

The author discusses the role of the field instructor as an agent of socialization into the social work profession. A self-assessment profile is presented to help students and field instructors identify their physical and personality attributes as well as their cognitive styles.

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THE ROLE OF THE FIELD INSTRUCTOR is to help students achieve greater self-awareness so that the students can work more effectively with clients. The shaping of appropriate professional behavior in students is a difficult task for both new and experienced field instructors. They often seek guidance on this matter in seminars and workshops.

Because the boundaries between personal and professional identity inevitably blur in teaching, learning, and helping situations, field instructors must encourage students to think about how their personal identity affects their role as a practicing professional. Becoming a social worker involves more than mastering a body of knowledge and skills. The process of education in the social work profession includes reorganization of self-image and crystallization of role expectations and new behavior patterns as well as the acquisition of new technical skills.¹ The field instructor's role is to help students with this important transformation.

The recognition of personal identity is a vital first step in the formation of professional identity. Because the person of the worker is a crucial component in the helping process, the worker must know him- or herself in order to reduce subjective

response and to increase actions that are deliberate, disciplined, and consciously directed to serve the client's best interests.² Although most social workers believe that self-awareness contributes to effective practice, the professional literature provides little guidance on how to develop self-awareness in social work students. Field instructors typically deal with this matter on a case-by-case, student-by-student basis by transferring and adapting their practice skills to their teaching methods. However, this transposition of practice skills with teaching methods can be risky: field instructors are admonished repeatedly not to "case work" or "therapize" their students.³ Many professionals fear to trespass inadvertently on the forbidden territory of the student's psyche in the process of encouraging appropriate self-reflection.

This caveat directs field instructors to focus on aspects of the student's personality or work style only when the student's work with a client appears to be faltering. Field instructors, therefore, delay such personal discussions until they can document repetitive patterns or themes in the student's work. Unfortunately, the well-meaning avoidance of "therapeutic" super-vision frequently results in insufficient attention to the student's personality and cognitive characteristics, both of which are significant to the development of a professional persona. Many students discover the impact of their personal style on clients only after trial-and-error experience culminates in failure.

The personal characteristics and individual learning style of students should

² Alfred Kadushin. *Supervision in Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 153.

³ Charlotte Towle. *The Learner in Education for the Professions*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1954, p. 89; and Kadushin, *Supervision in Social Work*, pp. 152-54.

receive routine and systematic attention in field instruction, regardless of whether the student is having difficulties. When the student's personal characteristics are part of the regular educational assessment during the initial phase of field instruction, the field instructor has a basis for planning assignments and for understanding a student's future difficulties both with clients and in field instruction itself. Insofar as "conscious use of self" is a desirable component of practice, field instructors have an obligation to help students appreciate the impact of their personality and cognitive style on their practice with clients and their approach to learning. This goal is educational, not therapeutic; equal weight is given to both the psychological and the cognitive dimensions of field work performance.

The approach to field instruction presented here also takes into account the degree of fit between the field instructor's style and that of the student. Although field instruction should always emphasize the student's practice and learning, the work style and personality of the field instructor cannot be ignored in this dyadic relationship. Recognition of differences and similarities in the personality and work style of both individuals lays the foundation for a working relationship based on mutual respect and tolerance for difference within the boundaries of the professional role.

The present article grew out of seminars and workshops for new and experienced field instructors. Both groups frequently stated their concerns about unprofessional or inappropriate student behaviors (for example, passive, demanding, or manipulative). Personal characteristics and work style are common problems in field instruction. Rather than automatically assuming that these problems originate with the student, however, one should also consider the possible lack of fit between the student and the field instructor, client, or

agency. In so doing, the way is paved teaching-learning interaction that respects individual difference and models reciprocal adaptation.

Field Instructor as Socialization Agent

Socialization, whether in childhood adulthood, involves behavior change, which occurs primarily through the personal influence of others. In social work, the instructor's mandate is to inspire and reinforce behavior change in the student. The specific methods by which field instructors accomplish their task vary according to models of practice and field instruction hold sway in the profession. When apprenticeship method was used, for example, the field instructor served as a model for the student, who initiated techniques and behaviors of the experienced practitioner. In the tutorial⁴, growth,⁵ clinical treatment⁶ methods of supervision the field instructor performed a quasi-therapeutic function in fostering student's personal growth. The expectation was that the student would learn about or herself in the process of learning how to help clients. The individual conference the field instructor focused on the student process recordings, which served as a basis for discussing problems in the student work. This discussion often included consideration of the student's countertransference reactions to client addition to positive and negative feedback.

