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Student Goals as a Tool in Supervision

At this stage of the field practicum, students are going deeper in their work with clients and have established a working alliance with you as the supervisor. Now is a great time to bring out their education contract (MSW) or learning agreement (BSW) to shape your continued work together. In the fall you and your student worked hard to articulate the learning opportunities that would maximize their growth and move them towards demonstration of competency. Often these documents suggest topics for discussion in supervision, or suggest that students share specific aspects of their educational work outside the placement. Take some time now to bring this document out, review it, and select areas to address in the coming weeks.

"All knowledge is connected to all other knowledge. The fun is in making the connections." - Arthur Aufderheide

Integrating Coursework

Have you been curious about what classes your student is taking? Have you wondered how best to integrate their coursework into the practicum experience? These are common questions for field instructors. To help integrate students’ coursework, consider some of the following suggestions:

- Ask your student to share their syllabi with you.
- Suggest that your student bring textbooks to supervisory sessions and look through the content sections.
- Ask your student to share case presentations, journal assignments, and papers.
- Suggest that your student bring “aha moments” in class to discussion in supervision.

By reviewing some of these experiences and materials together, you will increase your awareness of the academic aspects of your student’s social work preparation. Making these concrete links to direct practice will assist students with integration. This increased awareness by the student will provide useful topics for them to bring to discussion in supervision, and assist them in applying theories and skills to actual agency and client situations.

Your Field Education Manual is a great resource for additional curriculum information. In it, you will find an overview of the curriculum and description of the courses. In addition, the following links will bring you to the areas of our website that will provide you with this information. Enjoy taking a look at the rich selection of courses that make up our nationally ranked school of social work.

BSW Curriculum
MSW Curriculum
Going Deeper in Supervision: Helping Students Dive In

Written by: Tanya Rand, MSW, LICSW
Clinical Faculty and Field Faculty Liaison
St. Catherine University-University of St. Thomas School of Social Work

By this time of the year, students are usually settled in their placements and finding rhythm to their learning. Orientation is done, students are seeing more clients, and tasks are being completed. Overall there is a cadence to the supervisory relationship, trust has been established, and students feel more confident in their work.

When I was supervising students in field, I realized over the years that second semester was usually a great time for going “deeper” into the learning. There was so much general learning that took place the first semester (learning the system, building caseloads, completing documentation, providing care coordination, and using supervision to discuss all of it) that by second semester students were ready and wanting something more.

Going deeper in the learning meant I would need to give my students an opportunity to find richer/broader/more challenging experiences, ones that required me as the supervisor to supportively encourage risk tasking. For the student who was afraid to speak up in team meetings or professionally assert themselves, it meant me intentionally asking them to create a plan to practice this.

Going deeper in the learning meant I would need to help my students grow professionally by giving them increasing opportunities for critical thinking by encouraging them to not only reflect about their thinking and integrate their experiences, but also to challenge their way of thinking and that of others. This meant at times, I would also ask my students to intentionally disagree with me and question my perspective.

Going deeper meant that students needed to more readily explain their processes, and show how they were integrating theory into practice. I often would tell my students in the beginning of their internship, “By second semester- after you’ve gotten your feet wet, I am going to increasingly ask you things like ‘how do you know what you know?’ And I am going to even more so encourage you to reflect on your practice by asking you tough questions about your thoughts, your problem solving steps, etc.”

Overall, I let students know that going deeper in their learning meant I was going to ask them to “stretch.” I would sometimes tell them they are in personal training, and as such, they can gradually expect more difficulty. Lastly, going deeper meant I was going to be less quick to answer their questions, yet quicker to ask them questions. It meant that at times there would be more silence in supervision (even when it was painful for either or both of us), or that as a supervisor I would be more intentional about asking them to talk about their countertransference, biases, insecurities, or unmet expectations. Going deeper was an intentional action on my part as a supervisor. I knew I needed to role model this and lead by example. I had to trust the process and know it was ok to dive in.

Throughout the publication history of Field Matters, we have occasionally shared articles from The New Social Worker. This free online journal is a valuable resource for social workers at every stage of their career. This practice based journal is filled with articles written by practicing social workers and students. Often, there are articles addressing supervision or topics relevant to supervision. By clicking the image above, you will be directed to The New Social Worker on-line Journal.
Upcoming in BSW Field

This is a pivotal time of year for students and field instructors. It is a time to reflect on first semester in order to plan for the second semester and prepare for meeting learning goals and successfully completing the placement.

