

# Instructor Discussion Guide

*Teaching Person-in-Environment through advanced practice*

A drop-in companion for BSW and MSW faculty. Designed around the Person-in-Environment video and Maya walkthrough.

## AT A GLANCE

*What this guide includes and how to use it*

This guide is built around a single case (Maya) and a single framing principle: Chrono is a full PIE level, not an afterthought. It fits into a 60 to 90 minute class session and maps to the CSWE 2022 EPAS Competencies 2, 3, 7, and 8. You can use the full guide in one class, or pull individual sections for supervision, fieldwork seminar, or independent study.

### Suggested time blocks

- Pre-class preparation: 20 to 30 minutes (video and readings)
- Warm-up discussion: 10 minutes
- Small group work with Maya: 25 to 30 minutes
- Large group debrief: 15 to 20 minutes
- Post-class reflection or assessment: 20 to 30 minutes

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*What students should be able to do after class*

By the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Distinguish Micro, Mezzo, Macro, and Chrono as four equal levels of a PIE assessment, and explain why chrono is the most commonly missed level.
- Apply a Person-in-Environment lens to a real client presentation and identify details that belong to more than one level at once.
- Critique a micro-only formulation of a client's presenting concern and reframe it using all four PIE levels.
- Draft a treatment plan that names interventions at micro, mezzo, macro, and chrono levels, with clear ownership and timing.
- Connect PIE practice to CSWE EPAS Competencies 2, 3, 7, and 8, and to the NASW Code of Ethics (Standards 1.05, 6.01, and 6.04).

## PRE-CLASS PREPARATION

*Assign these before students arrive*

### Required

- Watch the Person-in-Environment video (The Social Work Progressive).

- Read the Maya walkthrough handout. Students should come in able to name at least one detail from each PIE level.
- Skim one recent peer-reviewed article on ecological systems theory or structural social work from the last ten years (see suggested readings).

### Pre-class reading questions

Students answer in writing (one paragraph each) and bring to class:

1. What is the difference between Micro, Mezzo, Macro, and Chrono in your own words? Give one example of a detail that could belong to more than one level.
2. In the video, Stephanie argues that chrono is usually treated as an afterthought. Where in your own practice or field placement have you seen chrono get missed?
3. What is one way your current field setting either supports or undermines a full PIE assessment?

## WARM-UP DISCUSSION

*10 minutes, full class*

Open with a quick whiteboard exercise. Write the four levels across the top of the board. Ask students to call out examples from their own field placement or case load that belong to each level. Your goal is not coverage, it is to show the class how quickly the micro column fills up and how slowly the chrono column does.

### Opening prompts

- When you hear the phrase Person-in-Environment, what do you picture? Has that image changed since Foundation year?
- Which PIE level do you feel least prepared to assess for? Why do you think that is?
- In your last three case notes, how often did you name something at the chrono level?

## SMALL GROUP EXERCISE: MAYA

*25 to 30 minutes, groups of 3 or 4*

Divide the class into small groups. Each group gets a copy of the Maya walkthrough (or uses their annotated version from pre-class). Assign each group ONE of the following tasks. After 20 minutes, groups report out for 1 minute each.

### Task A: The Flattened Note

Rewrite Maya's case as a single short paragraph a non-PIE clinician might write. Then compare it to the PIE formulation in the walkthrough. What specifically gets lost? What is clinically dangerous about the flattened version?

### Task B: The Missing Chrono

Identify every chrono-level detail in Maya's story. For each one, write a clinical implication that a chrono-blind clinician would miss. Then propose one intervention that addresses chrono explicitly.

### Task C: The Intersection Map

Find three details in Maya's story that belong to at least two PIE levels at once. For each, explain why the intersection matters more than either level on its own. What does that tell you about sequencing interventions?

#### Task D: The Systems You Actually Have

Look at the mezzo and macro sections of the treatment plan. Using your own local community as the reference, name specific agencies, benefits, or advocates you would actually call for Maya. What is realistic and what is aspirational? Why does that gap matter?

### LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF

*15 to 20 minutes*

Bring groups back together. Use the prompts below to keep the debrief focused and move it from case analysis to practice identity.

#### Debrief prompts

4. Where did the groups disagree about which level a detail belonged to? What does that disagreement tell you about how much judgment PIE requires?
5. What is the most common reason clinicians collapse PIE into micro, even when they know better?
6. How does a full PIE formulation change what you are accountable for as a clinician? What does it require of your agency and supervisor?
7. If you had to convince a skeptical supervisor that chrono deserves equal weight, what would you say?

### POST-CLASS ASSIGNMENT

*Choose one, due before the next class*

#### Option 1: PIE your current case

Take one client from your field placement (de-identified) and complete a full PIE assessment using the Clinical Assessment template. Write a 300 word reflection on which level was hardest to fill in and why.

#### Option 2: Chrono audit

Pull your last five case notes (de-identified). Count how many contain a chrono-level observation. Write a 300 word reflection on the pattern you see and what you would change going forward.

#### Option 3: Policy-to-practice memo

Pick one macro-level factor in your current practice setting (a benefits cliff, a policy change, a funding cut, a cultural shift). Write a one-page memo to a hypothetical new clinician explaining how that macro factor shows up in day-to-day client work, and what a PIE-competent response looks like.

### ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

*Simple three-level rubric for the post-class assignment*

Level	PIE coverage	Analytic depth
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<b>Developing</b>	Names micro and mezzo only, or treats chrono as background. Macro framed as context, not as a clinical variable.	Describes what the client is doing. Limited formulation. Weak connection between assessment and plan.
<b>Proficient</b>	Names all four PIE levels with specific details. Chrono treated as a real level. Some intersections identified.	Moves from description to formulation. Interventions map to at least three levels.
<b>Advanced</b>	All four levels fully developed with intersections. Chrono drives at least one clinical decision. Ethical and policy implications named.	Clear clinical reasoning. Interventions are sequenced. Reflection names the student's own blind spots.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

*Recent sources to pair with the video*

All citations are in APA 7 and published within the last ten years. Choose one or more to assign alongside the video.

- Hutchison, E. D. (2019). Dimensions of human behavior: Person and environment (6th ed.). Sage.
- Rogers, A. T. (2019). Human behavior in the social environment: Perspectives on development and the life course (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2022). Educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs. CSWE.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2021). Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. NASW Press.
- Teater, B. (2017). Social work practice from an ecological perspective. In C. L. Shehan (Ed.), The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies. Wiley.

## CSWE AND NASW ALIGNMENT

*Map this session to your syllabus*

### CSWE EPAS 2022 Competencies

- Competency 2: Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.
- Competency 3: Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice.
- Competency 7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
- Competency 8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

### NASW Code of Ethics (2021)

- Standard 1.05: Cultural competence (humility as an active clinical stance, not a trait).
- Standard 6.01: Social welfare (the practitioner's responsibility to the broader society).
- Standard 6.04: Social and political action (connecting the client's chart to the policies that shape it).