



SOCIAL WORK IN THE NEW CENTURY

FINDING YOUR WAY *through* FIELD WORK

A Social Work Student's Guide



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Chapter 1

Introduction to Field Work: Experiential Education

INTRODUCTION

This text is designed to set you on the right path toward beginning field work at all levels—first-year and second-year master in social work (MSW) field work and senior-year bachelor in social work (BSW) field work. Written from a field director's vantage point, it provides a practical and theoretical framework for achieving success in field work. You will find counsel; suggestions; options; and, at times, humorous reflections to guide your thinking and the stance you would like to take as you approach field work. Some items are geared to senior-year BSW and first-year MSW students, while others are specific to second-year MSW students. There are some details you need to know and likely some adjustments to be made in your thinking in order to maximize your field work experience. So if you're ready, read on.

As a student in field work, you will practice with people. You will develop professional relationships with your clients who need something from you and it is up to you to figure out what they need. These relationships should have depth rather than superficiality. This depth comes from a clear understanding of the theories and professional values highlighted in class that provide the foundation to help you recognize clients' needs and issues. To be clear, field education is not only about learning theory and quoting from the text. Something more is required. Field education is about practicing—using knowledge and values to guide your work. Therefore, you will apply the theory that you've learned in your coursework to live situations with clients.

DEVELOPING COMPETENCY IN FIELD WORK

Experiential learning theories inform social work field education. Dewey's (1938/1963) educational principles focused on the relationship between knowing and doing. Building on those principles, Kolb (1984) developed a model of student learning styles, while Schon (1984) emphasized reflective practice in professional education (Schon, 1990). Goldstein (1993) focused on field education itself. More recently, Shulman (2005) and others (Gardner & Shulman, 2005) examined signature pedagogies in the education of various professionals.

To further guide your field work experience, the following approaches of experiential education will be used throughout this text to help you reflect on your development of social work competency in field work.

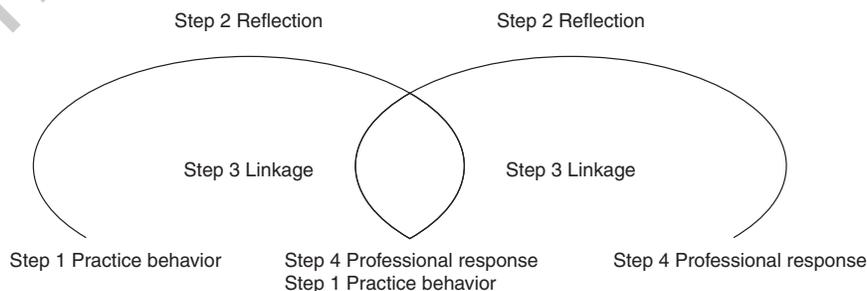
The Feedback Loop

The feedback loop (Bogo & Vayda, 1998) illustrates the learning process in the supervisory interaction between a field instructor and student that highlights the development of reflective practice (Schon, 1984). You will experience this process frequently. Step 1 represents the student's practice with a client—whether an individual, family, group, or community. Step 2 is the student's reflection and observation of the client. Step 3 involves connecting theory to a student's actions and reflections, which occurs during the meeting between field instructor and student. In Step 4, a professional response is developed with the field instructor for the student to use in future meetings with the client (Bogo & Vayda, 1998). This new client interaction begins Step 1 in the feedback loop again. This process is demonstrated in Figure 1.1.

The Field Instructor as “Coach”

The concept of the teacher as “coach” (Schon, 1990) highlights the training you will receive while completing your field work. This resembles the feedback

Figure 1.1 Feedback Loop



Source: *The Practice of Field Instruction in Social Work: Theory and Process*, 2nd edition, by Marion Bogo and Elaine Vayda. © University of Toronto Press 1998. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

a hitting coach gives to a baseball team member upon observing him or her at bat or how a piano teacher prompts a piano student's performance. The field instructor listens to the student, absorbs details from process recordings about interaction with clients, and uses understanding of the student's intentions to provide feedback.

