Finding a text for generalist social work practice is difficult. We search for one that is at once sufficiently broad yet detailed enough to be worthwhile for beginning students; one that links research with practice and evaluation without being too dry; one that incorporates ethical dilemmas and resolutions across practice situations and client problems as students must comprehend the realities of work in our field. We seek a book that captures a balance between the harnessing the strengths of positive coping with meeting the challenges of seriously troubled clients; one that covers the age span from childhood through adulthood; one that teaches students how to think critically and includes work with individuals, couples, families, and groups, the voluntary and the mandated. Clearly, diverse case examples are needed. While many authors have attempted to breach the gap in literature, few succeed. Author Tom O’Hare comes close in this newly released work *Essential Skills of Social Work Practice: Assessment, Intervention, and Evaluation*.

The author’s goal is provide a basic foundation practice text that serves as a bridge to more advanced interventions. This goal has been met. The book is divided into three parts. The first section details foundational building blocks of practice. Chapter one defines and links assessment, intervention, and evaluation stressing how research findings under-gird each practice component. The author details positive contributions and tandem limitations of prominent practice theories. As a reader, I found
particularly useful the section on using multiple sources of assessment including clinical rating scales and measurement tools. Here, the author provides a method for making sense of quantities of information through what he terms the Multidimensional Functional Assessment (MDF, see O’Hare, 2005). Chapter two elucidates the relationship between research and practice. The author does a particularly nice job of confronting and countering several myths, including the myth of the equanimity of theories and myths about evidence-based practice. As a professor, I found especially valuable the ten characteristics of social workers who think critically. Section One closes with an in-depth chapter on essential ethics in practice and links them to assessment, intervention, and methods of using research findings to avoid breaching ethical or legal practice. The depth of discussion on ethics, in particular, is welcomed and is unique to this foundational practice text.

Section Two covers essential practice skills including chapters on conducting the assessment and planning the evaluation, supportive skills, therapeutic coping skills, and case management skills. There are a number of strengths in this section. First, the author goes into some detail on methods of providing supportive counseling. Of particular note is the discussion on differences between working with voluntary and involuntary clients and practices for being supportive under both circumstances. Actual dialogue between clinician and client is given for each skill set. The therapeutic coping skills chapter relies heavily on cognitive and behavior methods while emotion-focused therapy is mentioned but not presented in the same depth. Finally, the chapter on case management is anything but dry.
Section Three takes on a tall order: applying combinations of essential skills with individuals, couples, children, and their families. The first chapter focuses on schizophrenia, mood, and anxiety disorders. Here again, skills given emphasize cognitive and behavioral treatment. In addition, while Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is briefly mentioned treatment application lacks sufficient depth for beginners to grasp sufficiently the pairing and phasing of treatments for this often highly troubling set of symptoms. I was impressed with the chapter on substance use and personality disorders (borderline and antisocial) as it is rare to find these areas covered in a foundation text. Excellent examples of comprehensive service plans are presented with case examples across problems, goals, objectives, interventions, and assessment and evaluation instruments. Motivational Interviewing and Dialectal Behavior Therapy are introduced; however, the student will need to consult another text for specific application of skills. Similar issues are present in the chapter on couples in conflict: heavily reliance on behavior models of couple’s therapy with some mention of Emotion-Focused Therapy (although delineation of associated skills is absent) and no mention of John Gottman’s empirically-based Sound Marital House approach. The book concludes with chapters on treatment of internalizing and externalizing disorders of childhood and adolescence. A final chapter is given on essential skills to evidence-based practices.

Thomas O’Hare has written a formidable foundation practice text that draws together many of the most important components of practice. The strongest points of this text include clear and concise presentation of charts, linking of human behavior theory, assessment, intervention, and evaluation within a research base; countering
myths, and inclusion of essential skills of working with clients who have troubling and often intransigent problems. While I would have liked to see inclusion of cases of homosexual clients, some mention of research findings on interpersonal neurobiology, more integration of diversity content within assessment and skills in essential methods, and more even coverage of various evidence-based practices, O'Hare’s book is a reliable evidence-based foundation practice text that meets the need of students working in a variety of challenging settings.

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