INTRODUCTION

Social work practice and education have undergone changes in the past half century that have significantly affected the way in which we use knowledge for practice. As I approached the task of writing this book I was struck by how much has changed in our knowledge base since my own graduate-level preparation. In the early sixties there was a very limited set of texts and journals that were used in social work education to prepare students for careers as direct practice social workers or as caseworkers, the term used at that time. The pioneers such as Mary Richmond, Charlotte Towle, Helen Harris Pearlman, and Florence Hollis had developed approaches to practice that built on the central values of the profession and the practice wisdom that had accumulated over time. Theories and practice principles developed in related fields, such as psychiatry and psychology, were integrated into this general body of knowledge. For students learning to practice there was a finite literature that could be studied. Field instructors, having themselves been trained in the same approaches that students were learning, could help students draw the links between their academic learning in university courses and the practice assignments they had in the field agency. One of the strengths of that era was that students learned a circumscribed body of knowledge and approaches in depth. Social work students were taught, either in class, field, or both, how to think about practice and how to enact a practice that flowed from a core of interrelated humanistic values, theories about the human condition, and intervention models. Social workers in direct practice seemed unified in their emphasis on a client-centered approach and a number of practice principles reflected this: start where the client is, go at the pace of the client, value self-determination of the client, support growth and development, provide an accepting, nonjudgmental relationship as the basis for helping, give primacy to client needs rather than organizational administrative requirements, and intervene to change social and economic factors in the client's environment that affect well-being.
The past can be glorified in reminiscences; however it would be false to portray those times as uniformly positive. There were glaring omissions, especially in the tendency to universalize and render diversity and systemic oppression invisible. The insights of feminist theory, antiracism, oppression, and empowerment analyses, and of postmodernist theory had not yet entered the professional discourse. Furthermore, there were few well-designed research studies to investigate social work programs and practices and to examine the outcomes and effectiveness of our work. Practitioners were largely operating on the basis of a collective practice wisdom that had developed over many years, without empirical support for these beliefs. While attention to the environment was always a part of the unique conceptualization of social functioning, the intellectual and practice contributions of Germain and Gitterman (1996) and Meyer (1983), who introduced and articulated the ecological-systemic perspective, were only beginning to influence practitioners. Finally, practice remained “behind closed doors,” a private and somewhat mysterious activity. Since one-way mirrors, audio-, and videotape had not yet entered educational technology, students’ work was rarely observed, nor did students observe skilled social workers in their practice. Schools of social work were not yet teaching interviewing skills, and students often wondered what good practice really looked like. Obviously, there were many deficits in teaching practice. However, students were taught a core of knowledge as well as a limited number of principles for applying that knowledge, including the following examples: start where the client is, reach for feelings, partialize the problem, determine both presenting problem and underlying problem, and proceed at the client’s pace. This set of principles provided guidelines to ground abstract concepts when working with individual clients. These principles were generic insofar as they could be transferred to practice with a wide range of clients, such as late adolescents, adults, and the elderly and across many settings, such as child welfare, family services, and health and mental health. These skills were also useful, with modification, in practice where individual clients and participants were involved in change processes, as with families, therapeutic groups and committees in organizations and communities, in supervision and administration.

In contrast, social work students and practitioners are currently confronted with an ever expanding and constantly changing body of knowledge. Not only is there a knowledge explosion in social work but related fields such as psychology, counseling, psychiatry, and marriage and family therapy offer innumerable new approaches to practice that hold interest for social work prac-
titioners. Many of these new models have been well described, tested, and shown to be effective in use with particular populations in controlled studies. The links between theory, research, and practice are clarified with the advent of treatment manuals developed for these empirical studies. Transferring the findings from studies to the everyday world of practice in agencies, however, has proven to be far more complex than expected.