A field instructor as coach is meant to support you and guide you even in the most difficult times. For instance, one such supervisor's strengths are described as (1) her unfailing responses to her students and staff in the moment; (2) that she always has a useful, action-oriented response to their crisis with a client; and (3) without fail, she finds a way to pick them up and sustain their morale. She is heralded by all staff but generally not known beyond the confines of the hospital (Anonymous, personal communication, 2012).

Stages of Experiential Learning

In her classic work, Reynolds (1948) identified five stages of experiential learning. You will experience these stages in your field work and beyond. Stage 1: Acute Self-Consciousness represents the anxious feelings of starting field work. Stage 2: Sink or Swim describes taking the plunge and diving into the work. Stage 3: Knowing What You Have to Do But Not Always Being Able to Do It shows the student's progress toward competence. This stage continues throughout a student's schooling. Stage 4: Mastery and Stage 5: Being Able to Teach will occur after a student's social work program is completed.

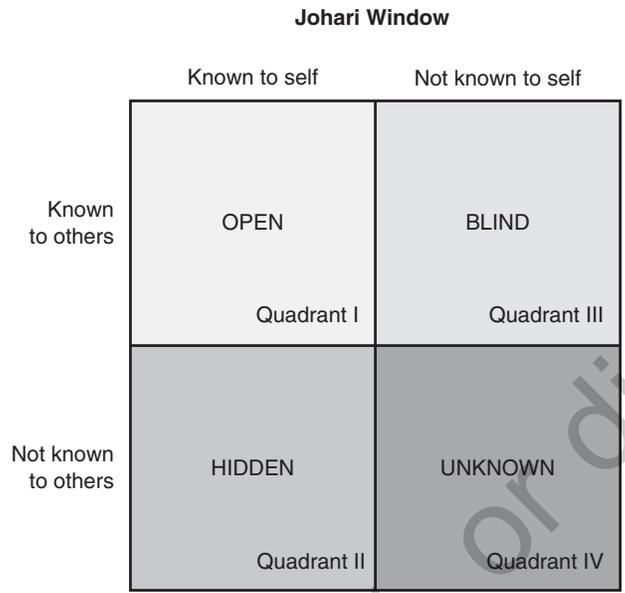
The Johari Window

The Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) is a visual framework from small group theory. When applied to field work, it clarifies how learning about yourself occurs with feedback from others. The four quadrants in the Johari Window show how feedback an individual receives expands knowledge about him or herself. The four quadrants of self-knowledge are as follows:

- Quadrant I: Issues about myself that are known to me and known to others—open area
- Quadrant II: Issues about myself that are known to me and unknown to others—hidden area
- Quadrant III: Issues about myself that are unknown to me and known to others—blind area
- Quadrant IV: Issues about myself that are unknown to me and unknown to others—unknown

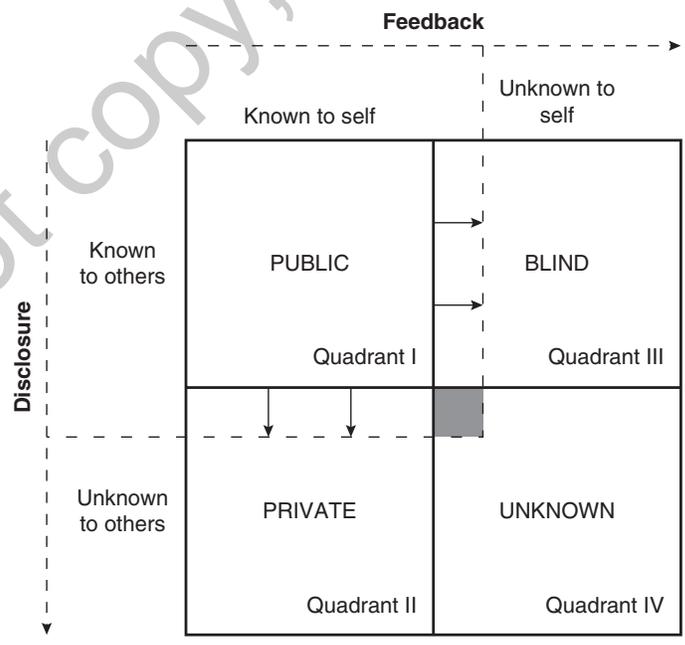
These are represented in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Johari Window



