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(Re) Capturing the Wisdom of Our Tradition: The Importance of Reynolds and Towle in Contemporary Social Work Education

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Abstract
This article argues that social work education has distanced itself from founding principles articulated by Bertha Reynolds and Charlotte Towle in ways that compromise the professional development of the learner in social work education. The authors trace persistent and historical professional social work education themes and identify key changes that have contributed to threats to educational integrity, with particular attention to field education and supervisory practice. After identifying both positive and negative trends and challenges to the quality of field education, the authors examine implications for field supervision and its place in the overall educational environment.

Keywords Reynolds · Towle · Field education · Signature pedagogy · Social work education · CSWE · Supervision · Student learning · Clinical practice

Introduction

We start, rather, from a belief that life is infinitely varied, dynamic and changing, and that social work is, like any phenomenon which appears at some moment in history, an integral part of life. It can be understood only as it is seen in relation to all other living forces of its time, and only as its growth is traced through a past, in which it had significance, to the promise of its future.
(Reynolds 1942, p. 3).

As Bertha Reynolds asserted in her seminal *Learning and Teaching in the Practice of Social Work*, social work must be based upon explicit views of the nature of human life, including what it means to learn, as these views inform the dynamic relationship between the profession and the socio-historical context in which social work is practiced (Reynolds 1942). The expression of these views should be present not only in practice, but in the design and implementation of social work education. As our profession of social work has matured in tandem with new knowledge about human behavior and countless other "living forces" that comprise current practice and educational environments, our educational practice has failed to retain and to apply crucial insight into what conditions most support the development of students into professional social workers. The magnitude of this failure is exacerbated by the convergence of the simultaneous contemporary trends toward unquestioned greater reliance on technical scientific knowledge, and changes in the institutional context of social work education and the structural framework in which social work is practiced within the larger society.

The essential value of field education within the overall professional educational enterprise not only remains central, but has been formally elevated by the Council on Social Work Education to that of "signature pedagogy" (Council on Social Work Education 2008; Wayne et al. 2010). Yet, while many aspects of the role of the field instructor reflecting the primacy of the supervisor's relationship with the field student have remained constant (Bennett and Saks 2006; Bogo 2006; Collins 1993; Gitterman 1989; Greenwood 1995; Reynolds 1942; Stafford and Robbins 1991; Towle 1956), numerous changes in the structure and functioning of professional social work education have profoundly compromised the experience of students in ways that challenge the ability

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to ensure high quality field education and threaten students' developmental integrity as we once understood it.

This paper traces the history of key persistent issues in social work education, arguing for the importance of field education as one of three analytically distinct but functionally integrated features of a conceptually coherent educational process, a nuanced process that is based on attention to the complex and individual nature of professional development of the student. The authors draw on Reynolds' (1942) ideas regarding the "whole person" who learns; and on Towle's (1956) conceptual framework placing the field experience, including the pivotal supervisory relationship, in connection with more distal but deeply unified classroom and administrative environments constituting concentric circles of an organic model of professional social work education. Further, the authors contend that there is an urgent need to more fully integrate an explicitly developmental understanding of the learner within these multiple levels and to incorporate these elemental insights into contemporary field educational and supervisory practice. The authors identify several consequential aspects of the current institutional context of social work education, including both those that represent advancement and those that militate against optimal fulfillment of the objectives of field education, with special attention to supervision. We conclude with implications for educational supervisory practice and call for the profession to address these concerns.

Background: Persistent Educational Issues

Just as Flexner's challenge to social workers in 1915 continues to reverberate as enduring unease regarding our professional stature, the earliest questions about the appropriate objectives of social work education and how educational programs should be organized to achieve these objectives seem hauntingly familiar, remaining relevant today in discussions of general social work, specifically field education (Flexner 1915).

In his review of Alice Salamon's defense of the "Soziaen Frauenshulen, that is schools of social work for women" in 1928, Hans Scherpner observed that the result of the "expansion and the increase of charitable measures" of the era was that, "The problems connected with social service training have grown increasingly more numerous during recent years" (Scherpner 1928, p. 555). As new schools of social work were established in quick succession in a process of "mushroom-like expansion" (Eubank 1928, p. 264) in the United States following the first fulltime program established by Simmons College and Harvard University in 1904, scholars began describing and categorizing features of their varied institutional arrangements and curricula (AASW 1929). In one such project, Earl Eubank reported that among the 39 schools then "giving training for social work in the United States and Canada,"

> In a word, we may say that up to the present time there is no agreement among the schools as to: (1) the content of the class work curricula, (2) the content of field work, (3) the amount of the class work, (4) the amount of the field work, (5) the relative proportion of class and field work, (6) the nature and extent of field supervision (Eubank 1928, p. 271).