At the same time that practitioners have been encouraged to use empirically based models, postmodernism and social constructionism have introduced a new epistemology and an appreciation that there are limits to what we “know” and what can be claimed as universal, objective, and true. These doctrines argue that individual meanings are developed through social interaction in specific contexts, cultural groups, and by virtue of social location with respect to characteristics such as race, class, and gender. Furthermore, individual assumptions and meanings are closely tied to language systems. Hence, there are many ways of knowing, understanding, experiencing and defining problems and how they should be addressed. Recognizing the existence of different worldviews may leave practitioners feeling pulled in opposite directions — searching for generalizable proven approaches or working in highly individual ways. Social workers may attempt to stay current with developments by reading the literature, attending continuing education programs, and incorporating new ideas in their work. Or, overwhelmed by the workload pressures of agency practice and the expanding and at times contradictory knowledge explosion, they may rely increasingly on their own experience and a core of practices that have proven useful and meaningful for them over time.

Schools of social work are committed to exposing students to the intellectual debates in the profession, to both traditional and innovative approaches. They try to cover considerable ground from societal to individual perspectives and from philosophical positions to empirical findings. As a result, social work students are likely to find a program of study that is crammed with innumerable bodies of knowledge, perspectives, values, and practice approaches. In individual courses reading lists grow and basic practice texts expand with the publication of each new edition as authors incorporate the latest concepts and debates in the discourse on social work practice. As more specialized models are described and tested students are also presented with an ever expanding range of procedures and specific intervention techniques.

Social work students who are embarking on a lifelong journey of learning to become effective practitioners state clearly that at the beginning they need
to learn a core of integrated and interrelated concepts, processes and principles, and skills for practice. Such a core is seen as a place to start, a place that can serve as a foundation throughout one’s career; a foundation that provides a sense of being grounded as a professional and engenders confidence that one possesses a core of competencies available for use in practice. An essential component of this core is basic interviewing skills that constitute, in large measure, the way in which any approach is put into practice. However, these interviewing skills do not “stand alone.” They must be used in conjunction with knowledge and understanding—of theories about human and social function and dysfunction and of how to provide help and bring about change. Once learned, this body of knowledge and skill can be used in different ways based on the mandate of the agency, the procedures of specific models, specialized information about populations and problems, and the needs of the particular client in the relationship with the worker.

FOCUS OF THIS BOOK

My aim in writing this book was to attempt to provide such an integrated view of theoretical concepts, practice processes and principles, and interviewing skills. Through teaching social work students in both basic and advanced practice courses and providing clinical consultation to experienced social workers in mainstream and ethnospecific agencies, I became aware of the need for a generic text for direct practice or clinical social work courses that would bring together theory, research, and techniques. With the growing findings from studies of practice effectiveness and the increasing number of meta-analytic and systematic reviews of these studies it became a challenge to assist students and practitioners to access and use this new knowledge. Empirical findings are important to guide practitioners and to provide the professional with some confidence that the methods we use will lead to positive outcomes for clients.

The text presents a group of generic theories and skills for use in communicating with adults and adolescents who can take advantage of an approach that is largely based on “talking.” Some of the concepts, processes, and skills are applicable to work with children, and examples of such situations are provided as illustrations. However, social workers whose practice brings them into regular contact with children need specialized knowledge to successfully work with this population. For example, a thorough grounding in child devel-
opment theory is essential for understanding children’s growth and behavior as well as some familiarity and competence in using interventions such as play therapy, art therapy, music therapy, and activity groups. There are also a range of interviewing skills designed for work with children that are beyond the scope of this text.

This text is intended especially for students as they begin to learn about social work practice. It can also be used by experienced practitioners who are interested in a systematic reexamination of contemporary social work practice theory, a review of selected empirically based principles, and a summary of interviewing skills. I have tried in the text to provide information at a level that is not so abstract that it is unclear how the concepts may be applied in the real world of practice. Neither is material presented in so concrete a manner that a cookbooklike approach would result. Rather my aim is to provide concepts and practice processes or principles that can be used by practitioners in a flexible and reflective manner so that the social worker and the client can fashion their own unique helping relationship and pathway to positive results.

