

Revisiting the Relationship Between Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

Michael J. Austin, Elizabeth K. Anthony, Ryan Tolleson Knee, & John Mathias

This analysis seeks to bridge the differences between micro and macro practice within the context of the shared mission of social work. The search for common ground, given decades of specialization, includes the identification of the different ways that the two forms of practice can inform each other, describes core workplace skills relevant to interventions at the micro and macro levels of organizational and community life, and explores the need for bilingual capacities to enhance communications between both domains of social work practice. It concludes with implications for future curricular changes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- In order to maximize the benefits of the relationship between micro and macro practice, the gap must be bridged between senior management and line staff in nonprofit and public sector human service organizations.
- Social work students need essential entry-level knowledge and skills; faculty need to renew their efforts in this era of specialization to collaboratively teach micro and macro practice in teaching teams.

The roots of micro and macro social work practice can be traced back 100 years to the works of Mary Richmond (1917) and Jane Addams (1912). Each viewed social work practice from the perspective of assessing the social environment in which vulnerable populations found themselves. They laid the foundation for the subsequent social science focus in social work education on understanding the person within the environment (human behavior in the social environment). While they may have viewed what we now call micro and macro practice as two sides of the same social work coin, they probably could not have foreseen the degree to which practice specializations have come to dominate the profession 100 years later. The various specializations within micro practice (often defined by such fields of practice as mental health, children, youth and families, aging, etc.) combined with the specializations within macro practice (community, organizational, policy, etc.) suggest the need to revisit the current and future relationship between micro and macro practice as it might need to unfold in the emerging era of educating for multilevel practice.

Although this analysis is based on the shared foundation that informs micro and macro practice, this foundation is not sufficient to identify the crossover skills needed in both micro and macro practice. As a result, this analysis begins with a description of the shared foundation of micro and macro practice, some current challenges, and the language used in the different prac-

tice domains as illustrated in a case vignette. It follows with a discussion of crossover skills that overlay the definitions of micro and macro practice. The analysis concludes with implications for managing the realities of specialized practice by focusing on macro-informed micro practice *and* micro-informed macro practice. While this analysis does not focus on the issues related to generalist, advanced generalist, or multilevel practice, these implications are relevant to both practitioners and educators invested in those approaches to curriculum construction as well as agency practice.

Shared Foundation of Micro and Macro Practice

Before discussing the elements of micro and macro practice, it is important to elaborate on the shared foundation that supports both domains of practice. As many social work historians have documented, there has been a continuous struggle for recognition among various fields of social work practice (Chambers, 1967; Lubove, 1969; Trattner, 1998). Both micro and macro practice value case and systems advocacy and the ongoing pursuit of social justice related to race, gender identity, abilities, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and age. Our shared history provides a foundation for educating future generations of social work practitioners as well as serving as a benchmark for assessing our progress over time.

Our shared values represent a second important part of the foundation. Beyond the centrality of our *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers* (NASW, 2008), students, faculty, and practitioners engage in an ongoing process of values clarification as new situations arise that call for redefining social work values. Today we wrestle with the impact of racial profiling, the realities of a living wage, the normalization of same-sex marriages and transgender identities, and the profound impact of privilege on human interactions.

The third dimension of the foundation involves the shared commitment between micro and macro practitioners to providing high-quality services and outcome-

based assessments. Both sets of practitioners are invested in promoting client self-sufficiency. Both micro and macro practitioners seek to fully define the services provided to promote positive outcomes and increase accountability to external funding sources. These outcomes represent an essential element in the shared commitment to advocate for change at both the case level (e.g., improving educational or vocational opportunities, improving self-esteem) and the systems level (e.g., advocating for new social policies to address child poverty). Questions still remain: How do micro and macro practitioners share the commitment to address the needs of vulnerable populations? What are some of the obstacles they all face in the process? While the shared foundation is important, it is not sufficient for addressing the increased complexities reflected in changing client needs and the multiple funding streams that affect the managing of human service organizations.

