



Merging Micro and Macro Intervention: Social Work Practice With Groups in the Community

Carolyn Knight and Alex Gitterman

ABSTRACT

Clinical or micro intervention predominates in social work education and practice. The prevailing assumption in social work practice and education is that one engages in either micro or macro intervention. In this article, we describe how these interventions may be merged into an integrated whole through social work practice with groups. The conceptual and evidence base of community work is summarized, as are efforts to identify practice skills that overlap both approaches. We assert that group work is ideally suited to promote individual empowerment and community change. Case examples illustrate the relative ease with which tasks and skills of group work at the micro level can be used in group work practice in the community. Implications for social work education are discussed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Given the intransigent social problems that continue to plague contemporary American society, mobilizing disenfranchised clients has never been more important. This underscores the need for social workers to embrace and engage in macro practice interventions, of which group work in the community is a mainstay. Yet, most social work students and professionals limit themselves to micro or clinical practice. The perspective that predominates in social work education is that students must choose a macro or a micro orientation.

The bifurcation of social work practice results in clinical practitioners and students feeling overwhelmed and powerless to effect change in the social environment, even when they understand the broader social forces that negatively influence clients (Anakwenze & Zuberi, 2013; Dudziak & Profitt, 2012; Essex & Massat, 2005; McLaughlin, 2009). In contrast, social workers who practice at the macro level often lack the requisite skills typically taught in clinical practice courses that are needed to engage and mobilize clients for social change (Netting, 2005; Weiss, 2006). Donaldson (2004) observes,

The profession needs to improve how it marries clinical and macro approaches to social work practice. Social work advocates strengthen their skills and enhance their credibility when they ground their advocacy in direct practice experience. Social work clinicians have a responsibility to advocate for public policy changes that would alleviate the suffering experienced by clients they serve. (p. 160)

In this article we focus on the intervention that readily lends itself to the integration of micro and macro practice: group work in a community context. Case examples are used to illustrate this intersection by identifying tasks and skills that overlap clinical and macro practice.

Community practice: Conceptual foundation and evidence base

Community practice is not the unique purview of social work (Brady & O'Connor, 2014). This may partially explain why a unifying conceptual foundation continues to be debated in the social work literature and is still evolving. *Community organizing* is the term most commonly used when discussing community practice and is most closely associated with group work in the community

(Christens & Speer, 2015). We use the terms community organizing and *community practice* or *intervention* interchangeably in this article.

A common theme in the social work literature is the pursuit of social justice and the empowerment of clients, consistent with the values, ethics, and mission of the profession. Johnson (1998) emphasized the integration of individual, community, and social change when he said that community change has “multiple meanings, including various types of approaches relating to individuals, families, and groups within neighborhoods, including traditional community organization approaches, community development, social change, and advocacy” (p. 40). Austin, Coombs, and Barr (2005) observed that community practice involves “increasing civic involvement, assisting groups and communities in advocating for their needs, and organizing for social justice to improve the responsiveness of human service systems” (p. 20). Both definitions suggest the role of the social worker is to mobilize clients to work together to effect change within their environment.

Rothman’s (2008) typology has played an instrumental role in conceptualizing macro practice in social work. He identified three modalities: social planning, locality development, and social advocacy. Thomas, O’Connor, and Netting (2011) expanded on Rothman’s conceptualization, tying it specifically to community practice:

- (1) Traditional. The goal is to “sustain and strengthen the existing community structure” (p. 345). Change strategies are data driven, planned, and deliberative and incremental in nature akin to a social planning approach.
- (2) Collaborative. The goal is to “develop community through diverse participation and decision making” and to “promote ... understanding within the community” (p. 346). Change strategies include encouraging consensus and compromise, are incremental in nature and are analogous to locality development.
- (3) Radical. The goal is to “liberate groups marginalized by oppressive systemic structures [through] radical structural transformation” (p. 347). Change strategies involve mobilizing disenfranchised individuals and challenging systems of oppression and reflect social advocacy.

The traditional and radical approaches are an attempt to make social institutions more responsive, but they differ in change strategies. These approaches need not be mutually exclusive. Collaborative practice focuses on the community itself. Brady and O’Connor (2014) noted that community intervention, “has been used to refer to various purposeful activities aimed at helping develop communities, challenge unjust systems and policies, and promote interconnectedness among members” (p. 212).