This text has been influenced by a number of themes that are interwoven throughout the work and bear making explicit. The first theme is that any professional practice in human services reflects a complex integration of a multitude of factors and competencies. Through my work in field education in social work (Bogo and Vayda, 1998) I have taught and learned from social workers and social work professors in Canada, United States, Japan, China, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka and recognized that many general practice principles are understood and used in individualized and culturally relevant ways in local situations. I became interested in understanding how social workers use, adapt, or integrate knowledge in their practice. It is difficult for practitioners to provide full accounts of what they do and why; hence any description of practice can only be understood as “at one step removed” from the actual situation. However, when engaged in extensive reflective dialogues about their work, social workers can articulate understandings and descriptions of their actions that were previously implied but not named or labeled (Bogo et al., in press). What does emerge is a description of practice that is not a linear and direct application of theory. Rather, practice is an intricate, nuanced, interrelated process of action and reflection, with reference to concepts or principles, previous situations and learning from these experiences, and occasionally to findings from practice research. This process occurs in a cyclical, looping, and
iterative manner. This view of practice-theory linkage as fluid and implicit is discussed more fully in chapter 1.

A second theme that appears throughout the text provides a somewhat different view. While still recognizing that at one level practice is amorphous and hard to pin down, at another level there are actions and skills used by practitioners that have been demonstrated effective. The text includes descriptions and discussions of these principles and processes and related behavioral skills. This material is derived from the professional literature and from two ongoing research projects. In these projects we aim, with a group of colleagues, to identify and describe some of the processes, competencies, and skills that constitute good social work practice. The first project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada, involved an examination of the processes in cross-cultural counseling that result in positive outcomes for clients (Tsang, Bogo, and George, 2003). This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto and the Research Ethics Boards of the participating hospitals and agencies. In this study we applied process-outcome coding methodologies and textual analysis to transcripts of audiotaped interviews of social workers and their clients. The clients and social workers who agreed to participate in the project were drawn from a range of settings, typical of social work practice: for example, an agency serving adolescents and their families, an outpatient mental health clinic for clients recently discharged from a psychiatric facility, a community health clinic, a family service agency. In all of the situations the social workers were providing the “usual” form of counseling and resources offered by the setting. This study helped to illuminate the processes, activities, and behaviors that workers demonstrated in practice with clients who were different from themselves by virtue of race, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability. Observations and emerging findings from this study are integrated throughout the text along with theoretical, notional, and experiential observations of practitioners and scholars working in the area of cultural competency.

The second project arose in an attempt to develop more reliable and valid approaches to evaluating the competency of social work students (Bogo et al., 2002). This project is also funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Toronto. In the first phase of the study the aim was to tap the implicit knowledge of experienced social workers and field educators as they described their perception of competent practice (Bogo
et al., 2004; in press). Through in-depth qualitative interviews social workers provided rich descriptions of the attitudes, qualities, and behaviors of social work students whom they considered exemplary, average, and not yet ready for practice. Through comparing the findings from the cross-cultural study and this study on competence, a set of helping processes and practice principles emerged, which are presented and discussed throughout the text.

As noted, findings from practice research in helping disciplines, including social work, have been incorporated in this text. Empirically tested models have much to offer to social workers in their practice. One can use a model in its entirety or selectively use processes or techniques that are demonstrated as effective. I have been selective in drawing from this growing literature and have included in this text those principles, processes, or techniques that have been shown to be effective in well-designed research studies and may have a more general usefulness if applied in a wide range of social work situations. Readers interested in the original studies and the specific models can retrieve the primary work through the extensive references provided.

Finally, both the “old” and the “new” are found in the text. Long-standing foundation principles of social work practice, also referred to as “practice wisdom,” that have withstood the test of time are incorporated. Many new perspectives offer insightful critiques of traditional approaches; however, the implications for practice are not yet well articulated. Since the aim of this text is to provide frameworks for current practice, material was selected for inclusion when it would further this goal.