⁴ Carl Shafer, "The Methods of Field Instruction in *Quality Field Instruction in Social Work*," Bradford W. Sheafar and Lowell E. Jenkins. (New York: Longman, 1982), pp. 218-20.

⁵ Marion H. Wijnberg and Mary C. Schwartz. "Models of Student Supervision. The Approval Growth and Role Systems Models." *Journal of Education for Social Work* 13 (Fall 1977): 109.

⁶ Carl Shafer, "The Methods of Field Instruction," pp. 220-21.

about the supervisor and the supervisory experience.

In 1952, Lucille Austin stressed that "the goal in supervision is to help the student gain some awareness of what he does and why."⁷ However, Aase George's historical review of field instruction points to the confusion in the field as to whether the purpose of the student-supervisor relationship was educational or therapeutic.⁸ In either case, personal growth and self-awareness have been viewed as important aspects of professional development since the 1930s. Charlotte Towle refers to the "corrective relationship" of field instruction,⁹ thus highlighting change and personal growth in the student as a significant part of the field-work experience. Max Siporin believes that many students and field instructors continue to regard the personal growth of the student as a vital component of field education.¹⁰

Some recent models of supervisory practice focus on the interactional nature of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, in which the roles and expectations of each are clearly spelled out through a teaching-learning contract. Growth issues can be included in the role-systems model if the student has been given explicit orientation early in field training that personal experience will be discussed

when it is considered relevant to the student's work with clients.¹¹

Personal Identity and The Educational Assessment

The concept of educational assessment complements the focus on the personal growth of the student as an important aspect of professional development. Ideally, learning assignments and teaching methods should be based on educational goals developed from the student's learning needs as identified in the educational assessment.

Austin advocated the use of an educational diagnosis for the purpose of individualizing training of the student.¹² Included in this diagnosis were factors such as the student's work performance, typical defenses, and character traits as well as supplemental information from the student's references and autobiographical statement in the admissions folder. The field instructor's observations regarding the student's bearing and appearance were also part of the diagnosis, as was the instructor's assessment of the student's typical learning style. Austin's approach depended on the field instructor making the diagnosis and using it for the student's benefit without sharing it openly with the student. The self-assessment profile, to be discussed later, involves active participation of the student in the formation of an initial assessment of his or her personal characteristics and approach to learning.

Twenty-five years after Austin's work, Alfred Kadushin stated that the educational diagnosis of a supervisee "includes a statement regarding what she already knows well, what she needs to learn, what she wants to learn, and how she wants to learn

it."¹³ The "how" element refers to cognitive styles, which Austin had outlined very tentatively. Sidney Berengarten studied these cognitive styles in some detail, searching for patterns and dynamics of student learning.¹⁴ His study of sixteen students identified three distinct learning patterns: (1) the *experimental-empiric* learner, who combines an intuitive approach with self-appraisal, (2) the *doer*, who learns from action and repetition, and (3) the *intellectual-empiric* learner, who relies on conceptualization and wants to test out theory before applying it.

Unfortunately, the social work profession has not emphasized cognitive styles as a method for guiding field instructors in adapting their teaching to the needs of individual learners.¹⁵ The field of education, by contrast, has accumulated a vast literature verifying that students learn in different ways and that learning is more effective when teaching is consonant with the student's style.¹⁶

¹³ Alfred Kadushin, *Supervision in Social Work*, p. 145.

¹⁴ Sidney Berengarten, "Identifying Learning Patterns of Individual Students: An Exploratory Study," *Social Service Review* 31 (December 1957): 407-17.

¹⁵ Carol Sturtz's dissertation on cognitive styles is an exception to this neglect. Sturtz found that cognitive deficits contributed to problem learning in field instruction. See Carol Sturtz, "Cognitive Dimensions of Problem Learning in Field Instruction" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, 1983). Two other social work dissertations also deal with learning styles: Catherine Peck Papell, "A Study of Styles of Learning for Direct Social Work Practice" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, 1978); and Reva Fine Holzman, "Major Teaching Methods in Social Work Instruction" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University School of Social Work, 1966).
¹⁶ Rita Dunn and Kenneth Dunn, *Teaching Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles: A Practical Approach* (Reston, Va.