Because so many perspectives exist on community organizing, developing an evidence base has been difficult (Netting & O’Connor, 2008). The social work literature is replete with anecdotal descriptions of community intervention. Research assessing the effectiveness of specific practice behaviors is scant (Brady & O’Connor, 2014). Available research focuses on two interrelated topics: the impact of organizing efforts on individuals and communities and the outcomes of such efforts.

Christens and Speer (2015) summarized findings relevant to the first topic: “Community organizing can be hypothesized to have ripple effects on community well-being as participants radiate its influences through their institutions and networks” (p. 211). Participation in community organizing initiatives has been found to be positively associated with enhanced feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment, community cohesion, civic engagement, and mental and physical well-being (Christens & Speer, 2015; East & Roll, 2015; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Maton, 2008; Ohmer, 2007; Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2013; Speer, Peterson, Zippay, & Christens, 2010).

Community work also is positively associated with improved social capital and community relationships, enhanced understanding among diverse groups of individuals, and increased community involvement in local decision making (Christens & Speer, 2011; Doe & Lowery, 2004; Walker & Stepick, 2014). Research that examines the outcomes of community organizing efforts suggests that

gains are modest and centered primarily on enhanced responsiveness of local institutions and policies (Bezboruah, 2013; Cheezum et al., 2013; Foster-Fishman et al., 2006; Speer & Christens, 2012).

The limited research available on practice skills highlights the importance of the following: forming alliances and coalitions, identifying and nurturing indigenous leaders, creating a leadership structure that can be sustained over time, and helping community members identify and make strategic use of change strategies (Christens, 2010; Christens & Speer, 2011; Foster-Fishman et al., 2006; Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001). Findings also point to the challenges associated with these tasks, particularly easing tensions and mistrust among constituencies, sustaining motivation to engage in change strategies over time, and challenging unresponsive institutions (Bezboruah, 2013; Campbell, Cornish, Gibbs, & Scott, 2010; Walker & Stepick, 2014).

Community practice in the social work curriculum

The decline in coverage in macro content specifically and community work particularly has been documented (Deal, Hopkins, Fisher, & Hartin, 2007; Grodofsky & Bakun-Mazor, 2012; Hill, Ferguson, & Erickson, 2010; Koeske, Lichtenwalter, & Koeske, 2005; Weiss, 2006). Students' preparation for community practice has been further compromised by limited opportunities to engage in this intervention in the field practicum (Deal et al., 2007; Ezell, Chernesky, & Healy, 2004; Mendes, 2008; Mor Barak, Travis, & Bess, 2004; Thomas et al., 2011).

This trend is compounded by the focus of the BSW generalist and MSW first-year foundation curricula. In theory, each arena of social work practice receives equal attention, but clinical practice prevails in most schools and programs of social work (Netting, 2005; Sather, Weitz, & Carlson, 2007). Research indicates that community organizers often identify first with this role and second as social workers (Hill et al., 2010). These individuals appear to be less interested in developing competence in practice skills and strategies, preferring instead to focus on the outcomes of their efforts (Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009; et al., 2012). These findings reflect the impact that limited education and training, coupled with the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework, has for community practice in social work (Dooley, Seller, & Gordon-Hempe, 2009; Netting, 2005).

The confluence of micro and macro practice skills

Efforts have been undertaken to identify skill sets that overlap macro and clinical practice (Austin, Anthony, Knee, & Mathias, 2016). Austin et al. (2005) identified practice skills that are common to clinical and macro practice, which include

- relationship building, including engagement, establishing trust and a partnership with the client/ or community members;
- assessment of interactions between client and community and the environment;
- contracting, including identifying and monitoring change strategies;
- use of self to promote client and community member empowerment;
- use of empathy; and
- cultural sensitivity.

Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon, and Lewis (1996) expanded on the importance of cultural sensitivity in the context of community practice. They asserted that this involves the ability to “learn from the community, which involves understanding one’s own and the community’s culture and social location, recognizing and building from community strengths, working as a partner, and dealing with conflict in and between groups” (p. 503). They further noted that the practitioner must identify “areas of positive functioning, particularly those that have been unnoticed or unrewarded, and using them as a basis for the organizing effort” (p. 503).