**LEARNING TO PRACTICE**

A final word about learning to practice is warranted. Any text can only describe practice; it is only in the actual doing of practice that ideas take more shape, are experienced, truly learned, and can become part of the social worker’s professional self. Social work education has long recognized this axiom about learning, and all programs prepare competent social workers by providing students with both academic courses and supervised educational experiences in the field. When students are provided with conceptual frameworks to understand what they are doing in the field they report that their learning is strengthened (Fortune, McCarthy, and Abramson, 2001). Some activities that link practice to theoretical concepts and vice versa include making connections between what is observed in specific practice situations and the concepts

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presented in courses and pointing out and labeling concepts when they are seen in practice. Students value field instructors who provide explanations of client phenomena and related practice interventions in the language of social work theory. Students, course instructors, and field instructors may wish to use some of the concepts presented in this text so that a similar terminology and nomenclature can facilitate teaching and learning across the domains of class, field, and integrative seminars. Similarly, experienced practitioners may wish to review their work on audio- or videotape on their own, with peers or a supervisor, and use the concepts presented in this text as a framework to guide reflection, feedback, self-assessment, and planning subsequent interventions in a particular situation. The process of learning and refining practice and interviewing behaviors is continuous, and I hope that this book can contribute to life-long learning for students and experienced practitioners.

Educational methods for teaching practice, both theories and skills, have been described in numerous articles in social work journals such as the *Journal of Social Work Education*, *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, and the *Clinical Supervisor*. It is clear from this body of literature that students appreciate learning environments that model the principles of social work practice (Bogo, 1993; Freeman and Valentine, 1998; Lewis, 1991). Instructors who behave in ways that are consistent with the values and principles they are teaching provide an experience for students that exposes them to the essence of social work (Knight, 2001). Modeling collaboration, respect, relationship building and maintenance are powerful ways of teaching.

The classroom environment is a potent factor that affects students’ learning. It provides the milieu in which students may feel respected by their colleagues, connected to each other, and experience a sense of “being in this together.” In such environments students report that they feel safe, can risk exposing their struggles and uncertainties in learning, and try out new ideas and behaviors (Bogo, Globerman, and Sussman, 2004a; Shulman, 1987). Experiential learning activities such as role playing with simulated clients and presenting audio- or videotapes to the class for analysis and feedback have been demonstrated to be highly effective methods of learning the content discussed in this text (Collins and Bogo, 1986).

Classroom dynamics however can also compromise learning. In classrooms where bonding has not occurred, where students have expressed strongly held opinions that others experience as insensitive or depreciating, where competition is intense, where problematic histories exist between class members,
or where conflict has not been resolved, students report feeling intimidated, unsafe, and guarded (Bogo, Globerman, and Sussman, 2004b; Holley and Steiner, 2005; Mishna and Rasmussen, 2001; Rasmussen and Mishna, 2003). These conditions are not conducive to the self-exposure needed for experiential learning activities or presentation of students’ own practice. Classroom instructors need a range of teaching skills, many of which are similar to those used in group work practice and in resolving interpersonal conflict. Drawing on their knowledge of group dynamics and sound teaching skills, instructors can assist students to develop norms for the classroom, learn to be productive members of a learning group, process differences of opinions in a respectful manner, and resolve conflict when it arises. As the teacher responds to a range of classroom situations, students learn about social work processes through observation, modeling, and experiencing them. The instructor’s comfort level when dealing with conflict, responses to ruptures that include attempts at repairs, and commitment to a productive environment provide a model to emulate in practice (Mishna and Rasmussen, 2001). Conversely, ignoring classroom dynamics and avoiding intervening when conflict arises also demonstrate stances that students may copy in their practice.