Kadushin touches in differences in styles referring to the learner's (student) preference for highly or loosely structured situations, action or thinking, group individual situations, and deductive inductive learning.¹⁷ Although this alternative styles is helpful, it does not the degree of specificity needed by field instructors in understanding the mix of personal identity and learning characteristics of individual students.

Self-Assessment Profile for Students Field Instructors

This profile provides an inventory, personal attributes, cognitive patterns, future goals to be shared selectively between student and field instructor. The purpose: the self-assessment profile is to enhance self-awareness in order to promote development of professional identity conscious use of self. The profile consists of four major categories and represents synthesis of the contributions of writers on this topic, in addition to author's own work on learning and teaching styles (Figure 1).

The purpose of the self-assessment inventory is to encourage self-reflection both the student and field instructor regarding how their personal characteristics, life experiences, cognitive styles may help or hinder interaction in the field-work set. Students should be encouraged to use

Reston Publishing, 1978), pp. 2-24. A paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, March 1 directly addressed the subject of different teaching methods. See Reva Fine Holzman, Dee Livingston, and Georgianna Shepard, "Teach Field Instructors: Balancing and Integrating Didactic and Experiential Approaches" (unpublished manuscript, School of Social Work, Hunter College).
¹⁷ Kadushin, *Supervision in Social Work*, p. 1.

⁷ Lucille Austin, "Basic Principles of Supervision" (1952), in *Social Work Supervision Class Statements and Critical Issues*, ed. Carlton E. Munson (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 64.
⁸ Aase George, "A History of Social Work Field Instruction: Apprentice to Instruction," in *Quality Field Instruction in Social Work*, p. 42.
⁹ Charlotte Towle, *The Learner in Education for the Professions*, p. 173.
¹⁰ Max Siporin, "The Process of Field Instruction," in *Quality Field Instruction in Social Work*, p. 185.

¹¹ Marion H. Winberg and Mary C. Schwartz, "Models of Student Supervision," pp. 111-12.
¹² Lucille Austin, "Basic Principles of Supervision," pp. 59-66.

inventory in thinking about how prospective clients may perceive them, and field instructors should use it to anticipate difficulties arising from differences in style and background between them and their students.

These goals should be clearly stated to the student at the time the profile is introduced, and its potential importance in planning the student's assignments should be emphasized. When the profile is given to the student during the first or second supervisory conference, then discussed the following week, it serves as a very helpful tool in the development of the teaching-learning relationship. It is recommended that the field instructor suggest to students that they fill in the first and last columns of the profile early in the semester. Discussion of the middle two columns can be postponed until six weeks later, when the student's educational assessment is discussed.

The physical and descriptive attributes in the left column of the profile are straightforward and easy for the student to complete. Discussion of how the student's attributes may potentially affect his or her work is more challenging. Allen Pincus and Anne Minahan describe the thoughts of a very young student as she prepares to work with an elderly group of clients.¹⁸ The student is very aware of her youthfulness and how aging is a constant concern for elderly people. She knows her youth will help her in some instances and create problems and hostility in other situations. Unfortunately, this same level of self-awareness was not evident in the situation of an extremely obese student who wanted to be placed in a medical setting but was oblivious to the negative impression caused by her weight in a ward of dialysis patients who had to adhere to strict diets. Fixed personal attributes such as age, sex, and

physical characteristics do have an impact on clients. Students need to be sensitive to potential client perceptions regarding their own presentation of self.

Discussion of the items in the right-hand column, labeled "life experience and future goals," is helpful in planning assignments. For example, a student who has just gone through a difficult divorce and who does not feel ready to work with marital problems can express her concerns. Such information allows the field instructor to structure initial case assignments in such a way that the beginning student has a reasonable chance for experiencing success.¹⁹

Before the student is asked to fill in the two center columns of the profile — "social/personality attributes" and "cognitive patterns" — some time should transpire. Learning patterns will become evident during field instruction and as the student and field instructor become better acquainted they may feel more comfortable discussing these issues. The student's relative degree of openness and trust, together with any self-reflective ability, will signal the optimal timing for this discussion. The student who is cautious and unwilling to risk self-disclosure may feel less defensive when this pattern is identified (in the second column) as one of several possible "personal style" characteristics.

