

Practice Reflection

Theory Mapping in Social Work Placements: The KIT model applied to meso and macro practice tasks

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ABSTRACT

Ten years ago, Collingwood and her colleagues (2005, 2008) published the Three Stage Theory Framework (the KIT model), a model for linking theory to practice in social work field placements. The focus of their work was how students might deconstruct and analyse micro interventions occurring in the placements to enhance their work with individuals, couples and families. This is unquestionably an area of placement learning that can be enormously challenging and complex to appraise in supervision. The KIT model represents an amalgam approach to learning and is a popular resource in our networks for its capacity to support supervisors and students in communicating about micro practice assessment frameworks, theory to inform, theory to intervene, policy and legislative frameworks, skills for practice, and values both personal and professional. Such communication is also required in placements where research, community work and policy analysis are required of the student. However, meso and macro practice was not addressed by the Collingwood model. Moreover, the literature on available models for applying theory to practice highlights an enduring gap at these levels of intervention. We propose that the Three Stage Theory Framework can significantly enhance student completion and understanding of meso and macro tasks by providing clarity about the potential knowledge, skills and values addressed. This article examines the importance of visualising or mapping theory in social work education and demonstrates how the Collingwood model can be applied to theory–practice integration with meso and macro tasks in social work field placements.

Keywords: *Macro practice, Indirect tasks, Field placement, Social work*

INTRODUCTION

Field education is a fundamental part of social work education in Australia (AASW, 2012) and around the world (Noble, 2004), and is present in historical accounts of the evolution of social work as a profession (George, 1982). Students are required to undertake a range of practice tasks on placement in order to facilitate their learning, along with integrating the theory they have learned in the classroom to these practice tasks whilst on field placement. One of the available models to be used for theory–practice integration is the Three Stage Theory Framework (Collingwood, 2005; Collingwood, Emond, & Woodward, 2008), a visual mapping tool to teach students how to link theory to micro-practice tasks. This framework is also known as the KIT model, drawing on the motif of a generalised client named “KIT.” Whilst this is a popular model for supervisors and students to utilise in the field placement, there remains a gap for linking theory to those tasks which are meso or macro in nature.

BACKGROUND

The divide that exists between practical and theoretical learning in social work education is bridged in the field placement experience with students engaging in a range of social work practice methods that encompass a variety of interventions. Interventions such as case work, counselling and therapeutic group work focus on the micro level, where students intervene with individuals, couples and families. Students often see these interventions as more practical in nature, with a more immediate contribution to change processes. This often leads to bias in the learning experience, a phenomenon that is mirrored by field educators who often prefer to teach micro practice tasks (Barbour, 1984).

Meso and macro practice interventions require students to develop networking, advocacy, public speaking and negotiation skills. These include contributing to social policy reforms, undertaking a research project, or working collaboratively within a marginalised community. Macro practice relies on students having good written and verbal communication skills (Trevithick, 2012) in which students often display a lack of confidence. Additionally, these ways of working often require a long-term perspective on change, which may occur well after the student has finished placement, and affect the community in the future rather than in the course of a single placement.

Added to this, while some individuals learn readily through experience, others rely on didactic communication and the written word, and still others prefer use of visual imagery or pictorial models (Maidment, 2015). An individual’s learning preferences strongly influence their learning in field placement. If field educators attend to student learning styles they can understand and enhance the student’s approach to theoretical integration (Lewis, 2003), select appropriate tasks and activities, identify areas where learning can be improved, and increase the growth of the student on field placement (Honey & Mumford, 1986). Visual learners, who may feel challenged by the emphasis on the written word and text-based learning as well as threatened by practical learning strategies such as “being thrown in the deep end” require a different approach. Although many models exist that support theory–practice application, there has been minimal focus on the use of visual imagery (Huss,

2012), and there is no single pictorial model that supports theory–practice integration in relation to meso and macro interventions.