Current Challenges Facing Both Domains of Practice

Decades of specialization have driven micro and macro practice further apart, as each form of practice attempts to remain current in its own practice technologies as well as responsive to the changing service delivery demands. It is in the context of the rapid pace of change and service fragmentation that we search for better ways to link micro and macro practice, indirectly returning to the shared roots of the profession.

There is much to appreciate and build upon when it comes to linking micro and macro practice, despite the recent marginalization of group work and macro practice (Rothman, 2013; Sweifach, 2015). This analysis is framed to promote dialogue among social work educators and practitioners about the future relationship between micro and macro practice. This form of dialogue is not seen as a simple academic discussion but rather a renewed effort to clarify the new demands facing the social work profession. As is noted in this analysis, we need to step back and discover new ways to value each form of practice when defined in relationship to the other. This process includes identifying the core workplace skills relevant to both forms of practice, recognizing the language that facilitates communications between the micro and macro practice cultures, and finding ways to build upon the shared educational interests in evidence-informed, theory-informed, privilege-informed, and policy-informed practice.

We begin with an exploration of the current challenges by focusing on the different communication styles that impact the dialogue between micro and macro practice, followed by a brief description of the core competencies underlying micro and macro practice.

Learning the Languages of the Other

In a previous discussion of what divides micro and macro social work, Lagay (1982) described clinical and community practice as two cultures that “often have trouble speaking to one another through a shared frame of reference in any more than the most global terms” (p. 277). This observation seems as relevant today as it did more than 30 years ago, and it raises the following questions: Are linguistic differences part of what hinders micro and macro social workers from understanding and appreciating each other’s work? Do we need to engage in bridging a communication gap?

To investigate linguistic differences in social work, we begin with the interactional settings in which social workers are educated. If social work practice largely consists of verbal communication (Sheafor, Horejsi, & Horejsi, 2000), then social work classrooms are a likely place for inculcating the norms of effective social work communication. Studying language use in classrooms can reveal how certain aspects of language use are taken to be emblematic of professional identity (Mertz, 2007). Taylor (2006), for example, found differences in communication styles and other aspects of “classroom culture” in law and social work schools. Such differences, Taylor argued, could help explain some of the differences in professional identity that lead to misunderstanding and conflict between child welfare workers and lawyers inside and outside the courtroom. Similarly, to the extent that micro and macro practitioners often experience substantially different educational programs, studying classroom interaction may offer insights into the differences in professional culture. It is important to note how language can be used to separate or isolate professionals, construct differences in status between them, and engage in “othering” whereby difference is viewed as a shortcoming.

A Case Vignette on Teaching Practice

To begin to explore perceptions about linguistic differences in the teaching of practice courses, one of the authors interviewed two faculty members: one who regularly teaches foundation macro courses and one who teaches micro courses. These interviews included questions about their teaching practices, their observations about students, and their perceptions about language use and communication styles in social work.¹ Attention was given to both what they said about language and their own use of language within the interview.

While both teachers emphasized the view that basic norms of professional communication among social workers should be the same, differences were apparent in the ways they described these basic norms. For example, while both teachers agreed that listening was important, they differed in how they described the importance of listening with respect to other aspects of

communication. The micro practice teacher felt that listening was important to both micro and macro practice, but appeared to be undervalued in macro social work, where she observed that more emphasis was placed on persuasion than on listening. In contrast, when the macro teacher was asked to reflect on the relative importance of listening and persuasion in macro social work, she disagreed that there was any difference in values, and she spoke at some length about how *good* macro practice begins with excellent listening. But later, she contrasted the “listening” kind of communication in micro practice with a “bigger picture kind of communication” associated with macro practice. Thus, each teacher contrasted listening with persuasion or “bigger picture” communication, respectively, and in each case, these contrasts were understood to mark a distinction between micro and macro ways of communicating. Both teachers pointed to a gap with respect to listening practices in micro vis-à-vis macro practice, but they each described this gap differently.