It is important for the field instructor to stress that the student's individual characteristics are not judged *per se*. However, in the course of the student's professional development, he or she is expected to vary his or her style according to the best interests of the client. The field instructor who is willing to share with the student some aspects of his or her own characteristic style models a quality of

¹⁹ Nancy Boyd Webb, "Developing Competent Clinical Practitioners: A Model with Guidelines for Supervisors," *The Clinical Supervisor* 11 (Winter, 1983), p. 49-50.

openness that helps the student overcome defensiveness. Lawrence Shulman believes that the supervisor's sharing of feelings contributes to a helpful working relationship.²⁰ For example, it is certainly instructive for a student to hear about how the field instructor deliberately changed a very informal style of relating to a more formal approach when working with a group of senior citizens who were lobbying in their housing development for increased services. The field instructor realized that older people often prefer to be addressed by their last names, although this was not the field instructor's own preference or usual pattern.

Field instructors tend to note immediately when their students demonstrate a work style that is drastically different from their own. For example, a student who is an intuitive learner wants to discover inductively from his or her own experience, rather than utilize the extensive agency information available about a client. When this student is paired with a field instructor who prefers to review all available information and discuss various alternative interventions prior to seeing the client, the student-field instructor interaction is headed for certain conflict.

Impasses can also occur when the student's style is similar to that of the field instructor. The danger is that the similarity of styles will blind the field instructor to the student's learning needs. For example, a field instructor and student who both tend toward intellectual and verbal styles may spend an inordinate amount of time in field instruction speculating about possible diagnostic categories and the theoretical foundations of various clinical syndromes, thereby minimizing attention to the student's actual work with clients.

²⁰ Lawrence Shulman, *Skills of Supervision and Staff Management* (Itasca, Ill: F.E. Peacock, 1982), p. 113.

It is, of course, the field instructor's responsibility to adapt his or her style to the student's needs, just as the student adapts his or her style to the client's. Field instructors must recognize that students will present more challenges than others will. Martha Giz states that "the supervisor tends to the his own therapeutic style, not personality characteristic, but a distillation of his accumulated experience in clinical intervention."²¹ Sonia R points out that therapeutic style comes from personality attributes and professional competence. She believes that the personality traits of the worker transcend and influence technical competence.²²

Use of the self-assessment p encourages the field instructor to anticipate the meshing or possible conflict between him- or herself and the student thus serves as a very helpful tool in apt self-awareness in the professional. Consideration of style difference similarities between the student and instructor is often a productive beginning: overcoming an impasse.

In the example of the field instructor whose approach to clients is intellectual and highly structured paired with an intuitive and action-oriented student, it would be appropriate for the field instructor to initiate a discussion with the student about different ways of preparing for the first contact with client, pointing out that their preferences represent two very different approaches. Student should be encouraged to consider possible effects on the client of such

²¹ Martha Gizynski, "Self-Awareness of the Supervisor in Supervision," *Clinical Social Journal* 6 (Fall 1978), p. 209.

²² Sonia L. Rhodes, "The Personality of the Worker: An Unexplored Dimension in Treatment," *Social Casework* 60 (May 1979) 259-61.

alternative approaches. Ideally, the method that is selected should serve the client's best interests and not merely reflect the worker's personal style. Thus, if a client's record reveals a history of chronic alcoholism, it is certainly important for the student to be aware of this and to let the client know that he or she is aware.

Just as the professional social worker must adapt to clients whose needs and personalities are so different from the worker's own, so too much the field instructor adapt his or her teaching style to accommodate the needs of the student. As part of the educational process, these needs should be discussed openly with the student so that educational assignments can be planned to address them. Active involvement of the student in his or her educational assessment conforms to principles of adult learning that stress the value of self-directed learning and mutual planning in order to increase commitment.²³

The personal identity of the learner is pivotal in the development of professional identity. Both the field instructor and the student must understand this and adapt their personal styles in the socialization process accordingly.

Becoming a social worker involves the integration of professional and personal identity via the various formal and informal socialization experiences that comprise social work education. One does not lose one's identity in the process; rather, one learns to use aspects of one's personality and style in a conscious, deliberate way, according to the needs of a given client or

situation. This conscious use of self is the mark of a true professional; the field instructor has a pivotal role in modeling this aspect of professional identity.

²³ See Malcolm S. Knowles, "Innovations in Teaching Styles and Approaches Based Upon Adult Learning," *Journal of Education for Social Work* 8 (Spring 1972): 32-39; Eleanor H. Judah, "Responsibilities of the Student in Field Instruction" in *Quality Field Instruction*, pp. 144-60, and Dorothy E. Pettes, *Staff and Student Supervision* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979).