Hardina and Obel-Jorgensen (2009) identified eight skill sets necessary for macro practice and parallel them with those that are used in clinical practice:

- self-awareness and cultural competence
- engagement
- problem identification and assessment
- facilitating self-determination and empowerment
- verbal and written communication
- weighing the ethical implications of strategies
- evaluating outcomes

These efforts show great promise, but they have yet to be incorporated in a systematic way into the social work curriculum or as the subject of empirical inquiry (Austin et al., 2016; Mertz, Fortune, & Zendell, 2007). The case examples presented later in this article demonstrate the overlap of clinical and macro skills in the modality that is particularly well suited to micro and macro integration—group work.

Group work practice in the community

Group work is a powerful modality for promoting community improvement, individual empowerment, and social justice (Hays, Arredondo, Gladding, & Toporek, 2010; Ratts, Anthony, & Santos, 2010; Staples, 2012). It exemplifies how clinical and macro practice may be merged into a seamless whole.

The model of community group work proposed in this article reflects what has been referred to as a “bottom-up approach” (Bezboruah, 2013, p. 15). The need and impetus for change originates in the community. It reflects a mix of Rothman’s (2008) locality development and social change and includes elements of traditional, collaborative, and radical approaches to community intervention (Thomas et al., 2011).

Analogous to the transformation of social work practice, generally contemporary group work primarily focuses on promoting change in individual members. Group work scholars have bemoaned the fact that the modality has lost its way, focusing more on individuals than on environmental and social forces that negatively affect them (Breton, 2012; Cohen & Mullender, 2006; Gitterman & Knight, 2016; Hays et al., 2010).

Increasing attention has been focused on identifying ways that group work can be used to move beyond the personal to the political (Dudziak & Proffitt, 2012; Gitterman & Knight, 2016; Mullender, Ward, & Fleming, 2013; Ratts et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2010). The concept of mutual aid is central to understanding the role that group participation plays in promoting individual functioning and improving community life.

Theoretical underpinnings: Mutual aid

In social work practice with groups, members’ relationships with one another are the primary source of growth and assistance. This takes several forms, including normalizing and validating members’ experiences, members supporting and making demands for change from one another, and enhanced feelings of esteem that come from being accepted and understood by others “in the same boat” (Shulman, 2016, p. 347). In most cases, these benefits are associated with improvement in individual functioning, but they are equally relevant to groups formed for community improvement (Donaldson, 2004; Hays et al., 2010; Ratts et al., 2010).

Group work in the community has the distinct advantage reflected in the adage that there is power in numbers. Individuals working in partnership with one another are better able to improve their social environments than if they worked alone (Breton, 2012; Staples, 2012). Consistent with

what community organizers argue, the mutual aid model of group work assumes that working in partnership with others is empowering in and of itself and has the added benefit of promoting social change.

The following case example reveals the consequences of not recognizing the importance of individual empowerment through collective action. One of co-author Carolyn Knight's students was placed in a day program for homeless men. Agencies in the region were organizing a rally at the state capital to advocate for increased funding for homeless services. The director of the student's agency decided that all clients in the program should be part of the rally to provide a face for homelessness. If clients refused to attend, they would be unable to receive any services at the agency the day of the rally. Many of the clients had their assistance checks sent to the agency because they had no fixed address. Clients' checks would be distributed only after clients attended the rally or, for those who did not attend, when the clients and staff returned from the rally.

Most clients attended but did little more than stand around talking among themselves. No attempt was made to involve them in the lobbying and advocacy activities that took place. The rally was successful in increasing funding in the state budget. But, the experience did not enhance feelings of empowerment among the homeless individuals; rather, it further disempowered and alienated them. The student's clients, whom she met in a weekly drop-in group, expressed anger at having been forced to attend the event. The predominant sentiment was a feeling of being exploited.

This illustration serves as a cautionary tale to social workers engaged in community group work. Members must feel a sense of we-ness, a sense of belonging and of being in it together. This shared perspective drives and is the foundation of collective action. Members must feel they have a stake in the work, whether directed at improvements in themselves, in their social environment, or both.