The details of the differences between these two teachers’ perspectives are clarified by the examples they gave of their own attempts to cross the perceived gap between micro and macro communicative norms. The micro teacher described a situation in which she had effectively used empathetic listening to defuse conflict during a staff meeting in a macro-practice organization. She pointed out that it was her clinical training that taught her to “tap into” the feelings of a combative coworker. The macro teacher, on the other hand, described a project to train micro practitioners to attend to their clients’ socioeconomic circumstances and “not just their emotional states.” These examples suggest that, for both teachers, perceived differences in communication in micro and macro practice have to do with differences in what social workers attend to or what they consider important. Understandably, then, each teacher not only noted the difference but also saw the difference as a problem, since it meant that inadequate attention was being given to a listening skill that each identified as critical. Their perception of these differences was not only descriptive but also evaluative; it was a perception of what the other side should improve upon.

The process of valuing each other’s form of social work practice is complicated. On the one hand, we may be using the same terms but not in the same way, thus providing a false sense of agreeing. On the other hand, the apparent differences in practice methods may actually be tied to normative evaluations of each other’s practice. As such, we are faced with the question: What can we do to better appreciate each other’s contribution to social work practice?

This brief description of the challenges facing instructors of micro and macro practice provides a context for identifying ways to bridge the differences between the

two practice domains by focusing on core crossover skills. In essence, what can we do to better appreciate each other’s contributions to social work practice? While differences in practice methods do not appear to be the issue, attitudes about the differences may be the problem. To address this dilemma, we focus the discussion in the following sections on the role of crossover skills that can serve as links between our working definitions of micro and macro practice. While the search for common ground to inform the education of future professionals is critical, it is equally important within the domain of agency practice where some of the tensions between management and line staff can be traced to the inadequate attention given to bridging the real or perceived divides or disconnects between micro and macro practitioners.

Core Crossover Skills

Micro and macro practitioners share a common set of crossover skills that are highly valued within organizations and across multiple professional contexts. While the skills associated with micro and macro social work practice are often viewed as exclusive to one form of practice or another, they routinely inform each other as *micro-informed macro practice* and *macro-informed micro practice*. For example, micro practitioners utilize the macro skills when they delegate responsibilities to staff, communicate the organization’s mission to the public, supervise direct-service staff, manage collegial relationships, advocate for clients and systems change, and lead teams and committees. Similarly, macro practitioners develop and maintain significant relationships with individuals when they facilitate board and committee meetings, assess and diagnose organizational and community problems, engage in hiring interviews, employ interventions to create positive change, encounter resistance when proposing change, and counsel and coach employees through active listening (Menefee, 2009; Sheafor et al., 2000; Tolleson Knee, 2014; Tolleson Knee & Folsom, 2012). To effectively manage clients, caseloads, programs, and diverse groups of people in differing contexts, micro and macro practitioners rely on a common set of crossover skills, as highlighted in Figure 1. Explicating these core skills is the focus of this section of the analysis.

Whetten and Cameron (2011) identified the following three categories of skills and behaviors that are critical for professionals who manage other people and are expected to assume positions of leadership: (a) personal skills (self-awareness, stress management, and problem solving), (b) interpersonal skills (supportive communications, use of power and influence, motivating others, and managing conflict), and (c) group skills (empowering and delegating, team building, leading, and managing change). Each skill category builds upon

the previous set of skills and is based on the assumption that effectively managing individuals, programs, organizations, and groups of people requires *the ability to effectively manage themselves and their relationships with others*. These skills also serve as precursors to high-quality practice in both micro- and macro-practice domains since they emphasize the importance of self-knowledge, communication, and engaging diverse people in relationships that can lead to positive change. In the next section we build on this understanding of core crossover skills to revisit the essence of micro and macro practice in order to identify ways to promote micro-informed macro practice and macro-informed micro practice.

Defining the Micro-Practice Perspective

Micro social work practice, otherwise known as direct social work practice, involves the process of working with individuals, groups, or families in an eclectic, problem-solving process that reflects a sensitivity to social diversity as well as the promotion of social and economic justice (Corcoran, 2009).

Due to the broad nature of direct social work practice, professional social workers embrace a diversity of theoretical perspectives that have important implications for how direct practice is viewed and what aspects of treat-

FIGURE 1. Core crossover skills: Personal, interpersonal, and group.

