**INTEGRATING THEORY AND PRACTICE THROUGH THE FIELD INSTRUCTION PROGRAM**

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**Greetings** from the Philippines and from the National Association for Social Work Education, Inc. or NASWEI, the organization of schools of social work in the country. The association is composed of 48 schools out of more than 85 schools offering a baccalaureate degree in social work with around 9 offering a graduate program.

I have been tasked to present a paper on **Integrating theory and practice through the field instruction program**. As a supervised fieldwork, it is the kind of experience where the student begins to translate theory into actual practice under the guidance of a trained and qualified person referred to as the supervisor. In the Philippines, the passage of Republic Act 4373 known as the Social Work Act of l965 requiring of the student the completion of 1,000 hours of supervised practice before graduation and passing the board examination given by the government every year to qualify to practice social work has the more placed importance to As such this puts the school supervisor in a situation where s/he does teaching and enabling the student to learn from his own sphere of field experience. field instruction as an integral part of the curriculum. This, therefore, required schools of social work careful assessment and planning of their curriculum especially along the area of integrating knowledge and practice.

Planning the field instruction program covers several factors within the broad categories of knowledge, attitude and skills for the learning continuum of the young student. Choosing the person who will supervise the student is, therefore, crucial. The very young and inexperienced student greatly demands supervision in the field which agencies very often cannot provide because of load constraints. As such this puts the school supervisor in a situation where s/he does teaching and enabling the student to learn from his own sphere of field experience.

Social Work graduates are to be equipped with the necessary practice skills, a task that is placed on the shoulder of the school supervisor. The transfer of such practice skills, say skill in case management within the context of the helping process, demands of the supervisor to be equally equipped and several steps ahead of the student in terms of having the necessary problem solving and analytical skills. This implies that the social work supervisors who transmit knowledge and skills and act as role models of the students should be soundly made up and have the ability to refill their knowledge and retool their skills to ensure that concepts , theories, and principles are taught through practice. A supervisor’s commitment to the goal of the profession and strong adherence to its value orientation are foremost in transmitting competency to the student. This is coupled by the supervisor’s personality attributes such as warmth, demonstrated knowledge of, and the enthusiasm for the subject being taught to achieve teaching-learning effectiveness.

**Teaching and Supporting the Student through Supervised Field Practice**

There are a lot of teaching methodologies that are being utilized by the Social Work faculty inside and outside the classroom. One thing is certain, teaching and supporting the student in field instruction is conducted in the context of supervision. Skipping the administrative function, the following teaching and supportive tasks are worth mentioning.

**Teaching** - Also referred to as educational supervision, it involves instructing students what they need to know and enabling them to learn it. A supervisor’s main responsibility as an educator is deciding what to teach, how to teach it, and in what order it should be taught. The following are some of the more important tasks.

1. discovering what student knows in theory and relating it to actual situations
2. formulating an educational program of connected learning experiences for the students like linking new knowledge with the old ones
3. enabling the students to see the interrelatedness of facts
4. bringing technical information to bear on practice
5. teaching from records to put life into what the student is doing: dealing with different clientele in relation to understanding human behavior and social environment, social work processes that enable clients to participate actively, adequacy of data to allow student to formulate a thorough assessment, knowledge of programs and services that respond to clients’ problems/needs, application of practice framework and models of intervention, and others as may be discovered in the process of teaching.
6. Creating a supervisory climate conducive to learning

**Supportive (Helping)** – The function includes interventions that strengthen the capacity of the student to deal with practice-relate stresses and pressures. The student is enabled to identify points of tension that interfere with his/her learning process and helping him/her overcome the same through an educational rather than therapeutic approach. Some tasks follow:

1. Helping the student see where his/her anxieties, attitude and values, as well as personal difficulties are preventing him/her from learning how to give the best service to the client
2. Enabling student to deal with certain block of learning and progress emanating from the discrepancy between practice demands and capacity to perform borne out of inadequacy of knowledge and skills
3. Initiating a purposeful relationship characterized by acceptance, mutual trust and freedom of expression.

