

Defining Advanced Generalist Social Work Practice Knowledge, Skills, and Values

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Received

Accepted

Published

January 10, 2014

January 14, 2014

July 24, 2014

Citation: Bolin, Brien L. (2014). Defining advanced generalist social work practice. *The Advanced Generalist: Social Work Research Journal*, 1(1), p 1-5.

Abstract

Social work education at the baccalaureate and foundation level of master programs is structured around a generalist practice perspective. Advance practice in social work education is defined and conceptualized through the curriculums of master of social work programs. This essay provides a definition of advanced generalist practice through the lens of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) ten Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) practice competencies.

Keywords: Advanced generalist practice, CSWE, EPAS

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Defining Advanced Generalist Social Work Practice Knowledge

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) identifies ten practice competencies along with knowledge, skills, values, and practice behaviors (CSWE, 2012). These competencies and practice behaviors reflect generalist social work practice for working with individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations in a variety of social work and host settings. These competencies are developed to provide a framework for guiding social work curriculum at both the bachelor and master levels of social work education.

Master of social work programs are able to develop their advanced curriculums around their program mission and goals. Programs with an advanced generalist practice focus similar to those with an emphasis on clinical practice, administration, or families are guided by CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS, 2012). The EPAS (2012) state "Advanced practitioners refine and advance the quality of social work practice and that of the larger social work profession" (p. 8, EPM2.2, CSWE, 2012). Advanced generalist social work practice has been discussed as reflecting "a breadth and depth of knowledge, skills, and ethics" as well as being a model for practice of "both/and" (GlenMaye, Lewandowski, & Bolin, 2004; Lewandowski, GlenMaye, & Bolin, 2004). The both/and perspective of the advanced generalist is a multidimensional, complex view of the social work helping process. The advanced generalist views change as occurring simultaneously in multiple levels of systems. The key to the advanced generalist perspective is the view that system that social work practice occurs is often complex and chaotic. In contrast to an either/or practice perspective as one-dimensional, linear, and focused on one level of the social system at a time. "Advanced generalist social work represents increased complexity in the learning process and greater breadth and depth of exploration in a generalist perspective rather than a uniquely different perspective from the generalist approach" (Schatz, Jenkins, & Sheafor, 1990, p. 217). The following essay provides definitions for each of the Council on Social Work Education core competencies CSWE, EPAS (2012) based on an Advanced Generalist practice perspective.

Educational Policy 2.1.1 states that a social worker should be able to "Identify as a professional social worker and conducts oneself accordingly" (CSWE 2012, p. 3). The advanced generalist knowledge, skills, and ethics call for social workers to serve as autonomous representatives and advocates for the profession, reflecting the core values of the profession as they commit themselves to a continuous growth of their own ethical practice.

Educational Policy 2.1.2 states that social workers should be able to "Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice" (CSWE 2012, p. 4). The advanced generalist social workers should be able to recognize and manage personal biases and demonstrate their ethical responsibility of service as consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics. This requires using a broad knowledge base, critical thought, cultural competency, and advanced skills to critically assess increasingly complex practice dilemmas.

Educational Policy 2.1.3 states that social workers should be able to "Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments" (CSWE 2012, p. 4). Therefore, the advanced generalist social workers should have the competency to apply critical thinking in their evidence-based

approaches to enhance their multidimensional practice as they communicate their professional judgments and contribute to the knowledge base of the social work profession.

Educational Policy 2.1.4 states that social workers should be able to “Engage diversity and difference” (CSWE 2012, p. 4). The advanced generalist social worker should be responsive to the influences of privilege and oppression. Advanced Generalist social workers apply their knowledge, skills, and ethics to critically assess and evaluate diversity and difference across the continuum of global communities and formulate a plan for change with individuals, groups, families, organizations, or communities.

Educational Policy 2.1.5 states that social workers “Advances human rights and social and economic justice” (CSWE 2012, p. 5). Advanced generalist social workers should be competent as they articulate an advanced understanding of oppression in society. The advanced generalist social worker should demonstrate their commitment to social and economic justice, empowering social change, and human rights. The advanced generalist social worker must draw upon their knowledge, skills, and ethical understanding of complex multidimensional systems as they apply theories of cultural competency in working with diverse individuals, groups, families, communities, and organizations.

Educational Policy 2.1.6 states that social workers should “Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research” (CSWE 2012, p. 5). The advanced generalist social worker is competent in developing ethical, evidence based interventions, and evaluations to inform practice and the growth of the profession. The Advanced Generalist social worker is able to conduct culturally competent and socially just evaluations in a multidimensional context.

Educational Policy 2.1.7 states that social workers are able to “Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment” (CSWE 2012, p. 6). Competent advanced generalist social workers use a multidimensional and culturally competent conceptual model in the application of their knowledge of human behavior across the life span.

Educational policy 2.1.8 states that social workers “Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services” (CSWE 2012, p. 6). Advanced generalist social workers use a multidimensional perspective as they engage in complex policy practice. Advanced generalist social workers are responsive to diversity and difference as they engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate social problems and social injustices. The Advanced Generalist social worker is intensely aware and responsive to the context of the community along with its history, social policies, and service. The Advanced Generalist social worker is able to critically assess and engage the community in socially just and culturally competent advocacy and interventions.

Educational policy 2.1.9 states that social workers should “Respond to contexts that shape practice” (CSWE 2012, p. 6). The advanced generalist social worker employs their knowledge, skills, and ethics through a multidimensional understanding of complex organizations and communities as they engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate individuals, families, and groups in the complex social environments that shape practice. The Advanced Generalist social worker must identify, propose, and implement multidimensional and sustainable change in collaboration with community constituencies.

Educational policy 2.1.10 states that social workers “Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities” (CSWE 2012, p. 6).

The advanced generalist social worker must critically engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate their practice using advanced knowledge, skills, and awareness of their ethical responsibilities. The advanced generalist social worker calls on their knowledge of a broad theory base and practice approaches as they practice social work in complex, dynamic social systems. The advanced generalist is trained to practice social work with individuals at the micro level, groups, and families at the mezzo level and communities and organizations at the macro level.

Conclusion

The advanced generalist social work practice perspective provides a social worker with in-depth knowledge, skills, and ethics as related to a broad range of practice settings. This essay has focused on the ten core competencies of CSWE (2012) and the definitions of the competencies for the advanced generalist social worker as suggestions for practice competency as one sustains their professional identity.

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About the Author(s)

Dr. Bolin received his doctorate in sociology from Oklahoma State University. His dissertation research focused on quality assurance in the deinstitutionalization of individuals with developmental disabilities in Oklahoma. He received his MSW from Walla Walla College. His current research interests include the Pedagogy of Social Work Education including teaching research, the use of digital storytelling to enhance students understanding of diversity and difference, and practicum. Dr. Bolin teaches research and evaluation in the School of Social Work as well as courses on the Advanced Generalist Model at Wichita State University.