**Organized of the Book**

The book is organized in three major parts: 1) conceptual frameworks, 2) helping processes and principles, and 3) interviewing skills. Part 1 is entitled “Conceptual Frameworks for Social Work Practice” and examines contexts that affect practice and concepts that inform it. The Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP) Loop (Bogo and Vayda, 1998) is introduced in chapter 1 as a vehicle for examining the multitude of factors that impinge on practice. The ITP Loop has been used in examining social work practice and guiding student teaching and learning in the field practicum. Through the loop metaphor the professional and organizational contexts of practice are examined as they affect the scope of what the practitioner is able to offer and achieve. The professional context is reviewed, including the knowledge and value base that serves as an underpinning for practice. The “personal self” of the student and of the social worker is emphasized and attention is paid to learning to become a practitioner, how the personal self of the practitioner evolves to incorporate a professional self, and ways of thinking about the integration of theory and practice.
Continuing the theme of significant contexts, chapter 2 examines contemporary perspectives that incorporate diversity in all aspects of our work. Social identity characteristics and societal dynamics related to power, privilege, and oppression can be reflected in direct practice. These concepts in the professional literature are introduced as a precursor to further elaboration throughout the text. In addition, key concepts in social work that cross theoretical models are presented.

The third and fourth chapters focus on the relationship as both a context of practice and a crucial dimension for bringing about change. The components of relationship, both with voluntary and involuntary clients, are examined. In chapter 3 fundamental and enduring characteristics of the professional relationship in social work are presented. Theoretical contributions to understanding the relationship are reviewed, especially humanistic and attachment perspectives.

In chapter 4 the extensive empirical literature on the therapeutic alliance is summarized and helping processes, practice principles, and behaviors that derive from this literature are presented. Issues of culture and diversity are examined in the interests of forging this crucial context for practice. Ethical standards relevant to relationship issues are discussed.

The fifth chapter presents frameworks for thinking about change from a variety of points of view. Findings from research on social work practice and from the extensive empirical literature in related disciplines are presented. Change is discussed from the standpoint of the client, from meta-analyses of these studies, and through the lens of a staged process.

Part 2 is entitled “The Process of Helping in Social Work Practice” and includes chapters on the actual stages, tasks, and interventions in practice. Each chapter in this section integrates the concepts presented in part 1 and discusses how these ideas are put into practice through preparatory, beginning, middle, and ending stages.

Chapter 6 considers tasks and issues in the beginning stage. This stage includes the important preparatory work that precedes the first meeting with the client. Activities related to preparing the setting and the worker are considered. The initial stage and its related activities are presented with respect to developing a working relationship and shared understanding between the client and the worker regarding the nature of the issues to be addressed, the goals sought, and the potential methods to reach those goals. An ecosystemic and multiperspective approach is used to examine steps in arriving at an as-
essment. This approach organizes the questions that the worker needs to consider, the information that must be gathered, the way in which the information will be examined, and finally how goal setting is linked to the conceptual framework chosen. The importance of understanding and assessment as a collaborative activity with the client is a theme throughout this discussion.

Chapter 7 focuses on the middle stage in helping and the processes, principles, and interventions that bring about change. Emphasizing that the social worker is a process expert, this chapter draws on the concepts and empirical findings presented in part 1, “Conceptual Frameworks,” to demonstrate how these concepts are enacted in the actual social work session. Throughout the helping process attention continues to be directed to two elements: 1) relationship maintenance and 2) goal achievement. Key themes in the chapter include developing richer and more complex understandings of the presenting problem; working with emotions, cognition, and behaviors; working with themes relating to individual, interpersonal and developmental issues. Identifying strengths, addressing obstacles, developing new perspectives, and taking action are presented. Finally, social workers do not always work to promote change; they also work to support and sustain clients through linkage to and coordination of necessary resources. Helping processes of the case management model are discussed in this regard.

Chapter 8 considers the ending or termination stage in social work practice, from short contacts to those that are longer in time frame. Four key processes are discussed: reviewing progress, consolidating gains, planning for next steps, and processing the emotional bond.

The final section of the text is entitled “Interviewing in Social Work Practice” and consists of one chapter. Chapter 9 provides a detailed discussion of the interviewing skills social workers use in practice. Skills are described and illustrated with examples. Together this set of interviewing behaviors constitutes a skill set that the practitioner uses to ground the concepts and helping processes discussed in the previous two sections of the text. Chapter 9 can be used on its own in social work courses on interviewing or in conjunction with the entire text in social work practice courses at the undergraduate and graduate level, in generalist and clinical programs of study. The chapter ends with recommendations for students about educational processes helpful in learning how to practice social work.