Tasks and skills in community group work

Groups formed for community change exist on a continuum (Austin et al., 2005; Bhat, 2010; Cohen & Mullender, 2006; Staples, 2012). They range from those focused on improving community life for members to those that attempt to effect broader sociopolitical change beyond the members' community. Regardless of where community group work falls on the continuum, the social worker attends to six tasks, which are identified through case examples in this article, as are the skills that integrate clinical and macro practice (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009; Mertz et al., 2007).

Recruiting and mobilizing individuals for collective action

Although not all community group work involves disadvantaged clients, this is often the case, and these groups most clearly reflect the mission and purpose of social work. Community group work can be quite challenging, as the research on community organizing reveals (Bezboruah, 2013; Campbell et al., 2010; Walker & Stepick, 2014).

Clients from disadvantaged and impoverished circumstances have learned through repeated experiences with socioeconomic barriers that efforts to improve their circumstances are unlikely to be successful. In response, they often adopt a worldview characterized by an external locus of control (Cohen, 2009; Sullivan & Larrison, 2003). This is exemplified in the following statement of a client one of us worked with in a homeless shelter when she was talking about finding affordable housing: "Why bother? What's the point of me looking? Nothing has ever worked out for me before. Why should I think that it would work out now?"

This frame of reference often is misunderstood and viewed as a lack of motivation or apathy. An external locus of control, also known as psychological impotence, is a coping mechanism that reflects an individual's experiences with economic disadvantage, oppression, and discrimination (Black & Stone, 2005; Smith & Shin, 2008). If the social worker is going to be successful in recruiting individuals to work together, she or he must be prepared to directly address members' core beliefs

about their powerlessness. Before members can engage in collective action, their frustration, skepticism, and anger must be acknowledged. As Austin et al. (2005) noted, this requires the use of a basic skill that bridges clinical and macro practice—empathy.

In some cases, members' feelings of hopelessness may be directed at the social worker. The following occurred in a group co-author Carolyn Knight facilitates in a residential shelter for homeless families. One of the members, Shirley, announced that she had secured employment and had already found housing for her and her three children. Two weeks later, Shirley came in to the group angry and upset, saying that the job had fallen through and that she was back to square one. Shirley angrily confronted co-author Knight: "I *knew* it was too good to be true! You keep telling us that we can make things better for ourselves, but that's just bullshit! Ain't nothing going to change." Other members loudly voiced their agreement. The members' anger reflected deeply ingrained beliefs that they could not make a difference in their lives, a belief borne out in their past and current experiences.

Addressing members' concerns about the worker

The members' anger toward co-author Carolyn Knight reflected a second task of the social worker, that is, acknowledging questions about the worker's ability to understand and be helpful, given his or her very different social realities. This requires use of relationship building skills and cultural competence, skills that overlap in clinical and macro practice (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009).

The social worker's contribution stems from an understanding of how group membership can harness the collective power that members possess, even when they don't themselves believe this. Members will question the social worker's credibility as well as whether they will be judged for the situations in which they find themselves. The social worker must be prepared to address privilege and how this affects members' views of her or him and their willingness to engage in a working relationship (Hays et al., 2010). When members voice their concerns about the social worker's credibility and trustworthiness, this fosters engagement among members and between members and the worker.

In the following example, the social worker anticipates potential members' reservations about her and about the possibility that they can make a difference. As she engages in "anticipatory empathy" (Gitterman, 2005, p. 78), she is poised to address these concerns when they surface. The setting is a residential program for homeless male veterans. The typical resident is an African American man who has had significant problems with substance abuse; a number have been incarcerated, typically for drug-related offenses. The goal of the program is to help residents find gainful employment as well as independent housing. The paucity of affordable housing, coupled with the resistance many employers have toward hiring ex-convicts, made it difficult for many of the men to leave the shelter.

Joanne, a young White woman, decided to organize one group session for men who have served time in jail to brainstorm what they could do to address the concerns of local employers about hiring them. Joanne distributed flyers to all residents inviting them to attend the session and personally invited as many men as she knew who might benefit from attending the group meeting. Most expressed skepticism and disinterest, but 10 men showed up.

Joanne opened the session with the following statement,

Thanks so much for coming. I bet many of you are wondering what you can possibly do to make a difference, to get an employer to give you a chance. And I also bet that some, maybe all, of you wonder what the hell I am doing here! The reality is that by yourselves, you haven't gotten very far when it comes to getting hired. What I am thinking is that if we all band together, we can come up with ideas about how to persuade employers to give you a chance. And that's how I can be helpful: helping you to work together to find a solution to the challenges you face.