Personal

Key skills: Self-awareness, stress management, and problem solving needed to recognize and manage the circumstances that often produce negative emotions is a vital skill for both micro and macro practitioners. The “effective use of self” involves skills that are based upon a higher level of self-awareness needed to effectively manage the stress of others and oneself.

Interpersonal

Key skills: Verbal and written communications, use of power and influence, motivating others, and managing conflict needed to:

- Conduct assessments, develop service plans, teach individuals new behaviors and skills, and monitor progress in achieving the behaviors and goals.
- Work effectively with, manage, and/or lead multidisciplinary teams, skillfully write assessments and reports, network with other professionals, provide staff supervision, contribute to the development of new service programs, assist with writing grants, and evaluate organizational policies and procedures.
- Manage power and privilege to effectively maintain relationships with clients and colleagues, including the capacity to skillfully motivate both while diplomatically addressing disagreements and conflicts that often occur when balancing the power and privileges that accompany leadership positions.

Group

Key skills: Empowering and delegating, team building, leading, and managing change.

Note. Adapted from “Developing Management Skills” (8th ed.), by D. A. Whetten and K. S. Cameron, 2011. Copyright 2011 by Prentice Hall.

ment are emphasized. For example, a professional social worker might come from a behaviorist perspective that guides pragmatic treatment goals, a family systems perspective that shifts the treatment emphasis from the individual to the family, or an empowerment and recovery orientation that reinterprets the meaning of diagnoses and treatment requirements. There are other perspectives that professional social workers embrace; however, these examples showcase the diverse conceptualizations of the client, the problem, and the treatment context that encompass micro social work practice.

Given this diversity, it is not surprising that the range of micro practice content differs by program type and the corresponding level of specialization embraced by faculty members who govern curriculum decisions. While generalist practice skills provide the foundation for most specialized micro-practice curricula, the focus on advanced direct practice often includes a range of specific therapeutic approaches taught in theory and

FIGURE 2. Master of social work program (MSW) micro practice content.

Foundation micro content

- Establishing rapport when interviewing clients using verbal and nonverbal behavior, eye contact, active listening, facial expressions, body positioning, empathic responses, clarification, encouragement, and rephrasing.
- Demonstrating professional use of self and the role of professional boundaries.
- Addressing diversity and acquiring cultural competence in working with clients that promote social and economic justice within a context of privilege.
- Applying the values and ethics in micro practice decision making.
- Utilizing the stages of treatment (beginning, working phases, and termination process).
- Acquiring problem solving strategies that promote client self-determination and empowerment.
- Engaging in critical thinking related to theory and practice with individuals, couples, families, and groups.
- Demonstrating the capacity to engage in comprehensive biopsychosocial and spiritual assessment.

Advanced micro content

- Linking assessment to intervention decision making.
- Planning and evaluating interventions.
- Utilizing a generalist intervention model or specific treatment models (such as cognitive-behavioral therapy).
- Demonstrating the application of knowledge and diagnostic criteria (DSM-V).
- Engaging in a critical examination of diagnostic models and attention to strengths, competencies, resilient development, and the importance of context.
- Acquiring an understanding of the role of medication and neurobiology.
- Demonstrating an understanding of patients’ rights and recovery model.
- Acquiring treatment, psycho-educational, and task group leadership skills.
- Applying case management and resource development skills.
- Engaging with diverse and vulnerable populations.

practice (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, trauma-focused therapies, motivational interviewing, brief treatment approaches, expressive therapies, dialectical behavior therapy, narrative therapy, and mind-body/integrative treatment modalities). This array of foundation and advanced practice competencies is highlighted in Figure 2.

Many of the essential micro skills taught in the foundation year are utilized in a range of applied settings and needed by any social worker employed in a human services organization. Several of the “signature skills” of the micro-practice curriculum are captured in (a) interviewing and relationship-building skills (Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Nugent & Halvorson, 1995), (b) critical-thinking skills that inform various interventions (Gibbs & Gambrill, 1999; Mathias, 2015), and (c) problem-solving skills (Mayer, 2013)—and they are also essential skills for macro practice.

