

# Reflections from the Editors: From Conception to Birth

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**Abstract:** This serves as the introduction to the special issue on micro and macro practice of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*.

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When the *Reflections* team contacted us, they asked if we might be interested in pulling together a special section focusing on macro practice. With Darlyne's role as co-chair of the national Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work, this request was a wonderful opportunity! Moreover, we had just begun working on an invited article for the Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers Summer 2016 newsletter. With a dedication to our profession's commitment to social justice, the thinking that went into that article, "The Horse and the Herd: Steadying the Shift Between Micro and Macro Direct Social Work Practice" (The Pennsylvania Social Worker, 2016), and Darlyne's work on the "Special Commission" (as it has lovingly come to be known), together formed the context for what you are about to read. Thanks to the outpouring of submissions, what had originally been designated as a section of a *Reflections* issue grew into its own special issue.

The Special Commission, sponsored by the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA), was formed in 2013 in response to the original 2012 Rothman Report. This report was a seminal piece in which Jack Rothman provided evidence to affirm the growing concerns regarding the place of macro practice in professional social work education and, therefore, practice. According to Rothman (2013), our profession's ability to address individual problems on a community and societal level has been "truncated." Thus, the work of the Special Commission remains rooted in the belief that "macro matters"—that social justice can only be completely attained when all are considered (individuals, families, groups, organizations, and their communities) through our direct practice with each and when we address the policies that impact them all.

Like you, members of the Special Commission—currently 30 commissioners, 100 investor schools and programs, and 320 allies—know that examples of injustice abound throughout the history of our country. While seemingly well-intended, the impact of national and state legislation that has ignored the interconnection and interdependence that exists among individuals and between them and the systems created to support them, has oftentimes been tragic. Examples would include: the consequences experienced by the people and their unprepared communities following deinstitutionalization and the closing of mental hospitals in the 1970s; the resultant race to the bottom from No Child Left Behind; the less-than-adequate, and even harmful, provisions for hurricane survivors and residents of communities largely comprised of women and people of color by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as state and social service entities; and the damage to us all from the continued realities of inequitable healthcare and a retributive (as opposed to restorative) justice system. These and

countless other examples are infamously well-known.

The good news is that the awareness of the need to move from espousing to enacting our profession's person-in-environment perspective is increasing, and not only among those of us whose base of service is in the social sector. We have kindred colleagues in for-profit and governmental institutions as well.

Listening to part of a recent conversation about this special issue with entrepreneurial businessman Richard 'Dick' Pieper, Sr. reminds us of this fact. Founded as Pieper Electric in 1947 by his father, Dick assumed the leadership of now PPC Partners, Inc. in 1961. With its branches and franchises in eight states across our country, communities who employ the services of PPC and its employees company-wide are very familiar with the Noble Experiment. This ambitious proposal in 1990 contended that the best leadership that a company could provide would be in "hiring and developing exceptional human beings who could do a better job than you, giving without expectations, receiving without expectations" (History of PPC Holdings Employee Ownership, p. 1). This ethos laid the foundation for this company to legally become employee owned in 2001. The Noble Experiment remains an integral part of the PPC culture, guiding its internal and external operations.

Dick is now the Non-Executive Chairman of PPC Partners, Inc. When asked what he does, Dick told us:

What I do from your macro sense is I grow oak trees. And unbeknownst to me, people say I now have a whole forest. More specifically, I work with people to develop their human capacity. In my words, to be all that the Lord would have hoped them to be, or is available to them, to make this a better world. (R. Pieper, personal communication, September 9, 2016)

When asked why he does this, Dick quickly responded:

It's a great place to be. I would say that 80-90% of the population in the world wants to be helpful for their fellow man. They just don't have examples of how to do it. The systems, the governments, all reflect Newtonian thinkers. Today's world has run way past that kind of thinking and that kind of education. But that's how most people are still programmed. Looking at life from that perspective is kind of crazy, complicated, and dysfunctional. And that's what we see in our society. If the leaders—formal and informal—could think in quantum, they would connect it all up. You wouldn't see it as a professional life, and a personal life, or a community life. You would say, "They have a life." (R. Pieper, personal communication, September 9, 2016)

Dick didn't stop there. He went on to tell us:

Unfortunately, the system itself thinks exactly in terms of what you describe this [special issue] to be in response to, even saying that "Social workers do this, society does that." Newtonian thinkers believe that they can do anything and solve anything: Give us enough

money, enough staff, we'll figure it out, when in actuality, every person is unique and the relationship of every person to where they are, where they live, the kind of air they breathe, the people they walk by during the day, who move up and down their street, who live in the apartment next to them are all unique. To think that you can organize this all in boxes is setting people up, and many of them lose. We're talking about a system that supports the people, enabling success or enabling failure. (Pieper, personal communication, September 9, 2016)