The student's introduction reflects the intersection of four micro and macro practice skills: self-awareness, cultural competency, empathy, and relationship building (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina &

Obel-Jorgensen, 2009). Joanne's acknowledgment of members' reservations fostered trust and set the tone for creating a partnership with them.

Joanne's comments were initially met with silence and side conversations in which the men laughed and joked with one another. In response, she said,

I get that what I am saying sounds like bullshit, particularly coming from me—this young White girl who *has* a job and who has never been arrested, much less served time in jail. But, I truly believe that if you guys work together you can make a difference. Maybe the place to start is with your honest thoughts and feelings about what I am saying.

Joanne's comments prompted a heated discussion of the men's pessimism and their beliefs that their efforts would be wasted. Joanne suggested, "At least think about what you could do to convince people to give you a chance." After two more meetings, and input from administrative staff, the members settled on a plan to invite potential employers to the agency to meet with them firsthand.

Two additional meetings preceded the planned job fair in which members practiced their interviewing skills, learned how to conduct themselves during this process, discussed ways to persuade employers to give them a chance, and worked on their résumés. Members of the group personally contacted potential employers and invited them to the shelter for the event. The group members also made up flyers that described the job fair and distributed them to businesses and organizations in the local area. From the perspective of staff and clients alike, the job fair was a success. It resulted in the creation of ongoing partnerships between employers and the shelter, and several of the members did in fact secure employment. These additional clinical and macro skills are reflected in Joanne's actions: contracting, identifying problems and change strategies, and facilitating self-determination and empowerment (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009). Her ability to "monitor the group" (Knight, 2014, p. 30), a basic group work skill, allowed her to observe members' initial reactions to her and to her proposal and respond directly to them. She understood the concept of the "two-client paradigm" (Shulman, 2016, p. 345). Joanne had two clients: each individual member of the group and the group as a whole.

Joanne anticipated and tuned in to her own assumptions about her clients' dilemmas, reflecting the clinical or macro skill of self-awareness (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009). If the social worker is going to be successful at engaging individuals who are caught up in a cycle of self-defeating thinking and behaving, she or he must be able to see the broader socioeconomic forces that have created the challenges they face. The group social worker does not ignore the bad choices members may have made; rather, she or he is attuned to the political nature of clients' personal struggles. Joanne admitted that she found herself getting frustrated and exasperated at members' bad choices and their "lack of motivation," even as she understood the underlying forces that were at play. The members themselves must appreciate the sociopolitical context of their challenges if they are going to be motivated to act.

Enhancing members' critical consciousness

The social worker's tasks make the transition from helping members see the potential for change to recognizing their underlying similarities. The social worker helps members engage in what has been referred to as "critical-consciousness raising" as a way of "liberat[ing] clients from self-blame" (Hays et al., 2010, p. 182). This allows members of groups to consider the ways their common struggles can be addressed through collective action (Burnes & Ross, 2010). Members are helped to develop a "universal perspective" (Shulman, 2016, p. 348), whereby they see that their personal struggles, which may appear to be different on the surface, reflect underlying common experiences with oppression, discrimination, and limited opportunities (Burnes & Ross, 2010; Itzhaky & Bustin, 2002). This task is evident in the following scenario.

One of our students was placed in an elementary school in an impoverished area of the inner city. His work involved working with children identified as having behavioral and emotional problems. A

significant problem that the school staff had reported was the state of the school's playground. Despite efforts to keep it safe, staff members were continually picking up trash, discarded needles, bullet casings, and the like. James observed that in his meetings with several parents, similar concerns were expressed. The parents and guardians were reluctant to let their children play on the playground for safety reasons. Tanya, James's field instructor, tasked him with coming up with a strategy to involve parents in a cleanup effort at the playground and ensure that it stayed that way.