**Junior Students:** Day juniors are getting deeper into their field placements and are beginning to find their stride while EWO students are just beginning their placements. The upcoming semester will provide an opportunity to explore and practice more independence and autonomy through beginning practice. Students will also be preparing for the Admission to the Major process. As a part of this process, juniors will be looking forward to completion of their Mid-Term Evaluation by field instructors. This will be completed on IPT when the student reaches 80-100 hours in the placement. It is hard to believe but our junior students will also be completing the interview and placement process for their 2016-2017 senior field placement this spring. If you haven’t heard from us and are interested in hosting a senior student next year, please contact me ASAP.

**Senior Students:** The upcoming semester offers senior students the opportunity to deepen their learning and attend to areas for growth identified during first semester. Building on this knowledge and experience will help build the competence and confidence needed for moving into the profession. Continued reflection on the Mid-Term Evaluation and the learning agreement goals can help guide the continued learning process. Your teaching, guidance, and mentorship are critical components of this stage of the student’s field experience.

Carey Winkler, Director of BSW Field Education

Upcoming in MSW Field

We hope the second half of the practicum has gotten off to a good start. As you and your student resume the learning experience, we encourage you to integrate your impressions from the first semester evaluation. Are there areas of skill development that need additional focus? Are there goals identified on the education contract that would benefit from a deliberate approach? Do certain activities need to be scheduled now to ensure they happen in the second semester? This is an excellent time to renew your and your student’s intention around learning, and address any areas of concern. As always, we are available to provide support. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Field Faculty Liaison if additional consultation would be helpful.

While it may seem a long way off, completion of the placement is on the horizon. We encourage you to help students anticipate some of the ending stages and provide adequate time to prepare. For some students, the placement completion may coincide with employment at your setting. Do be sure to check the Guidelines for Bridging Practicum and Employment if there will be any overlap between the student’s practicum experience and new employment at your agency. The Guidelines, and a corresponding application form, are available on pp. 162-164 of the MSW Field Education Manual. A pdf of the manual is posted on IPT, available on the homepage after log in.

Lisa Richardson, Director of MSW Field Education
Self-care can bring about a sense of ambivalence for all of us. For students, these feelings can be amplified by the realities of juggling school, an internship, employment, family, etc. What we often hear from students is, “I don’t have time for self-care.” Perhaps you recall having said this, or hearing it from a colleague, at some point in your career as well – I know I do. The truth is, many of us feel this way when we are managing busy lives in addition to putting a lot of time and energy into caring for and assisting others. Being in a field placement provides an opportune time to instill positive habits, grow systems of professional support, and integrate a value of self-care as a necessary part of good practice.

Being a social worker inherently means being moved by humanity and having a deep sense of compassion and care for others. This translates to being impacted by the sadness, frustration, joy, pride, injustice, success, grief, and pain that people experience. It is then also our responsibility to manage that impact as professionals who maintain appropriate boundaries and limit our emotive responses in the midst of practice. In essence, we walk a tight rope and self-care can serve as the balance bar that allows us to make it from one end to the other. When that balance bar is off, the path ahead is unclear, we are distracted and have a sort of tunnel vision in trying to regain our balance, experience worry and stress about the fear of failing, and can get stuck in one spot or sometimes even have to move backwards to find our footing. Continued imbalance can lead to burn out.

Self-care takes individual intention and support, guidance, and ideas from others. Take time to talk with your student about how you practice self-care, whether or how your agency supports self-care, why self-care is important and how it relates to your practice context, what they have observed in themselves and in others thus far, and ways to maintain a positive perspective on practice. Starting with a conversation is often the key to opening the door to exploring self-care techniques, challenges, and opportunities. There are some wonderful resources available to further explore self-care in social work offered below. Invite your student to share field assignments with you related to self-care and consider engaging in a self-care activity together at the start of each supervision meeting. This can be as simple as a 2-3 minute breathing exercise, doing some mindful movements together, or even a short walk together. This will illustrate the value and importance that you place on self-care and assist your student in developing habits for practice.

Perhaps you can build on the conversation by talking about a “community of care” and ways to not only attend to oneself but to colleagues as well. Gilbert and Nissly (2014) described this as “sustainable social work” and noted the need to take care of each other, build community, and thrive (vs. survive). They further discuss that this paradigm shift could also move us from talking about individual good will, helping, etc. to a conversation about the will of the profession as one of social justice.

Resources

http://www.selfcareinsocialwork.com
http://lyceumbooks.com/MindfulnessAndSocialWork.htm
http://yourskillfulmeans.com


References