Three Levels Paper

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SW 3010 Wednesday morning
Many social workers may identify themselves as practicing one of three levels of practice: micro social work; mezzo social work; or macro social work. However, there is a lot of overlap between the three levels of practice, and often a social worker that practices one level will have to engage in another level to effectively intervene for their client. The three levels will also work to solve similar problems in different ways and the three levels also require many of the same skills. Guest speakers that came to class demonstrated what macro and mezzo level practitioners do, and this helped show some of the overlap between the three levels.

All three levels of practice advocate on behalf of and intervene to help people. Micro social workers intervene with individuals, and help them help themselves. Mezzo social workers intervene for clients in group settings, or with families. Macro social workers work with communities for community wide change.

In class we were told an analogy about social work practice. The story, as it remember it goes as such. A bunch of social workers were having a picnic by a river. Suddenly they saw a person floating down the river, calling for help. Naturally, one of the social workers runs into the to pull the person out. As soon as the person was helped, more people came floating down the river, so more of the social workers ran in to pull more people out. However, a few of the social workers decided to walk upstream and see why so many people were falling in the river, and put a stop to it. In this story, the social workers who ran into the river could be considered micro social workers, as they helped individuals. The social workers that walked upstream could be considered macro social workers, as they wanted to change the cause of the problem. This story, as told in class, demonstrates how the different levels of social work overlap. Both social workers helped to solve a problem they just took different approaches.
Micro social workers deal with individuals and try to empower them. However sometimes, the problem experienced by the individual is outside the individual. To effectively intervene for the client, the social worker must go beyond the individual to get to the root of the problem. This is an example of how a micro social worker may engage in macro social work. For example, a client is a single mom who works until the late evening, after her children’s school closes. Her children are forced to walk home, because there is no safe bus, and because they are unsupervised, are getting into trouble, causing her stress. To help the client alleviate the stress, the social worker will have to intervene at the cause of the stress. The social worker may have to advocate for change within the community, such as later after school care at the elementary school, safer busses which is engaging in macro social work. Another example may be, a school social worker has a student with behavior problems, and discovers that the child is acting out because of familial problems. To effectively help the student, the social worker would have to meet with the family, and intervene with the family, or engage in mezzo social work.

Micro social workers also work with their clients to get resources from the larger system, or a macro system. When the micro social worker helps link a client to resources from a macro system, the role is referred to as a broker (Kirst-Ashman and Hull, 2012) In the previous examples, the micro social worker may provide services to the clients from a macro system, such as resources for reduced cost daycare for the single mother, and may provide resources to the family, or child from a larger system. The micro social worker might take the role of mediator between a client and a macro system, if there is a problem between the client and the macro system. (Kirst-Ashman and Hull, 2012) For example if the single mother, or student and family, had a trouble qualifying for services, the micro social worker may intervene. And of course, a
micro social worker may also take a role as an advocate and advocate on behalf of the client to the macro system. (Kirst-Ashman and Hull, 2012)

In class we had the privilege of having three guest speakers. Two of them practiced macro social work, and one practiced mezzo social work. The guest speaker Susan Titus spoke to us about her experience as a mezzo social worker. She spoke about group dynamics and how to effectively run a group. Knowing how to run a group is critical for a mezzo social worker. Maureen Taylor spoke about her experience as a macro social worker. She explained how she advocated on a large scale, and utilized the media a lot to get her message across. Contacting the media is probably done more often by macro social workers. However both knowledge about groups and knowing how and when to reach out to the community are skills that social workers at all levels of practice need to be familiar with.

The three levels of practice not only overlap in that a social worker may have to reach beyond their own level to solve a problem, but they overlap in that many of the same skills are required and many of the same methods are used. All social workers work with other people; so all social workers require good people skills. All social workers need to be empathetic and have good interpersonal skills. Micro social workers use empathy and interpersonal skills when working with individual clients, mezzo social workers use empathy and interpersonal skills while working with groups; and macro social workers use those skills while working with other people in the community. (Donar, 2012a) All levels of social work use conceptual frameworks to practice; micro using Systems Theory and the Ecological perspective, mezzo using knowledge about group dynamics, group culture and norms and other group characteristics, and macro uses an organizational context. (Donar, 2012a) The different levels have very similar intervention models. The steps for the generalist intervention model for micro and mezzo levels are:
engagement, assessment, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. The model is the same for macro social work, minus the follow-up. (Donar, 2012b) Social workers in all three levels must also abide by the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics; it’s values, and its ethical guidelines.

Macro and mezzo social workers may be involved in intervening for similar problems to the examples listed above. Although they may not be working with individual clients, their work may help them. Macro social workers may be advocating for better job services for single mothers, so the client may have an opportunity to get a better job, in addition to advocate for safer busses, and longer and cheaper day care. Macro social workers may advocate for teacher education programs to train teachers how to deal with students who have behavior problems, to help children cope. Mezzo social workers may meet with the single mom, and her children to help the family work through some of its issues. The mezzo social work may run support groups for children at a school or community center, or for adults which the child’s parents could attend that may help them cope with their own issues.

The overlap of the three levels of social work may cause ethical or value conflicts for social workers. According the National Association of Social Work (2008), one of the core values of social work is confidentiality (2008). If a micro social worker feels that they must go outside of the immediate client to intervene, or refer the client to a macro system, the client may not want their information being shared with others. For example, the example described earlier with the school social worker needing to intervene with the family, the child may not want the family to know, or get involved. The social worker has to respect the child’s confidentiality, as well as what the client wants, but at the same time, if the social worker does not try to intervene in the family, the child will not get help. A micro social worker may feel the need to advocate on
a large scale for an issue on behalf on the client that either conflicts with either the client or social worker’s values. For example, a micro social worker living in a small town or rural community may have a client who is pregnant. The client may want to have an abortion, but because it is a low populated area, there is no access to abortion. If the social worker is against abortion, but wants to provide the client access to resources that the client wants, the social worker will experience value conflict. They will have to decide whether to advocate for a change in the community that will allow the client to be self-determined, or to follow their own conscience. At the same time, a micro social worker may be involved in macro level advocacy that may not be what the client wants. A micro social worker may be passionate about something, but allow a client to do another. A way to alleviate the value conflict is to remember the value of self-determination, and allow the client to make decisions. As described in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), competence, or the value that social workers practice only in their area of expertise within certain boundaries. (NASW, 2008) A social worker may be trained as a micro, mezzo, or macro social worker, but find themselves in a situation at a different level of practice that they have no experience, and no competence in. There can also be ethical or value conflicts when the three different levels are all advocating for the same problem. The best way to alleviate these values and ethics conflicts is to follow the code of ethics as best as possible, as well as use ones own best judgment. Ultimately, the social worker is working to help a people, and so the people’s best interest should be a deciding factor.

The three levels of practice overlap in the ways they are practiced by social workers. They require many of the same skills to effectively intervene at each level. Often times, the different levels are intervening for similar problems at their respective levels.
References


Donar, N. (2012b) Chapter 5 Macro Practice. Notes


http://www.naswdc.org/pubs/code/code.asp