Taking stock of the place of social work subsequently in the wake of the Depression, the University of Chicago's Sophonisba Breckinridge argued in favor of the growing commitment to the 2-year program of professional education for social work. She identified the emerging place of social workers in the realm of "public welfare" and the implications for social work education in these "new horizons" (Breckinridge 1936, pp. 437, 441). Her research-based analysis revealed that while programmatic details continued to vary among schools, there was, nevertheless, growing agreement regarding the "combination of teaching in the field and teaching in the classroom" and the need to "individualize the student as well as the client," within a "generalized, as over against the specialized" curriculum (Breckinridge 1936, pp. 442, 443). She specified "three directions" that would be achieved within this evolving model of social work education:

> (1) in their capacity to establish the kinds of relationships with persons needing treatment out of which constructive treatment may be expected to emerge—this is the field-work job; (2) in being made aware of the bases of treatment in the mental, physical, and social factors determining the treatment of the individual case; this is the object of the courses in case-work, child-welfare, psychiatric, and medical information; and (3) by definite examination of the public organization and community relationship, together with special studies of institutional development such as makes possible the use of existing resources and the swift discovery or creation of new resources (Breckinridge 1936, p. 447).

As the profession of social work consequently experienced shifts in its practice paradigms, so did schools of social work respond and contribute to those shifts in their curricula, all the while becoming more deeply rooted in their academic institutional contexts. Various leading schools adopted distinct theoretical orientations with distinct curricular manifestations evident in, for example the contrasts between the emphasis on "broad social science education and research" at University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration and the more specialized casework curriculum developed by Porter Lee at the New York School

(Dore 1999; Meier 1954; Shoemaker 1998). Nevertheless, common themes appeared in the educational discourse, themes that bore some fundamental answers to continuing questions about ultimate objectives and methods of social work education.

Primary among these shared perspectives was that, as Gordon Hamilton asserted, "The professional school certainly does not exist for mere imparting of knowledge or mere opportunities for research. It must exist—its main function must be—to produce people who know how to put together effectively knowledge and experience" (Hamilton 1942, p. 223). She observed that these principles were being undermined by lack of attention to basic educational principles. She suggested that, for example, the "startling differences" among schools in requirements for field work, ranging from 225 to over 900 h, should be resolved with close consideration of the sequence of learning over 2 years, of the individual student's growth and the overall curriculum. In Hamilton's explication of how the second year of a 2-year curriculum might thus graduate autonomous professionals she asserted that,

> I cannot overemphasize that *planning* (emphasis in original) educational sequences should not mean that a given student must *always* (emphasis in original) follow such sequences. Learning is not a mere accumulation of knowledge, and never knowledge in one precise order, but is growth in understanding. For professional students, however, growth must be in a given direction. The several aspects of growth—greater assurance with techniques, greater ability to relate one's self with other persons and groups in a socialized development, identifying and forwarding the aims of social work in the larger world—must all be effectively integrated (Hamilton 1942, p. 217).

Just 2 years later, in a paper presented at the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social Work in Indianapolis, Hamilton expressed concern that in regard to educational practices that would yield "mature skill," professional education was moving in the opposite direction. She observed that, "The pendulum everywhere in education has been swinging far over to technique, and I suspect that the emphasis of the postwar education will be even more sharply technical and vocational… and we shall grow thinner and more superficial in essential competence" (Hamilton 1944, p. 150). At the same conference, Frank Bruno, while congratulating the profession on its unmistakable steady progress, amplified Hamilton's general worry over trends in social work education. He enumerated five "special problems" facing social work education as it was developing: the graduate versus the undergraduate level, and their relative place in the profession; instructors, referring to the qualifications and fulltime versus part-time

employment status of teachers; the sources of financial support of schools, with particular reference to the risks of relying primarily on tuition rather than endowments; the overall function and organization of field work in the curriculum; and, as an overarching focus, the "perennial conflict" over whether professional education should be preparing practitioners for "specific tasks" or generalized "professional competency" (Bruno 1944). Bruno, Hamilton, and their colleagues at this anniversary conference likely would have been gratified to know how far social work education has progressed in so many respects, particularly in rising dramatically to the persistent call for growth in research-based knowledge for the profession and the entrenchment of social work in the modern university; and yet they would have been dismayed to know not only how constant these problems remained, how prescient their concerns were, how little their wisdom was heeded, and some of the consequences that have ensued.