There are many different ways for micro practice to inform macro practice. For example, behavioral observation skills are needed by managers conducting staff meetings or building effective teams, particularly when it comes to promoting wide-ranging participation and attending to and recording information. Similar listening and relationship-building skills are needed when interviewing job applicants or conducting performance reviews. For another example, these same skills are needed by community organizers engaging with key community stakeholders to identify new ways of managing violence in the local neighborhood.

Defining the Macro-Practice Perspective

Over the past five decades or more, macro practice has evolved to include the domains of community practice, management practice, and policy practice to the extent that they are each currently represented by separate social work journals. These three forms of macro practice have been informed by theories emerging from macro sociology, organizational psychology, political science of institutions, and the economics of political and behavioral transactions. Over these same decades, the research emerging from these social science disciplines has produced a flood of new concepts relevant to macro practice (e.g., social capital, neighborhood effects, interorganizational interactions and dependencies, and leader–follower dynamics). Some of the core social science concepts that are captured in a trifocal perspective of community, organizations, and groups include structure and process, stages of development, power and leadership, conflict and change, systems of exchange, and integrating mechanisms (Mulroy & Austin, 2004).

In the same way that the social sciences have expanded, our understanding of the various forms of macro practice has also grown. From the 1960s, when commu-

nity organizing entered the arena of social work education, drawing upon a history of social action and social planning (Betten & Austin, 1990), community practice in the 21st century has included a mix of the practical approaches to developing and evaluating service programs, along with grassroots organizing in support of social action and social movement development. The millennials with dreams about creating organizational start-ups are also pushing for more opportunities to develop new programs and agencies that match their passions and social media talents and that address long-standing social problems. In essence, the relevant skills of community practice are used not only by social workers but also by those organizers emerging out of grassroots organizations, urban and regional community development and planning efforts, and advocacy organizations devoted to coalition building.

Also emerging out of the 1960s was a growing interest in finding better ways to manage human service organizations. This interest included the need to strengthen the capacities of the majority of agency supervisors who had moved into middle-management roles (without much supervisory training) based on their many talents in providing direct services (Patti & Austin, 1977). At the same time, there was an increased call for managerial skills related to managing human resources, finance, and information systems, all areas that are being developed and refined in the for-profit sector as well as in the public sector by individuals with backgrounds in business and public administration. The claim that you needed to know the nature of human services to become an effective human service manager was under attack by those arriving in human service agencies from outside the profession of social work. Throughout all these changes, the field of leadership development was evolving from (a) one relying on experience and knowledge of the service sector to (b) one that called for leadership skills that attended to followership dynamics to (c) one that reflects our current interests in the ideas of leadership identity formation linked to gender identity and race for those blocked from entry into key positions.

Tracing its roots back to Jane Addams and the pioneers who developed and implemented the New Deal of the 1930s, policy practice has emerged over the same five decades as a form of practice rooted in advocacy, legislative action, coalition building, and policy development. Within this domain of macro practice, social workers are called upon to demonstrate skills in policy analysis (alongside those graduates of public administration programs grounded in econometrics), case-based and systems advocacy (Ezell, 2001), presentation skills related to persuading others about the significance and need for action, and the ability to show how policy practice relates to the management of human service organizations (Kimberlin, 2010).

Each of the domains of macro practice highlighted in Figure 3 includes skills relevant to those engaged in micro practice. For example, since we know that the social environment impacts the behaviors of clients, information about our client's neighborhood of residence and local resources can be critical to the assessment and implementation of problem-solving strategies with clients (Austin, Coombs, & Barr, 2005). Similarly, the skills involved in developing effective presentations in a policy or organizational context are the same skills needed by micro practitioners when advocating for clients in front of school boards or the state legislature (Ezell, 2001). And finally, the same macro-practice assessment skills needed to understand organizational and community dynamics can be used in micro practice to help colleagues engage in bottom-up change strategies designed to promote effective client services.

Discussion

While it is helpful to recall Lagay's (1982, p. 277) observation that micro and macro social workers have trouble finding "a shared frame of reference in any more than the most global terms," it is our contention more than 30 years later that a new focus is needed on the crossover skills in order to promote macro-informed micro practice and micro-informed macro practice. For example, clarifying such broad terms as "listening" would help us to see where both differences and similarities lie, recognizing that shared language, then, is not necessarily indicative of shared understanding.