The Three Stage Theory Framework – an adaptation to student placement tasks with a macro focus

Macro practice often presents conceptual challenges to students within field placements, challenges that historically resonate throughout the social work profession (Feit, 2003). Macro practice incorporates a range of non-clinical social work tasks such as organisational planning, program evaluation, policy development, consultation and financial management (Feit, 2003). It has been described as practice that works at the macro client systems level of intervention and focuses on organisations, institutions, communities, regions and nations as opposed to individuals, couples and families as the locus of change (Hepworth, Rooney, Dewberry Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2010). In student placements, macro tasks might include organising an event, creating and running an educational workshop, updating a resource manual or undertaking a quality improvement project. Although these tasks can overlap with administration, they are largely grounded in social work ideals of social justice, equity, access and broad social change.

For macro-practice tasks to be relevant to social work student learning it needs to: (1) be developed in relation to an immediate and identifiable client group or target audience; (2) have a basis in theory, both in relation to the understandings of the population and the justification for the particular activities undertaken; (3) sit within a legislative, policy and procedural framework; (4) draw upon and, in some cases extend, agency networks; (5) refine and demand particular social work skills in order to be completed; and (6) be underpinned by appropriate ethics and values. Next, it is vital that field educators deconstruct and explain these various elements for the student within supervision. The Three Stage Theory Framework model, first published by Collingwood (2005) and later refined by Collingwood et al. (2008), is an excellent tool to facilitate the theory to practice integration with macro tasks, and specifically with service users (Collingwood, 2008, p. 81). However, in its published form, the model is aimed at the analysis of only micro-practice tasks.

The original framework utilises three nested circles to deconstruct social work cases and create a theoretical framework around the individual, couple or family who have sought social work support. In the innermost circle, the “Service User Profile” (referred to as “KIT” for anonymity) requires the student to collate significant information about an individual, couple or family they are working with. Around KIT, a second circle is drawn and split in half. The left-hand side requires students to identify theories that inform their work, for example, grief and loss or trauma theories. Conversely, the right-hand side of the theory circle addresses theories to intervene and students are encouraged to make a choice of *one* to *two* methods of practice in this section. Around the theory circle sits the outside circle, identifying the knowledge, skills and values that the student must consider when working with KIT (Collingwood, 2005; Collingwood et al., 2008).

To adapt this model for macro-practice tasks we have made key modifications. Firstly, macro-practice focuses on populations and communities rather than individuals and families, so the Service User Profile morphs into the “Population Profile” (POP). Secondly,

while “Theory to Inform” remains relatively unchanged, “Theory to Intervene” focuses on theories relating to research, policy or community work as opposed to those relating to direct practice.

The model applied to indirect tasks

(Higgins, 2014)