Seeing It Whole: The Learner in Reynolds' Point of View About Social Work

To this fertile discussion regarding momentous questions posed by leading educators, Bertha Reynold contributed a seminal treatise proposing how individuals move through the stages of development from student to professional social worker. Reynolds began with the premise that, independent of the always-changing contours of practice that occur in diverse cultural contexts, "…social work is a part of life. Learning is also a part of life. It *is* (emphasis in the original) life, not only preparing to live. Just as living involves the whole person, so does learning" (Reynolds 1942, p. 57). What is assumed in that premise informs a detailed set of principles for programs of professional education that includes a clear charge for fieldwork and supervision.

Although Reynolds vigorously supported the need to further the scientific grounding of social work practice, she believed that practice was equally an art as a science. In the context of professional education, "Learning an art, which is knowledge applied to doing something in which the whole person participates, cannot be carried on solely as an intellectual process…" (Reynolds 1942, p. 69). The cultivation of these artistic and scientific capacities requires careful construction of field education that provides each students direct experience in "real agencies," supervised by a social worker who "picks up the scattered threads of the real experience and weaves them into something intelligible to the student"; but with due acknowledgement that both field agencies and supervisors are responsible for far more than professional education. In this organizational context, then, schools of social work must be responsible for developing curriculum, for helping students integrate theoretical and practical knowledge and, most urgent in her estimation, for

"adequate training for supervisors in teaching social work under field conditions" (Reynolds 1942, p. 144).

Reynolds rested her complex scheme of education on the supposition that students are "biological organisms that must survive and eat and find their mates" and who bring these and other universal human urges and needs to the educational enterprise (Reynolds 1942, p. 68). Learning to be a social worker requires new knowledge not only about the external world but about one's self, in ways that are likely to challenge current self-understanding and familiar patterns of adaptation in emotional as well as intellectual dimensions. Thus, teachers must be aware of the range of complex emotional, psychological, biological and social aspects of change that occurs as the whole person learns. The particular configuration of these elemental aspects varies among students but must be activated and directed by carefully planned educational experiences through a generalized process that results in common capacities for professional practice.

The underlying process of professional education is one of deliberate development of "conscious intelligence and learning" as applied to the mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill the particular requirements of the profession. Reynolds posited five stages of "the use of conscious intelligence" as this type of learning occurs and the corresponding primary role of the teacher, particularly the field instructor. The first stage is "acute consciousness of self," akin to "stage fright" when students may feel paralyzed by fear and thus focus exclusively on their own needs. At this initial stage, the teacher must provide security and assurance that the student possesses a basic adequacy that provides foundation for further learning. After overcoming this initial fear, students enter the stage of "sink-or-swim adaptation" during which focus remains on the self but they discover, perhaps by chance, appropriate responses that the teacher should reinforce through encouragement to further develop the "spontaneous" action. Assuming these actions are productive, students move into the third stage of "understanding the situation without power to control one's activity in it." This entails a "concomitant release of energy" from being solely focused on the self to "freedom to study the situation as it is," that is, the introduction of more truly conscious intelligence in responding to clients and their needs. The teacher's responses at this stage are particularly significant in influencing students' abilities to develop further, remain at this level, or become too discouraged to take further risks to grow. Reynolds believed many social workers never develop beyond the third stage; but under optimal educational circumstances and with personal capacity, a student achieves the fourth "stage of relative mastery, in which one can both understand and control one's activity in the art which is learned." At this developmental level of practice, the student or worker "has become professional in that he can apply knowledge to the solving of practice problems,

using himself as an instrument, with all his acquired skills and his emotional responses, disciplined and integrated to the professional purpose" (Reynolds 1942, p. 81). At this stage, one is able to practice with full autonomy with, if possible, continuing supervision designed to maintain a high level of functioning and incorporate new forms of expertise. Beyond this advanced stage of professionalism is the fifth stage when one desires to "teach what one has mastered," at which point we find not only interest in classroom teaching but the desire to serve as a field supervisor of social work students.

Reynolds' framework suggests a path toward an ideal of professional maturity. However, successful movement along this path unequivocally requires that the educational experience be designed in response to those factors that affect how and how quickly each student moves through the stages. Although Reynolds provides a thorough analysis of how the curricular, pedagogic, and organizational elements of the educational program intersect to produce this optimal circumstance, the field work supervisor is paramount in her capacity to provide individualized opportunities to guide the student's development. Reynolds lodges in this relationship between supervisor and student the ultimate responsibility to serve as the "catalytic agent which makes possible the acceptance and use of what would otherwise be to the students or workers a body of knowledge too remote to be of interest, too theoretical to be applied, or too threatening to be endured" (Reynolds 1942, p. 203). In short, it is through direct field supervision that all elements of professional education are animated.