### How does the supervisor teach and enable the student to learn?

Let us take a look at the following excerpt from a student’s recording.

“ During our first meeting, I felt very much for the minor. She seemed to

be trusting of this student worker. She disclosed that her father started molesting her by touching her private parts while he was giving her a bath.

She said she was only 8 years at that time. Then sometime in 2010 she

was forcibly abused by her father. This was repeatedly done until she

was 12 years old. The incident happened every time her mother was out

selling vegetables in the market and her other siblings were in school. She

could not tell anyone about what happened to her because of her fear of her father.”

As a supervisor how do you handle this particular situation with the student? Take the first statement, “During our first meeting, I felt so much for the minor.” One very important skill of the supervisor in using the record for teaching is identifying potential pitfalls and how to ask the right question. A vital question then is “What do you mean when you said “I felt so much for the minor?” The question is designed to make the student conscious of the use of the word “for” in her recording. Very often the very young social work student is not aware of how her feelings operate while listening to the story of her client. At this point, the supervisor may evoke from the student concepts like empathy, the operation of the unconscious emanating from the student’s personal values acquired through socialization process. Principles like controlled emotional involvement can be stressed while exploring how the student feels about the perpetrator to test the conscious application of acceptance and non-judgmental attitude.

Exploring further the reaction of the student to the disclosure made by the minor, another appropriate question may be “How have you been affected by the disclosure of the minor during your first meeting with her?” Allow the student to go deeper into her feelings and describe the corresponding behavior she manifested as she listened to the client.

In relation to the emotions evoked during interviews with various clientele groups, I would like to share with you the experience of a colleague who had to be called by her student at the middle of the night because the student was too restless and confused to sleep. After a few questions to the student, the supervisor found out the student did an in-depth interview with a sexually abused child and in the process absorbed the situation itself. The effect was both physiological and psychological to the point that the student felt her physical body was aching and reacting strongly, yet she was too young and inexperienced to understand what was happening to her.

From the foregoing experience of the supervisor, let us glean some implications:

1. The student should be helped and enabled to overcome the discrepancy between the realities in practice and the student’s unpreparedness brought about by age and theoretical inadequacy.
2. The challenges in the field are enormous that supervisors must be careful and discriminating in exposing students to situations they may not be intellectually and emotionally ready for.

Let us cite another example where theory and practice meet.

In exploring what interventions could be used in the helping process, knowledge of agency policies, laws, programs and services comes in, whether these be in the form of direct provision from the agency or from other agencies through referral and networking. A child who has been abused by her own father may find their home not safe for her protection and therefore a threat to her survival. Protection service as an intervention like institutionalization by virtue of the doctrine of parens patriae, or as mandated by existing laws may be resorted to. When used as a technique such institutionalization is referred to as environmental manipulation.

What I presented are not exhaustive since we have our unique experiences springing from our cultural diversities. However, I hope this could trigger some looking back into our Field Instruction program which is the ultimate end in the training of would-be social workers, our students. Through the interrelatedness of theories and their appropriate application to practice, we are giving our students a “holistic” experience in her Social Work education. The issue of molding and formation of students intellectually, emotionally, and practically for effective service points to the need for a concrete animation of the basic philosophy of the profession coupled by knowledge and practice that is authentically and culturally rooted and responsive to a changing society. As Tyler (Bennagen, citing Tyler, l968) had aptly put it,

Without theory, practice becomes chaotic, merely a collection of isolated

Individual cases. Theory gives meaning and clarity to what would otherwise

be specific isolated cases. On the other hand, without practice, theory

becomes mere speculation. The realities of practice provide a check on

pure speculation, a test of adequacy of theory; and also, practice provides

the problems which must be dealt with by any comprehensive theory.

Thank you, everyone, for listening and participating In the discussion.

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