James contacted parents of his clients and explained the school's concerns about the playground and asked if they would be interested in finding a solution. A meeting was planned at the school at a time that suited most of the individuals who expressed interest. Twelve parents and guardians attended. James and Tanya began by reiterating the school's concerns about the playground and explaining the purpose of the meeting. They were immediately interrupted by parents' angry exchanges with one another. James and Tanya quickly discovered that long-simmering tensions existed among some of the parents over drug dealing in the neighborhood, loud music, out-of-control youths, and discarded trash and debris. Two members were targeted because they were viewed as the cause of the neighborhood's problems.

Tanya acknowledged the anger but said,

You all live in very tough circumstances. It sounds like you want to make your homes and your neighborhood safe for yourselves and your children, but it's an uphill battle. It's easy to just blame your neighbors, to turn on each other. But the reality is that the City has basically abandoned you. Think about why you are here ... the unsafe nature of the playground. Your children have a right to a safe space to play. If the City isn't going to do anything about it, then maybe it's up to you guys to work together to make things better. We're hoping that you can put your differences aside to tackle something you all care about.

Tanya's intervention is consistent with research in community organizing that suggests the need for the professional to bridge differences and promote mutual understanding (Christens & Speer, 2011; Doe & Lowery, 2004). Her comments also reflect the clinical and macro skills of empathizing with members' frustration, identifying problems of mutual concern, and assisting them in establishing partnerships among the members and between the members and the social worker (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009). Tanya also employed a basic group work skill: She directly addressed the scapegoating that members' actions reflected. She understood that if the parents were to work together, they needed to recognize that all of them, including the two women who had been targeted, were in the same boat. Tanya accomplished this through the group work skills of pointing out commonalities and linking the individual to the group and the group to the individual.

Helping members identify strategies for community change

Groups engaged in community change may only meet for one time; others may meet for a specified number of sessions, and others may go on indefinitely. In all cases, the group social worker is tasked with helping members of the group identify collective strategies that are likely to be successful and simultaneously empowering to them. Research in successful community organizing underscores the importance of this task (Foster-Fishman et al., 2006).

As group members come to see the broader forces that shape their lives, their anger can fuel a desire to act but may lead to proposals that are unrealistic and beyond the abilities of members to achieve. Social workers and clients alike must recognize that change is typically piecemeal, consistent with the research findings in community organizing (Cheezum et al., 2013; Speer & Christens, 2012). However, small changes lead to more significant ones. "Organizing for social justice entails 'looking at the big picture' and then 'connecting the dots' to immediate, specific and realistic goals and objectives that can make concrete improvements in the lives of members of marginalized and oppressed groups" (Staples, 2012, p. 294).

In the example of the parents' group, James and Tanya assisted members in putting aside their differences to begin to work together to do something about the playground. In a subsequent

meeting, attended by even more parents and caregivers, members directed their anger at city leaders, including the mayor, city council, and law enforcement. They became animated and put forward a range of ideas such as taking photos of the playground and sending them to city officials and the media, organizing a protest at city hall, petitioning their local councilwoman, and picking up trash in the playground and dumping it on the steps of city hall.

Each of these strategies has merit, but James and Tanya worried that none would make a difference or lead to an immediate improvement in the playground. They also worried that if one or more of these strategies were followed and none were successful, the parents would become discouraged and lose interest. As previously noted by others, there are challenges associated with maintaining momentum (Alinsky, 1971; Bhat, 2010; Staples, 2012). Research in community organizing reinforces the need to sustain motivation over time (Bezboruah, 2013; Campbell et al., 2010).

Consistent with locality development, James and Tanya suggested that members consider taking on the task of cleaning up and monitoring the status of the playground, encouraging them to discuss how this could be done, and determining what resources would be needed to make this happen. By locating the solution to the problem in the group members themselves, the workers were promoting self-empowerment as well as collective action (Donaldson, 2004; Hays et al., 2010). Findings of community organizing efforts support the importance of these outcomes (East & Roll, 2015; Speer et al., 2010; Speer et al., 2013).

An essential skill in clinical and macro practice is working in partnership with clients to identify strategies that are realistic and likely to be successful (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009). The challenge for the social worker is to balance respect for members' ideas and contributions with helping them settle on actions that have the potential to be effective. The group social worker offers, but does not dictate, the direction members choose to take. "When community members are actively involved in decision-making processes, there usually will be greater 'buy-in' and cooperation....The lived expertise and local knowledge that [members] bring to the problem-solving process usually result in better ideas and solutions" (Staples, 2012, p. 288). The worker needs to be persistent in encouraging members to come up with ideas, given deeply held views that they cannot make a difference.