Towle and the Learner in Education for the Professions: The Whole School Teaches

If Reynolds provided insight into the educational developmental trajectory of social work students from the perspective of the individual learner as an organic being, Charlotte Towle expanded the contextual breadth of our understanding in her 1956 classic, *The Learner in Education for the Professions: As Seen in Education for Social Work* (Towle 1956). Consistent with Reynolds' theoretical focus on the importance of the self for practice,

> In professional education, we have the common obligation to impart certain essential knowledge and to conduct our educational processes so that they are a means to personality growth. Only thus may the student become free imaginatively to consider, understand, and relate to the needs, wants, and strivings of those whom he is to serve. Our educational systems must strengthen the student's integrative capacity, thus reinforcing his potentials for growth in that learning

may proceed rather than become constricted or break down (Towle 1956, p. ix).

Towle's rich scholarship drew on a widely multi-disciplinary array of social scientific and psychological theories and empirical studies to chart the direction of successful professional learning. Foreshadowing the work of Ripple (1964) on conditions for successful outcomes in casework, Towle asserted that, "Outcomes of learning hinges on three sets of factors that are continuously interrelated—the individual's motivation, his capacity, and the opportunity afforded him to attain his aims" (Towle 1956, p. 86).

Though limited space prevents explication of Towle's ideas about what constitutes appropriate motivation and capacity for professional development, she reminds us that unless students are basically "socially educable," no educational design will yield qualified professional social workers. She describes the educable student in the context of professional social work education as one who:

> …enters the field with a readiness to grow into carrying the responsibilities of a mature adult; in fact, this educational situation immediately exerts pressure for him to mature rapidly. He must act beyond his years. Furthermore, in social work he must meet the dependency needs of people in trouble, individuals whose years and experiences of life's realities are beyond his years and experience. He must meet the impact of their emotions objectively and helpfully. He must tuck under, against the day when he truly outgrows them, the many biases, prejudices, emotional convictions, which still have great value for him personally…. The significant conclusions of all this are: The student in this field is having to undergo at rapid tempo basic change in his feeling and thinking under heavy demands frequently at a vulnerable age (Towle 1948, p. 313).

Few issues of professional education remain as contentious as who should be admitted to schools of social work and how suitability should be assessed; however, let us proceed with examining Towle's ideas with the acknowledgment that this question is in critical need of resolution by contemporary educational leaders.

Assuming, then, that the learner is educable, the instructional program must be designed with explicit attention to the developmental needs of the learner in relation to the demands of the profession:

> From the standpoint of the principles of stability, of economy, and of progression in learning, the demands of professional education at times threaten the intactness of the self or ego, present heavy reliance on automatic learning for mastery, and depleted energy. As a result, intense feelings and intense emotions at times

stretch the integrative capacity to the utmost. To maintain stability of the personality, in the interest of its economy and in order that energy may be available for more than marginal learning, the student will need the help afforded through an educational process in which his need to learn in certain ways is met (Towle 1956, p. 51).

Analogous to the professional relationship in practice, the educational relationship lies at the heart of change (see Perlman 1979, for more complete conceptualization of this principle) in a desired direction, characterized by Towle as "a means to pattern the conduct of professional relationships and a determinant in the outcome of learning" (Towle 1956, p. 135). Through positive educational relationships, the educable student is helped to meet the many demands on her integrative capacity.

For full professional development to occur, multiple educational relationships must function in a holistic and developmentally oriented organizational context that exist for a definite purpose with the student at the center. This context comprises the "school as an organic whole" encompassing three levels of educational relationships (Towle 1956, p. 138) operating in concentric circles representing relative distance from the student learner.