By seeing differences as opportunities, we shift our focus from bridging gaps to identifying what we can offer one another. Thus, "multilingualism" in the communicative practices of both micro and macro may help

FIGURE 3. *Master of social work program (MSW) macro practice content.*

Community & policy practice domains ^a

- I. Organizing services and programs and community groups.
- II. Planning, monitoring, and evaluating community development and human services programs.
- III. Collaboration among nonprofit, public, and private organizations, as well as community interest groups.
- IV. Development of organization and communities (social, economic, and sustainable).
- V. Advocacy, policy practice, social justice and human rights

Human services management knowledge domains ^b

- I. Leadership (stakeholder involvement, organizational mission and vision, and guiding innovative change processes).
- II. Resource management (human, financial, and informational).
- III. Strategic management (program design and implementation and strategic planning).
- IV. Community collaboration (relationship building and maintaining among agencies and community groups).

to bridge the gaps without erasing them. Social workers capable of moving between micro and macro professional "languages" can help to demonstrate how the concepts or skills from one domain of practice might be valuable to another. In this way, the differences between micro and macro practice, linguistic or otherwise, need not be barriers to collaboration and unity, but rather can be resources that enrich us all and reinforce the profession's shared ethical foundations.

This analysis of the relationship between micro and macro practice seeks to build upon the past and present to inform the future, especially future discussions among faculty and practitioners as well as between them. We have briefly defined micro- and macro-practice issues as well as the challenges related to identifying core crossover skills and cross-methods communications.

One approach to breaking down the silos created by knowledge specialization and curricular turf maintenance involves strategies for increased dialogue between micro and macro educator and practitioners. For example, faculty interested in introducing macro content into micro-practice courses might teach students to look beyond the client case to engage with the multiple forces impacting the client's well-being. This form of macro-informed micro practice holds much promise and challenges macro-practice faculty to identify key macro-practice tools relevant to micro practice (e.g., facilitating meetings, managing conflict, and engaging clients on agency advisory committees). In a similar way, micro-informed macro practice could feature the essential relationship-building and critical-appraisal skills of micro practice. For example, motivational interviewing skills from micro practice (engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning) can be used when engaging colleagues in collaboration, consultation, and job interviewing that involve skills related to dialogue, analysis, mobilizing, and anticipatory planning (Schumacher & Madson, (2015).

Another approach to addressing the challenges underlying the relationship between micro and macro practice relates to student learning and changing agency practice. For many students, choosing between specializing in micro or macro practice can be a painful choice when they seek a valued professional identity and want to become social workers capable of using multiple practice tools. They find themselves contending with licensing demands, getting ready for a changing job market, facing faculty and peer pressure, and planning for ways to manage their student debt. Some handle these pressures by taking electives that satisfy their micro- or macro-practice interests. Others wonder why schools of social work do not give sufficient attention to structuring double majors so that the curriculum makes it possible for students to develop both micro and macro skills. Still others wonder if the standard 2-year master of social work (MSW) program provides enough time

^a Gamble & Association for Community Organization and Social Administration, 2010. ^b Network for Social Work Management, 2016.

for the breadth and depth of the learning they desire. University enrollment pressures make it difficult in many cases to add a third year to the MSW program, and some schools have chosen to expand learning opportunities through the design of a doctoral program that features advanced practice (often in the form of a part-time doctor of social work [DSW] program or a dual master's degree program) and/or post-MSW certificate programs. Today, the overwhelming trend is to reduce credits and provide opportunities for students to complete a graduate degree in the shortest time possible and from anywhere in the world.

Multiple conclusions can be drawn from this scenario. The easiest approach is to leave the issue alone and continue the status quo by which micro-practice students gain macro skills throughout their careers, as they advance in human service organizations by attending workshops and/or engage in other part-time master's degree programs. Similarly, making space for students to take electives in the other methods may also provide a simpler approach to traversing the micro-macro practice continuum. During this early phase of professional development, most students are focused on counseling clients to help them better manage their emotions and personal lives and are less interested in macro practice. Similar to those professions in which technicians are promoted or intentionally transition to managerial positions (e.g., nurses, teachers, and engineers), perhaps macro content is viewed as more relevant when micro practitioners have more experience and are more interested in leading positive change in organizations and systems.