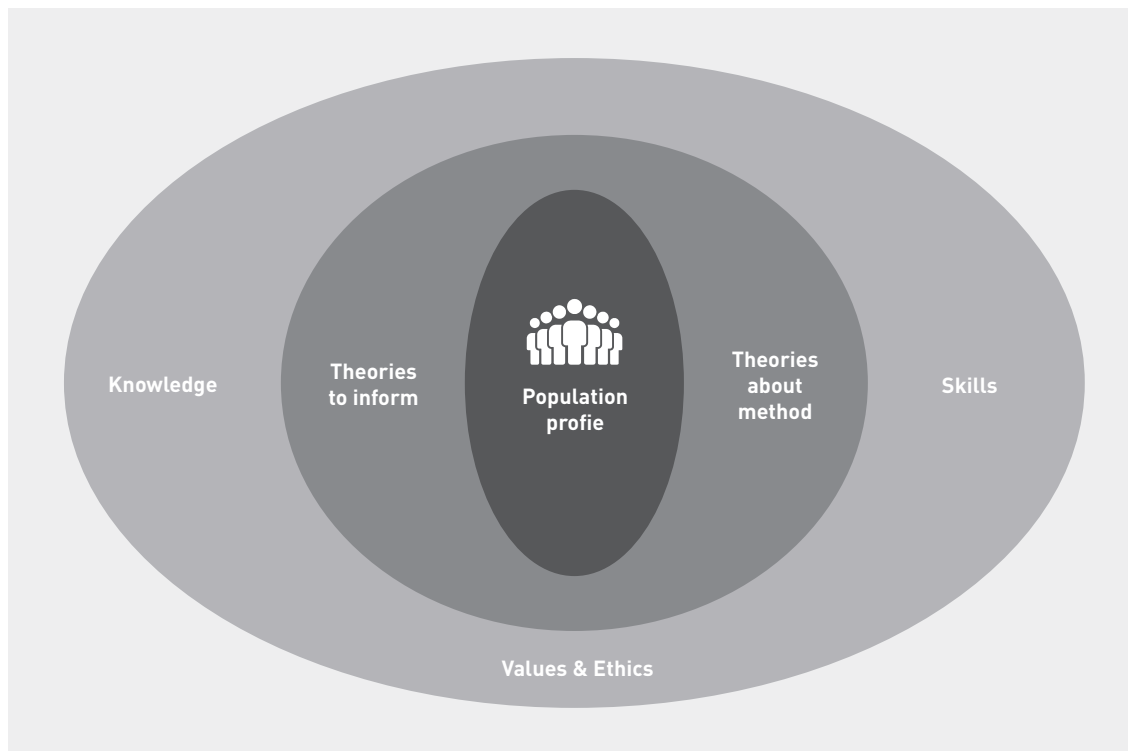


Figure 1. Practice Example – the application of the adapted Three Stage Theory Framework Model

An example is provided here, utilising fictional students, to demonstrate the use of the KIT model to macro placement tasks. Two students, Mia and Len, were on their student placement at a government institution working with families and friends of missing persons. They were asked to develop a booklet suitable for teenagers with a missing person in their lives. They were required to work independently as well as with a group of young people to prepare the book and assist with the launch event which occurred towards the end of the placement. They plotted their project utilising the Three Stage Theory Framework adaptation to meso and macro tasks.

Their first step was to develop a population profile. To this end, Mia and Len conducted a literature review, met with the young people and interested service providers, and participated in and observed the comings and goings of the placement agency. The literature, in this context, included a wide range of materials written about teenagers and missing persons, including agency annual reports, brochures, case notes, newspaper articles, historical records, government reports, books and journal articles. By immersing themselves in this data Mia and Len quickly became familiar with the main characteristics of the population including the age range, gender, cultural identity, other demographic features, and the nature of the experience of “missing” for families and friends. They could identify gaps and were particularly struck by the lack of literature on the topic. These inconsistencies

and areas of interest then informed them as they observed and facilitated focus groups with young people. They paid attention to details such as the numbers of young people with missing people in their lives, whether they live locally and what support structures are in place, how they seem to cope, what their support needs are, their ages, their lived experience of loss and any special issues or concerns, for example culture, language, risk, connectedness and so on.

Their next step was to ground their project in theory by identifying theories to inform and theories to intervene. Mia and Len considered psychological, sociological, economic, political, environmental and structural theories to understand the young people they were working with. They noted that theories of complex and unresolved grief, adolescent developmental stages and the way culture interacts with experience were particularly relevant. They also considered theories about society and how young people participate in society, gain power, relate to other members of the community and attempt to solve problems.

Mia and Len reflected upon the methods associated with the organisation's chosen strategies of focus groups, preparing a resource booklet and hosting a launch event. They read widely on community change strategies and identified that the focus groups promoted citizen participation, and that the booklet was a means of public advocacy and popular education. They then researched best practice in these areas of intervention.

Lastly, Mia and Len addressed the outer circle of the Three Stage Theory Framework. They identified and accumulated their knowledge of organisational protocols, policies to protect participant and family privacy, appropriate processes for developing and sustaining networks, and how to support the confidentiality of their clients. They also identified the need to develop relationships with and between their stakeholders, including the police, hospitals, victim services, schools and young people. They developed and refined their skills of empathy, narrative building, writing, collecting and organising information, working with groups, managing their workload, presenting information visually and engaging with young people. Throughout the process, they identified the social work values essential to the project as respect for dignity, doing no harm, working collaboratively, empowering communities and promoting justice. Mia and Len's final conceptual map helped them make sense of their project and to plot their learning and achievements throughout the placement cycle.

CONCLUSION

Whilst students are regularly engaging in macro-practice tasks on field placement, there are not the visual models available to support theory–practice integration. This article provides an application of an existing model, the Three Stage Theory Framework, to macro tasks to support students to integrate their classroom and real world experiences. The next step is for this model's application to be empirically researched and evaluated with social work students and supervisors alike.

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