior and the Social Environment, Social Welfare Policy, and Social Work Research. Some programs also link with courses in Oppression and Social Justice, and these cases and teaching strategies address these key themes. Vertically in moving into advanced concentrations, Generalist Practice prepares students to go deeper into generalist approaches, as well as focus more intensively in direct or indirect practice, and/or in social work practice with individuals, or groups, or families, or communities, or organizations.

**APPENDIX TO THE TEACHING GUIDE GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE  
HANDOUT; PRE PLANNING GENERALIST PRACTICE INTERVENTIONS WITH  
ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES**

\*Adapted From: Wayne, J. & Cohen, C.S. (2001). *Group work education in the field*. Alexandria, VA: CSWE  
These focusing questions guide social work students, workers and supervisors in identifying readiness for working with organizations and communities, assessing the agency environment as the context for social work practice, and understanding client, agency and community needs in relation to agency capacities.

***Phase One: Self Assessment***

A. How do I feel about planning and implementing community and organizational interventions?

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B. What experience and knowledge about social work practice with organizations and communities can I bring to this process?

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C. What experience and knowledge about social work practice in general can I draw on?

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D. What do I need to do to prepare myself to plan and implement community and organizational interventions?

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***Phase Two: Identification of Past and Present Agency Experience***

A. Is there an agency ideology on organizational and community practice strategies?

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B. What has been the agency experience these types of interventions?

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C. Do certain groups of staff have a monopoly on working organizationally and with communities?

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D. If agency staff does not work in these areas, what can be the reason(s)?

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***Phase Three: Assessment of Client Needs and Agency Capacities***

A. Are there unmet client and staff needs in this agency which can be appropriately met through the use of organizational and community interventions and strategies?

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B. In what ways will agency policies, procedures, and informal organization enhance and/or complicate such work?

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C: How will we proceed to develop and implement an organizational or community intervention?

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