A more complicated approach involves the work of faculty to expand their teaching efforts to include more attention to the importance of micro or macro practice in their current practice courses. This process involves a "battle over shelf space" in terms of what gets moved out to make space for new or different content. A more radical approach might include course redesign to reflect an integration or combination of micro- and macro-practice content that focuses on core workplace skills and cross-cultural communications related to micro and macro practice. Faculty members can also assist students in overcoming the negative emotions that accompany an uncertain professional identity by articulating how many social service organizations value employees who possess strong core skills (i.e., communication, problem solving, and critical thinking) and have the capacity to seamlessly transition between micro- and macro-practice domains and settings.

The challenges often reflected in the tensions between micro and macro practitioners in human service organizations involve a "culture of finger pointing." For example, micro practitioners often point to middle and senior managers as the source of contradictory directives,

repeated reminders about the importance of client record keeping, and calls for more effective collaboration inside and outside the organization. Even those micro practitioners working independently or under contract are increasingly aware of the policies and administrative procedures related to reimbursement for services that impact their practice, especially the implementation of the Affordable Care Act with its health and mental health components. Similarly, macro practitioners often exhibit impatience with the behaviors of micro practitioners who can be slow to respond to organizational requests for information, resistant to organizational change, and not interested or able to grasp the importance of agency finance and reporting requirements.

Some of the strategies found in the cultures of learning organizations could be used to address aspects of these challenges. For example, micro-macro communications could be enhanced by managers who invest time in shared decision making in which micro practitioners are actively engaged in organizational decision making as well as agency leadership development programs (not just for those in the middle or top of the organization). Managers could also engage micro practitioners in "stretch assignments" that help them build skills in the areas of program development, grant writing, team leadership, and service outcome evaluation. In contrast, micro practitioners could actively engage senior management (who are often removed in time and status from client contact) to shadow them on a regular basis as a way of updating managers.

In the final analysis, we are calling for a new social work built on our rich history and based on a blending of micro and macro practice for the 21st century. Our recommendations include (a) increased dialogue between faculty who teach direct-practice courses and those who teach macro-practice courses as well as agency-based fieldwork instructors (e.g., developing macro-practice experiences for direct-service students and micro-practice experiences for macro-practice students) and (b) increased opportunities in human service organizations for both micro and macro practitioners to build a learning culture that fosters collaborative efforts in the development of promising practices.

One of the unique features of the social work profession is our diverse array of interventions that equips us to address major social problems from more than one perspective. Those entering the profession, and those with more experience, find it very enriching to work alongside colleagues who care about many of the same issues in our different fields of practice. Working from different perspectives is enriching when it stimulates creativity and critical thinking, thereby allowing us to question some of our operating assumptions with regard to ways of making the world a better place. This diversity makes social work both unique and dynamic, and it is this dynamism

that can help us promote increased collaboration between micro and macro practice.