As Fig. 1 illustrates, at the center of this concentric model rests the learner in education. Closest to the learner are field supervisors who provide the "core experience" that is the "major determinant of the student's development" (Towle 1956, p. 138). This is, functionally, the most powerful of educational relationships because:
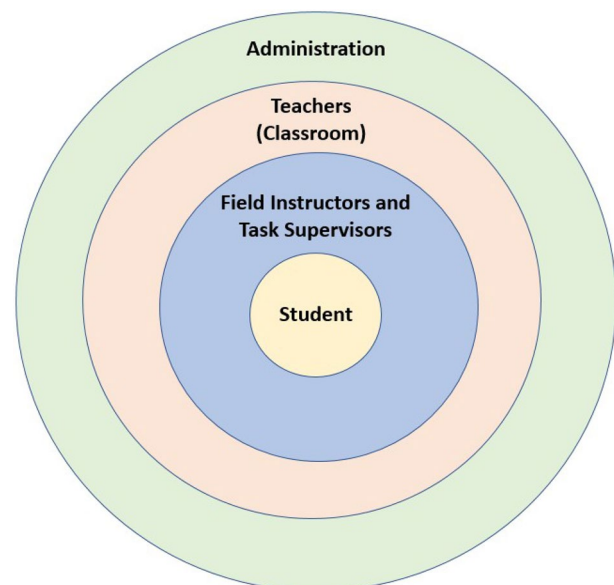

Fig. 1 Organic whole: social work educational system

Since the demands of the field from the very start, proceed at faster tempo than learning can be implanted in the classroom, the field-work supervisor is helping the student when he most needs support, through supplementing the classroom instruction. Throughout his training she will be most closely engaged with him, as he undergoes change, as he ambivalently resists and accepts the total learning. The nature of his relationship is decisively important for the student's initial orientation to and continued use of the school as a whole (Towle 1956, p. 139).

At the next level outward from the supervisory relationships are classroom teachers who provide the greatest part of the intellectual stimulus for growth. Naturally, "There will be great variation in their import for a given student, depending upon the subject matter in relation to the student's interest and aptitude, as well as upon the personality factor and the methods used" (Towle 1956, p. 139). The very fact that social work educators continue to devote significant effort to parsing the nuances of how pedagogy and content are best designed to effect desired outcomes among students affirms both the importance of classroom learning environment and, perhaps, that there may be many different legitimate ways to achieve any given outcome.

The most distal—and unfortunately, today, least considered—level of a coherent educational environment is "the school as an institution, represented in the administration" (Towle 1956, p. 139). The administration represents to students the final educational authority, those who "set requirements, who are responsible for the whole beneficent or iniquitous system, and who finally pass judgment on him *in toto*" (Towle 1956, p. 139). For Towle, these relationships most commonly occur with individual advisors, field and classroom faculty and administrators who often fulfill multiple roles simultaneously. Functionally, when students are afforded opportunities to participate in governance and other organized activities they gain expertise important for agency practice. Beyond these opportunities, however, we should include the potential for learning that inheres in the many ways students interact with various administrators and staff as they move through their program of study.

The ultimate meaning of the administrative level of the organic educational environment, like that of the other two levels beyond the student core, lies not in its specific features, which surely have and will continue to vary among schools; rather, it is through the integration of all three levels into a coherent whole, a consistent, consciously-devised, and always educationally-centered learning environment that students have the greatest opportunity to embark successfully on the complex demanding process of becoming mature social workers. Though the nature and the strength of the relationship with any aspect of this whole organism varies

from student to student, changes over time and with personal and organizational circumstances, it is critical that students experience a sense of "oneness" in the form of shared philosophies, values, aims, and purpose of social work education. Educators should be aware that, finally, "their teaching, helping, and administering relationship with the student determines in large measure his very capacity to work purposefully with people in ways appropriate to the profession, with in the helping relationship between worker and client, in collaborative ways with colleagues, or in his relationship with subordinates and persons in authority within the agency hierarchy" (Towle 1956, p. 141). In other words, these multi-level educational relationships working inextricably hand-in-hand together form the crucible and engine of professional social work education.

Whither the Wisdom: The Current State

There is no evidence that social work educators explicitly or deliberately rejected the validity of the educational principles explicated by Reynolds or Towle. However, the following decades saw movement away from schools incorporating a strong guiding focus on the range of developmental needs of learners in direct relation to the demands of advanced practice. The vigorous debates found in the *Milford Report* (Work 1929), and later in the *Hollis and Taylor Report* (1951), in *Social Work* in Bartlett's *Ways of Analyzing Social Work Practice* (1958) and Gordon's *A Critique of the Working Definition of Social Work* (1962) and other important analyses emerged from the profession's growing desire for clearer definitions of professional purpose and shared knowledge. While certain debates live on—for example whether social work education should have a generalist or a specialized focus (Leighninger 1980)—the establishment of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) in 1952 marked a collective commitment both to define more closely and to oversee implementation of prevailing educational standards.