Source: Luft, Joseph (1999). The Johari Window: A Graphic Model of Awareness in Interpersonal Relations. In Cooke, Alfred L., Brazzel, M., Saunders Craig, A., and Greig, B., (Ed.), *The Reading Book for Human Relations Training, 8th Edition* (pp. 51–54). Silver Spring, MD: NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science.

Figure 1.3 Johari Window—How Feedback Expands the Public Area



In the feedback loop process in field instruction, students expose their work, the hidden area in Quadrant II, and their field instructor provides feedback in Quadrant III, the blind area. The purpose of feedback is to increase the size of Quadrant I—the open area of issues known to self and known to others. Thus, the issues in Quadrants II and III become exposed and shared. This is depicted in Figure 1.3.

The exchange of disclosure deepens communication between you and your field instructor, which, in turn, deepens your role with clients. Extensive discussion on the process of field instruction will be found in Chapter 5.

HOW TO MAXIMIZE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE FIELD

This text examines frustrations and potential obstacles in working with clients and developing practice skills. It provides tools and supports to help you address and deal with these issues. Several helpful maxims are introduced to help you make the most out of learning in the field and will be discussed in detail in future chapters.

Know Thyself

The first maxim is to “know thyself.” The Greek philosophers usually attribute “Gnothi seauton,” know thyself, to Socrates (Delphi, 7th century BCE). In practicing with clients, you will have to understand how their issues and needs impact you. You must also recognize any personal feelings of uncertainty and awkwardness.

It is important to know who you are in the learning process. In constructing a desk from IKEA, some people start assembling immediately, reading the instructions as they go along. Others review the instructions thoroughly before undertaking the task (Kolb, 1984). The person who jumps in will find the thorough reader to be frustrating. Some students will read chapters about schizophrenia before seeing the client; others will conduct more research after meeting the client. How you approach learning provides you with further self-awareness. The popular model of Kolb (1984) describing four typologies of learning styles has more recently been expanded by others (Honey & Mumford, 2006).

Embrace Being a Learner

The second maxim is to embrace being a learner. This involves accepting that you do not know everything and suspending your need to prove that you do. It means giving yourself to the experience and allowing yourself to be supervised. With this comes accepting the labels of “student” and “intern.” You are undertaking an internship, not a job.

Start Where the Client Is

The third maxim is to start where the client is. You will hear this daily. Your challenge will be deciphering where that may be. Your classroom and field instruction will help you apply the necessary critical thinking to determine where the client is. The point is that you must make every effort to start with your client's agenda, not your own.

Accept the Ambiguity and Feelings of Uncertainty of Social Work Practice

The fourth maxim is to accept the ambiguity and feelings of uncertainty of social work practice. This asks you to give up your expectations of prescriptiveness and the need for hard-and-fast rules. Rather, you must be able to go where the client takes you—at least some of the time. Facing the unknown of first meetings will challenge you as a beginning practitioner. Try not to avoid these feelings.

Do Not Skip Over Preparatory Empathy

The fifth maxim is to not skip over preparatory empathy. Following the dual aspects of preparatory empathy boosts your connection with your client. First, review the literature about this type of client. Second, reflect upon how you would feel in that client's shoes. These tasks have no shortcuts. Consider how you would feel if you were a 37-year-old who, in college, had your first psychiatric hospitalization. You were diagnosed with schizophrenia and now you still cannot work where you had wanted—in nursing. Use this reflection by preparing yourself to be acutely attuned to the client's needs when you meet.