The parents and caregivers group illustrates what members bring to any community intervention. The group decided to hold a cleanup day at the playground that ended with a block party. Group members solicited donations of food, drinks, and supplies from local business owners and a large grocery chain. The nephew of another group member was a deejay who donated his time to the event, and a corner grocery provided large trash bags and gloves for the cleanup. A collection was taken up in the school itself, and staff contributed more than \$150.00. Several group members solicited donations of cash and goods from their churches and other community leaders.

Enhancing the likelihood that members' efforts will be successful

The social worker must take steps to ensure that members are prepared for the undertaking they have decided on. Joanne assisted her group's members with developing their interviewing skills and writing their résumés, emphasizing how their military experience prepared them for employment. In the case of the parents and caregivers group, once members got on board with the effort, James and Tanya spent time in group sessions working out the details of the cleanup and block party to follow. In doing so, they enhanced the likelihood that the community effort would be successful.

Sustaining the group's efforts over time

Groups in the community may be limited to addressing a specific social problem or may continue over time to address future challenges or sustain changes that have already occurred. The veterans'

group in the shelter is an example of the first type. The parents and caregivers group reflects a variation on the second type.

Initially, Tanya and James and the members themselves envisioned the group as solely focused on cleaning up the playground. However, the workers and members quickly realized that it wasn't enough to engage in a one-time cleanup; within a week, trash once again appeared. The members themselves asked to meet again with James and Tanya to see what could be done about keeping the playground clean over time. With their assistance, the group set up a network of volunteers to check the playground on a regular basis, recruiting other neighbors to participate in this endeavor.

A goal that is emphasized in the community and locality development literature is the creation of a leadership structure that grows out of the collective action of individuals and becomes self-sustaining (Grodofsky & Bakun-Mazor, 2012; Ohmer, 2010; Staples, 2009). Research on community organizing underscores the importance of this goal (Foster-Fishman, et. al., Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001). Although it is a worthy objective, it may not always be possible, particularly in those instances when the social worker practices at the micro level. At a minimum, the worker assists members in recognizing the gains they have made collectively and individually, reflect on what went right and what went wrong, and identify further work, consistent with the clinical and macro skill of evaluating outcomes (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009).

In their last session with the group, James and Tanya pointed out the group's accomplishments, which extended well beyond the clean playground. At the end of the school year, a fun fair took place, which resulted in community residents becoming better acquainted with one another and participation in school activities improving as more parents and caregivers demonstrated greater interest in what their children were doing and learning. The workers also assisted members in identifying resources in their community they could call on to assist with future projects, including many of the individuals who contributed to the initial block party like clergy, local shopkeepers, a family-owned funeral home, and a large chain grocery store. The results of this effort are consistent with research findings in community organizing that demonstrate its positive impact on self-empowerment and collective empowerment, community cohesion, and civic engagement (Christens & Speer, 2011; Doe & Lowery, 2004; Walker & Stepick, 2014).

Implications for social work education

Many social workers, including those skilled in and practicing group work, have failed to see how they can integrate micro and macro interventions. We have demonstrated how easily this can be done using the group modality in a community context. Attention must be devoted to each of the following three considerations if the profession's mission to pursue social justice is to be fully realized.

Decrease the micro/macro divide

Social work educators must eradicate the either-or perspective that has come to define social work practice: One either practices clinical work or engages in macro intervention. We argue that this is an artificial distinction and have begun to identify teaching strategies that help students see how they can blend micro and macro interventions (Dooley et al., 2009; Dudziak & Profitt, 2012; Gitterman, 2005).

Student competencies that reflect an integration of both arenas of social work practice have yet to be clearly articulated (Austin et al., 2016; Gamble, 2011; Regehr et al., 2012), although others have identified overlapping skill sets for micro and macro interventions (Austin et al., 2005; Hardina & Obel-Jorgensen, 2009; Mertz et al., 2007). The case examples in this article illustrate the relative ease of merging these skill sets through social work practice with groups. Highlighting skills that are relevant for both arenas of practice provides an effective starting point for developing competencies.