With social work colleagues and others like Dick in mind, our proposed call for submissions was both broad and focused, inviting "...narrative expositions and reflections from social work educators, practitioners, and others whose experiences have led to a deepened understanding of the need to attend to both the micro and macro aspects of our real world." Although not exactly what *Reflections* had in mind when we spoke, we went ahead and sent our proposal to Mike Dover, the editor and "chief cook and bottle washer" for this journal. His response was energizing and a relief. He wrote:

I must say, I was expecting a proposal for a, shall I say, more narrowly focused "Macro Matters" approach, calling for narratives on community organizing or social administration per se. But I am actually very pleased, as the issues you have raised are among those least developed in the social work literature. How better to examine them than via narrative and reflection? (M. Dover, personal communication, May 12, 2016)

With an abundance of enthusiasm and permission to reach out to those kindred spirits who may not identify as social workers, but whose lives—personal and professional—reflect the core values of our profession, our special issue was born.

### **Birth**

As shared earlier, in response to this call for proposals, we received numerous manuscripts from colleagues both within and outside of our profession. Manuscripts that were outside of the focus of this call were forwarded to the *Reflections* editor for possible inclusion in a 'general section' of the journal. Following the *Reflections* protocol, all submissions determined appropriate for this special issue then underwent blind peer reviews by two separate reviewers. Thanks to Mari Lynn Alschuler, Gary M. Bess, Shane Ryan Brady, Michael Dover, Jane Gorman, Monica Leisey, Beth Lewis, Kim Lorber, Florence Ellen Netting, Kelly K. Reinsmith-Jones, Alankaar Sharma, Marian Swindell, Lara Vanderhoof, and Victoria Winbush for serving as wonderfully thoughtful reviewers. Extra special thanks go to Lillian Wichinsky, who immediately accepted our invitation to be one of the two reviewers for all of the submissions we received. Amidst challenges that come with relocating to another state and joining another academic community, Lillie remained committed to providing reviews that were thorough and timely!

We also sought out and formally interviewed a dear colleague and friend, Frances Hesselbein, who is not a social worker by profession but, again, whose life well-aligns with our social work values. Collectively, the articles and this interview in this special issue reflect a range of individuals' perspectives and, more importantly, the different pathways that they have taken to

recognize the differences between micro-direct and macro-direct practice and the connections between them. Unlike the ordering of articles in most journals, we decided to share these with you in alpha-order using our colleagues' last names. While that starts us off with the Hesselbein interview by Darlyne, once we did this we thought it worked!

As we read these manuscripts, a series of juxtaposing themes emerged. To name just a few: both personal and professional transitions in moving from “either-or” to “both-and” perspectives in understanding the micro-macro relationship; transitions that were both smooth and clumsy and that occurred earlier or later in one's life; intuitive appreciations as well as explicit articulations of the realization that the real world actually bridges the academic micro-macro divide; and, as in the case of three of our authors, a deepened understanding of micro and macro connections through working with individuals and with animals. The existence of this call led several to recognize for the first time the dynamic interplay between ‘micro and macro’ in multiple areas of their lives; for others this opportunity in the *Reflections* journal affirmed long-held beliefs that were central to their personal lives and to their professional teaching and research.

Not surprisingly, our own work over the months of putting together this special issue mirrored some of these themes. Both of us have the roots of our professional education in micro/clinical social work. While Melissa chose that as her primary professional identity, Darlyne's doctoral education and unanticipated, yet greatly appreciated, leadership positions quickly propelled her into embracing a more macro professional identity. Our ying and yang—different yet interdependent—foci have always enriched our working relationship and, we believe, enhanced the quality of our final products. That said, for this special issue we will let you be the judge.

We hope that by the time you finish reading this issue, you will agree that the services provided by our profession are most effective and complete only when we work from an appreciation of the interconnectedness of micro- and macro-direct practice. Such an understanding is required to best address the needs of both ends of our professional client system—from individuals to communities—as well as the policies and procedures that are informed by and shape the lives of them all. In short, we trust that at the conclusion of this special issue you, too, will start to see micro and macro connections everywhere. We hope that you enjoy reading this special issue of *Reflections* as much as we did in bringing it to you. We look forward to hearing from you!

### **References**

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