References

- Addams, J. (1912). *Twenty years at Hull-House with autobiographical notes*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Austin, M. J., Coombs, M., & Barr, B. (2005). Community-centered clinical practice: Searching for a continuum of micro and macro social work practice. *Journal of Community Practice, 13*(4), 9–30.
- Betten, N., & Austin, M. J. (1990). *Roots of community organizing, 1917–1939*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Chambers, C. A. (1967). *Seedtime for reform: American social services and social action, 1918–1933*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Corcoran, J. (2009). *Direct practice in social work*. Oxford bibliographies online. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ezell, M. (2001). *Advocacy in the human services*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Gamble, D. N., & Association for Community Organization and Social Administration. (2010). *Core knowledge areas for work in community organization and social administration with a focus on organizing, planning, collaboration, sustainable development, and progressive change*. Retrieved from http://www.acosa.org/CO_Core_Knowledge_Areas.pdf
- Gibbs, L., & Gambrill, E. (1999). *Critical thinking for social workers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Kimberlin, S. (2010). Advocacy by nonprofits: Roles and practices of core advocacy organizations and direct service agencies. *Journal of Policy Practice, 9*(3/4), 164–182.
- Lagay, B. (1982). The two cultures of social work. In M. Dinerman (Ed.), *Social work futures: Essays commemorating twenty-five years of the graduate school of social work* (pp. 267–281). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Lubove, R. (1969). *The professional altruist: The emergence of social work as a career, 1880–1930*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books.
- Martin, D. J., Garske, J. P., & Davis, M. K. (2000). Relation of the therapeutic alliance with outcome and other variables: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 68*(3), 438–450.
- Mathias, J. (2015). Thinking like a social worker: Examining the meaning of critical thinking in social work. *Journal of Social Work Education, 51*(3), 457–474.
- Mayer, R. E. (2013). *Problem solving: The Oxford handbook of cognitive psychology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Menefee, D. (2009). What human service managers do and why they do it. In R. J. Patti (Ed.), *The handbook of human services management* (2nd ed., pp. 101–116). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Mertz, E. (2007). *The language of law school: Learning to “think like a lawyer.”* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Mulroy, E., & Austin, M. J. (2004). Towards a comprehensive framework for understanding the social environment: In search of theory for practice. *Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment, 10*(3), 25–59.
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (2008). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Nugent, W. R., & Halvorson, H. (1995). Testing the effects of active listening. *Research on Social Work Practice, 5*(2), 152–175.
- Patti, R. J., & Austin, M. J. (1977). Socializing the direct service practitioner in the ways of supervisory management. *Administration in Social Work, 1*(3), 267–280.
- Richmond, M. (1917). *Social diagnosis*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Rothman, J. (2013). *Education for macro intervention: A survey of problems and prospects*. Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA). Retrieved from www.acosa.org/
- Schumacher, J. A., & Madson, M. B. (2015). *Fundamentals of motivational interviewing: Tips and strategies for addressing common clinical challenges*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sheafor, B. W., Horejsi, C. R., & Horejsi, G. A. (2000). *Techniques and Guidelines for social work practice* (5th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Sweifach, J. S. (2015). Has group work education lost its social work essence? A content analysis of MSW course syllabi in search of mutual aid and group conflict content. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35*(3), 279–295
- Taylor, S. (2006). Educating future practitioners of social work and law: Exploring the origins of inter-professional misunderstanding. *Children and Youth Services Review, 28*(6), 638–653.
- Tolleson Knee, R. (2014). An analysis of direct practice social work perspectives and behaviors in middle management. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 38*(2), 146–157.
- Tolleson Knee, R., & Folsom, J. (2012). Bridging the crevasse between direct practice social work and management by increasing the transferability of core skills. *Administration in Social Work, 36*(4), 390–408.
- Trattner, W. I. (1998). *From poor law to welfare state: A history of social welfare in America* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.
- Whetten, D. A., & Cameron, K. S. (2011). *Developing management kills* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

¹ The interview included four main components: First, faculty members were asked if they noticed any differences in preferred communication style among their students, either based on student feedback or their own observations. Second, looking over the syllabus of their colleague, who teaches a different form of practice, they were asked to reflect on both the language used in the syllabus (e.g., specialized terminology) and the expectations for communication style in classroom interaction and assignments. Third, in talking about the comparison of their own syllabus to that of the other teacher, they were asked to reflect on similarities and differences with regard to these same aspects of language use. Fourth, they were asked to reflect on various hypotheses about the role of language. Throughout, the interviews were conversational, and both faculty members offered reflections and opinions that were not directly related to any of these four components but were quite insightful.

Michael J. Austin, PhD, professor, University of California Berkeley.
Elizabeth K. Anthony, PhD, MSW, associate professor, Arizona State University.
Ryan Tolleson Knee, PhD, professor, University of Montana.
John Mathias, (PhD cand.), MSW, University of Michigan. Correspondence: mjaustin@berkeley.edu; University of California Berkeley, 216 Haviland Hall, School of Social Welfare, Berkeley, CA 94720.

Manuscript received: January 8, 2016
 Revised: March 15, 2016
 Accepted: April 5, 2016
 Disposition editor: Sondra J. Fogel