With the enhanced professionalization of social work came increasing pressure to delineate the best way to educate and to assess graduate students. Since its inception as the accrediting body of social work programs, CSWE has shifted its evaluative framework, fluctuating between focusing on students achieving competencies and on meeting program objectives. Following an early emphasis on developing learning experiences designed to meet learning objectives influenced by Ralph Turner, CSWE adopted competency-based education (CBE) as a framework for curriculum and assessment for social work programs (Arkava and Brennan 1976). CBE—then, as now—was intended to ensure the development of proficient social workers as well as the economic viability of professional educational programs. Arkava and Brennen struck a remarkably contemporary note in observing that, "as funding for all phases of higher

education becomes more difficult to secure, educators are more pressured to justify their programs in competition for dwindling dollars" (Arkava and Brennan 1976, p. 6).

The assessment framework employed by CSWE shifted from 2001 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) emphasizing program objectives and educational outcome back to assessment of practice competencies in 2008 (Holloway 2009). According to the 2001 CSWE EPAS, "Graduates of baccalaureate and master's social work programs demonstrate the capacity to meet the foundation objectives and objectives unique to the program. Graduates of master's social work programs also demonstrate the capacity to meet advanced program objectives" (Council on Social Work Education 2001, p. 7). In contrast, 2008 CSWE EPAS stated, "The BSW curriculum prepares its graduates for generalist practice through mastery of the core competencies. The MSW curriculum prepares its graduates for advanced practice through mastery of the core competencies augmented by knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration" (Council on Social Work Education 2008, p. 3).

The most recent accreditation standards in 2015 reflect a movement toward re-integrating more deeply the centrality of the learner in the understanding of competence. Bogo and others have contributed to this focus by distinguishing "meta competence" from "procedural competence" (Bogo et al. 2006, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014a, b). Bogo et al. suggest two "inter-related dimensions" of holistic competence that incorporate the crucial capacity for reflection:

One dimension, meta-competence, refers to higher order, overarching qualities and abilities of a conceptual, interpersonal, and personal/professional nature. This includes students' cognitive, critical, and self-reflective capacities. The second dimension, procedural competence, refers to performance and the ability to use procedures in various stages of the helping process and includes the ability to form a collaborative relationship, to carry out assessment, and to implement interventions with clients and systems (Bogo et al. 2013, p. 260).

This multi-dimensional understanding of what characteristics comprise professional competence informs current accreditation standards:

EPAS recognizes a holistic view of competence; that is, the demonstration of competence is informed by knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations (Council on Social Work Education 2015, p. 6).

Does this statement suggest that we have, indeed, recaptured essential ideas about what is required of professional education and of the mature practitioner, incorporating the need for greater accountability into a truly learner-centered framework? Despite this positive trend we seem, in some respects, nearly to have abandoned the interest in and capacity to focus closely on the "catalytic" power that resides in the relationship between supervisor and field student that is so integrally part of a coherent educational program in which all aspects of development are attended to and reinforced at all points of contact with students. Our preoccupation with measuring competence has left us less confident in our ability to take account of the dynamic and undeniably more internal features of individual learners' professional development, as the 2015 CSWE EPAS currently requires. Consequently, then, in the wake of the long absence of close attention to the whole learner in the profession we must re-create educational conditions that result in social workers whose personal and professional development are evident in both meta- and procedural competence.

The flourishing literature on supervision in social work education both supports the multidimensional framework of 2015 CSWE EPAS and confirms the importance of Reynolds' and Towle's insights into the nature of professional development through reflection (e.g., Dewane 2006; Davys and Beddoe 2009), use of clinical supervision (e.g., Strozier et al. 2000; Bogo 2006) and supervision in field education (e.g., Bogo et al. 2004; Bogo 2006, 2015).

At the same time, however, numerous characteristics of contemporary higher education and its larger context challenge our ability to act on that insight consistently. The economically-driven pressures to increase student enrollment (Karger and Stoesz 2003); to retain and treat students as "consumers" rather than as learners, sometimes without regard to their educability or suitability to practice with vulnerable clients; to measure faculty success more in terms of gaining external funding for research and correspondingly less in terms of teaching; to replace tenure-track with adjunct, part-time or clinical faculty who may be excellent instructors but typically do not have equivalent curricular holistic perspective or support from the administration; and to accept insufficiently critically on-line education: these are just some of the current challenges in providing optimal learning environments for learners, despite the holistic emphasis of CSWE 2015 EPAS. These trends often place increased, in some respects undue responsibility on field instructors to compensate for some of the serious shortcomings students may face in the classroom and administrative settings in their schools.