Classroom education must be complemented by field opportunities that help students merge clinical and macro practice. Evidence suggests that even among students who intend to practice at the macro level, their practicum experiences often fall short, possibly because of the lack of preparation of the field instructor (Deal et al., 2007; Mor Barak et al., 2004). This research suggests that field instructors will need guidance in how to merge clinical and macro practice activities. Continuing education workshops hosted by social work schools and programs would be one way to assist these individuals.

Additional attention must be directed at evaluating the effectiveness of interventions primarily oriented toward the macro environment like community practice. Some have noted that efforts to develop an evidence base for macro practice lags far beyond that of clinical practice (Coulton, 2005; Ohmer & Korr, 2006; Shapiro et al., 2013). As educators and practitioners work to integrate core skills of clinical and macro practice, this should lead to a greater focus on assessing the effectiveness of interventions that are associated with the wider social environment.

Enhance teaching of social work practice with groups

In this article and elsewhere (Gitterman & Knight, 2016), we assert that group work is an ideal modality for improving social functioning at the individual and community levels. There is abundant evidence that relative to other areas of practice, most notably casework, the group modality is receiving far less attention in the social work classroom and field practicum (Goodman, Knight, & Khuododov, 2014; Simon & Kilbane, 2014; Sweifach, 2014).

If group work is to achieve its full potential as a vehicle for change, the social worker must have a firm grasp of group work principles, methods, and skills. Resources such as the practice standards of the International Association for Social Work With Groups (2015) provide educators with valuable guidance in this area. Field instructors also will need assistance because research indicates that like their students, their understanding of the modality is limited (Goodman, Knight, & Khuododov, 2014).

Develop university–community partnerships

The community organizing literature includes examples of community outreach partnership centers (COPC). Most of the programs described in the literature do not originate in schools of social work but rather are housed in nursing, public health, and medical schools. This might reflect the health-related goals of many of these efforts and the availability of federal funding to support them.

University–community partnerships focus on engaging “in the struggle for social change ... to challenge social inequalities and oppressive power” (Fisher & Shragge, 2000, p. 2). These partnerships have different bureaucratic structures, missions, and goals, but they share a commitment to using the resources of the academic institution to improve local communities (Baiardi, Brush, & Lapidis, 2010; Carney, Maltby, Mackin, & Maksym, 2011). Communities avail themselves of the knowledge, expertise, and material resources housed in a university setting (Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2011). Emphasis is placed on developing collaborative, egalitarian relationships with community representatives, consistent with the mission and purpose of the social work profession (Cherry & Shefner, 2004).

The COPCs often include a research component, designed to assess community needs and strengths and evaluate outcomes of collaborative efforts (Doe & Lowery, 2004; Stoecker, 2012). Emphasis is placed on participatory, action-based research that enhances individual and community well-being (Bilodeau et al., 2009; Israel et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2010). Some also emphasize the role that action-based research can play in informing and modifying social policy (Petersen et al., 2006).

The COPCs sponsored by schools and programs of social work would be an ideal way of providing students with opportunities to merge clinical practice and macro interventions and to train field instructors in how to do this. Student involvement in community-based action research

would enhance their appreciation for the role research plays in practice (Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2011). Sponsoring a COPC has the added advantage of modeling the profession's goal of promoting social justice.

The COPCs are not without their challenges. Faculty involvement is critical to their success, which must be reflected in tenure and promotion decisions (Seifer & Calleson, 2004). In theory, the COPCs are designed to empower communities and the citizens who live in them. However, examples abound where the academic institution maintained overall control, reinforcing the very disenfranchisement that such programs are designed to eradicate (Breslin et al., 2011; Drahota et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Group work is ideally suited to promote client empowerment and community change. As the case material in this article reveals, the modality serves as an instructive model for how clinical and macro practice can be merged and integrated into a cohesive whole. The challenge to social work educators is twofold. First, far greater attention must be devoted to identifying and emphasizing practice skills that define micro and macro practice. Second, group work must once again become an integral component of the generalist, foundation, and advanced social work curricula. Social work schools and programs have the added responsibility of developing partnerships with disadvantaged communities to provide learning opportunities for students and field instructors and further the mission of the profession.

Notes on contributors

Carolyn Knight is Professor of Social Work at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. *Alex Gitterman* is Professor of Social Work at University of Connecticut.

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