Although there are many potential positive as well as negative consequences (see Table 1) to social work's shifting professional education landscape (Bennett and Coe 1998; Bogo 2006, 2015; Burke et al. 1999), Bogo and others observe that the development of the learner often is not the primary focus of professional social work education. Below we identify a number of these trends and suggest both their

Table 1 Positive and negative consequences of contemporary trends affecting quality of field education

Contemporary trends	Positive consequences	Negative consequences	Recommendations to CSWE and schools for improving social work field education
Increased emphasis on research in schools of social work with particular emphasis on funding	• Increased number of social work researchers • Discovery of discipline-specific knowledge, e.g. regarding vulnerable people and evidence about practice effectiveness • Generation of external resources to support schools • Increased collaboration with other disciplines	• Less faculty engagement in classroom teaching • Less faculty engagement in field education • More adjuncts or part-time instructors • Shift of institutional resources away from teaching mission including field education	• Reintegrate full-time and tenure-track faculty into field education as liaisons, offsite supervisors, and field seminar instructors • Integrate field education models into research grants, with faculty as liaisons, working with field faculty
Proliferation of online programs	• Structural flexibility for the learner • Some schools of social work generate greater revenue • Accommodates different learning styles	• Lack of face to face contact between learners and instructors • Many are more expensive • Field education is often treated as a student service rather than as part of the curriculum and has been contracted out to for-profit entities • Less ongoing intimate contact with students threatens field educational function as a professional gatekeeper • Less ability to monitor quality and rigor of field placement when liaison visits are only online	• Set more specific standards regarding profiteering in social work programs that financially exploit social work students • Define more explicitly how field education is an integral part of the curriculum for each school of social work • Set more specific implicit and explicit standards for online programs
Fewer faculty as field educators	• Saves money for institutions • Allows faculty to focus on research	• Threatens vertical and horizontal integration of curriculum • Creates challenge to integrate theory into practice • Diminishes relationship between field and classroom • Research generated by faculty often is not shared with practice community and students	• Reclassify staff as permanent faculty in field education • Create more faculty field positions • Provide equitable resources for field education vis-a-vis other elements of the curriculum by each school of social work • Set more specific standards for field education teaching ratios and provide a resource allocation for field education that reflects its importance
Lack of oversight of field supervision	• Flexibility for institutions in how they define and structure field supervision	• Flexibility allows schools to allocate fewer resources to field education than is necessary to ensure educational integrity • Lack of high quality supervision threatens development of learner into a professional social worker • Develops poor future social work supervisors in a downward cycle over future generations	• Develop more specific supervision requirements for the student learner, field supervisor, and liaison

Table 1 (continued)

Contemporary trends	Positive consequences	Negative consequences	Recommendations to CSWE and schools for improving social work field education
Increase in administrative personnel, often not social workers, in large universities with greater division of functions	• Relieves faculty of administrative duties • Intended to increase organizational efficiency	• Creates greater difficulty in maintaining consistent expression of educationally focused administrative responses to students and others • Lack of knowledge and integration of the Code of Ethics and social work principles across administrative functions • Communicates that social workers are poor managers	• Set requirements that leadership positions within schools of social work should at a minimum hold the terminal MSW degree, like the field instructor requirement
Less assessment of students' readiness and educability in admissions and retention	• Greater accessibility to professional social work education • Consistent with contemporary norms ensuring legal rights of applicants and students	• Less focus on the educability of learner in field education • Greater pressure on the field education unit to provide specialized aid to students who lack maturity or receive substandard supervision in field and in the institution • Graduates may enter field without meeting requirements of autonomous practice	• Set more specific standards for determining readiness for field education and post masters practice • Enhance direct measurement requirements to include assessment of readiness to move from foundation to advanced level of practice • Define standards and evidence regarding what constitutes educability and readiness • Move all field education courses to a graded system rather than pass/fail to strengthen gatekeeping and protect future clients

positive and negative consequences relevant to achieving a more holistic competency model necessary to attend to all aspects of professional learning.

What Is at Stake: Implications for Field Education, Supervision, and Professional Education

The farther away we move from the developmental needs of students without defining how programs might accomplish this as the guiding core of social work education in a comprehensive educational environment, the greater the risk of fulfilling Gordon Hamilton's prediction of our profession becoming ever thinner and more superficial in essential competence. Each cohort of students that enters the field without having the benefit of an intentional relationship with a field supervisor whose educational focus includes the complex processes necessary for mature use of self and ability to attend foremost to the needs of her clients poses two profound threats to our professional integrity: first, the inability to function effectively in the service of client well-being; and second, the inability to carry on these essential qualities through providing excellent field supervision to subsequent generations.

While the changes noted here and other recent developments in social work education bring undeniable benefits to our professional practice, we are remiss in failing to assess honestly their costs as well. The authors suggest that professional social work educators step back and re-commit ourselves to the core purpose of schools of social work paying greater heed to the wisdom that has been lost but finding increasing acceptance through 2015 CSWE EPAS and operationalized through such strategies as objective structured clinical examinations; that is, to educate professional learners through conceptually coherent and consistent relationships among and between levels of administration, faculty, and field supervisors acting in concert with common objectives (Bogo et al. 2011).

The field supervisor, by virtue of the nature the learning situation, has the most immediate and intimate knowledge of the student's particular stage of development as defined, for example by Reynolds. While it may be unrealistic—and unnecessary—to expect classroom teachers to possess a similarly detailed knowledge of each student, it is realistic to expect teachers to understand the centrality of relationship in practice, and both model and offer students an experience of a positive working relationship in the classroom. Similar to social workers, teachers have individual styles that inform their interactions in class; and, as Towle observes, different course material lends itself to different types of teaching. Yet fundamentally, students benefit from experiencing varied but generally positive relationships with their faculty. In this sense, classroom teachers are also practitioners, and in so practicing they are reinforcing the relational capacity

that is being more closely developed with the field supervisor. Another example of how classroom teachers reinforce the work of field teachers is through the curricular content, including assignments that can enhance or be largely irrelevant to what students are learning in field. This is an obvious point, but its significance lies not in the content per se, but in the expectation always to be motivated by conscious educational purpose with reference to the rest of the educational environment with particular attention to the need to apply knowledge in field as directed and assessed by the field supervisor.

Perhaps less obvious but equally important is the potential for administrative functions to contribute directly to professional development even when the focus of interaction is not field related. For, what Gambrill characterizes as the ascendency of "bureaucracy and managerialism run amok" across organizational settings also occurs in academic institutions seen, for example in the 47% increase in university administrators in contrast to only a 14% increase in faculty in recent years (Gambrill 2014, p. 405). One corollary of increased administrative presence is a shift in perspective regarding the appropriate stance with students. Many institutions of higher learning now expect that educational experiences should be especially responsive to in the context of generational patterns of students' sense of "entitlement" as "customers" and with particular due consideration of their emotional and other vulnerabilities. While these qualities are, of course, not equivalent in any sense, they suggest a contemporary tendency to distance ourselves from responding to students' needs primarily in reference to the requirements of professional developmental maturity as the overriding criterion for educational choices. Rather than attempting to shape students' responses to the educational demands of social work, often there is implicit, if not explicit, administrative pressure to accept students' developmental features as givens. Such educational practices may serve the interests of the institution in terms of reaching targets of recruitment and retention and avoiding conflict, but they often do not serve the interests of the students' professional development and thus those of their clients currently in their field settings or their future clients.

A common example of such potential tensions in organizational priorities occurs when students manifest behaviors that are not consistent with such maturity or functional capacity such as substance use or poor academic performance. In these situations, administrators can serve the cause of enhancing professional development by providing appropriate support and care within the context of a demand for work as a supervisor would in field. Resolution of students' difficulties in performance thus must include balanced consideration of how to help students succeed in the context of meeting educational expectations as the ultimate value. When problems are addressed with such dual focus, students

receive consistent messages about norms of professional conduct while benefiting from a caring relationship.

Without the type of coordination and consistency suggested above, the field supervisor can be cast as the primary or even sole source of the specific kind of educational experience that is essential for the social work student to mature sufficiently to graduate with reasonable competence in the short run and the foundation upon which later growth can occur. The time for mitigating the risks discussed here by more explicit attention to field education within the larger educational system is apropos, with the development of accreditation standards for 2022.

With each institutional and educational compromise we make without reference to learners' developmental needs consistent with the kind of deep learning that occurs in supervision, the more likely it is that the next generations of professional social work educators will possess less capacity to provide field supervision and other forms of teaching that are required for graduates to achieve professional excellence. The wisdom that Reynolds and Towle provided must be recaptured, elaborated, and applied widely and consistently to ensure greater success in achieving the missions of social work that have animated the commitment to our profession for so long and that continue to draw hopeful students to our doors today. What is at stake, in short, is our future as a profession.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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