Integrate Social Work Theory and Values Into Your Work With Clients

The sixth maxim is the ethical imperative to integrate social work theory and values into your work with clients. As a professional learning experience rather than a job, field education requires you to effectively apply knowledge and values to the client situation. Professional ethics dictate that you rely on theory and values to direct your work.

Embrace Artistry as Your Individuality in Professional Use of Self

The seventh maxim is to embrace artistry as your individuality in professional use of self. Becoming an effective social work practitioner requires that you embrace your creativity. Picasso didn't just paint any old woman. He painted one whose eyes, limbs, and torso were viewed from different angles. You, too, need to

do this, although you are not yet Picasso. Use of self is how you uniquely approach a client situation through the lens of professional theory and values. However, at this point you will not have complete creative control—your ideas should be tested out with your field instructor and your classmates, all of whom are part of your Johari Window.

By harnessing your self-reflections, keeping up with readings, and writing process recordings, you may even form a creative approach for helping your clients.

CASE ILLUSTRATION 1.1

FORMULATING CREATIVE USE OF SELF IN A CRISIS SESSION

Deborah, a 24-year-old first-year student, has been concerned about her 89-year-old client, Morty. She anticipated that the flooding in his Brooklyn community from Hurricane Sandy probably created a visual that reminded him of the devastation in his town in Russia during World War II (WWII).

At their first meeting, he talked about the displacement of the Jewish population in his former Russian community and his new life here. He is one of many Russian Jewish residents in the area who came to New York City decades earlier after the former Soviet Union allowed the Jewish population to leave. Deborah has some understanding of WWII and the Russian role in defeating Germany. Being Jewish, she also knows about his community.

Deborah's agency has a program to help Hurricane Sandy survivors. She knew Morty had been evacuated and was located at an assisted living site. Although Deborah did not suffer storm damage, many of her friends did. She expected Morty to be out of sorts. However, when she visited him, he was happy to see her and said that he was so impressed with how quickly the Americans distributed food and relocated everyone. This would never have happened elsewhere. Deborah was amazed, and although she had prepared to talk with him about his "plight," she saw that was not his experience. Instead, he talked about how liberating it felt to leave Russia.

Deborah was uplifted by his attitude, thinking that he handled the storm better than her friends. Gaining new perspective, she told him that she was inspired by the way he handles difficulties and that even the war experiences he had do not seem to have unnerved him now. He hinted that there is much he does not like to talk about and prefers the positive and reiterated how impressive the community had been.

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Meeting with the Field Instructor

Deborah and her field instructor discussed how she can find out more about Morty's life, including allowing him to share some negative experiences. Her field instructor credited Deborah for shifting her focus from an expected plight into being where the client is and hearing his reaction to the hurricane relief efforts. Her life lesson from Morty has Deborah thinking about how to share his positive attitude with her fellow students. In this situation, Deborah embraced artistry by using her own knowledge of history to show her client she understood his story and his history. Deborah and her field instructor decided she should tell her practice class about Morty's impact on her. Although Deborah has much more to learn about how to explore negative feelings, her connection to the client fostered her artistry in her use of self—even as a beginner.

Discussion

Deborah's artistry in her use of self is evident. She used the two parts of preparatory empathy before seeing Morty. She knew the history and is in touch with her own feelings. In dealing with the unexpected, she moved to where the client is. She then reflected on her feelings and the impact Morty has on her.

FRAMEWORK OF THIS TEXT

This book is constructed in sections with several chapters contained in each section.

Part I: *Understanding Where You Are Heading* provides an overview of field education. The social work competency framework for foundation year and the second year of field work is provided.

Part II: *The Design and Structure of Field Work* contains concrete tools for a successful entry into an agency and a viable beginning. This part provides discussions of the relationships you will develop with your field instructor and your faculty field advisor.

Part III: *Transforming the Desire to Help Into Professional Competence—From Caring to Learning How to Do* details practice dilemmas in the student–client relationship and the development of competencies throughout the foundation year and advanced second year of field placement. In these chapters, you will come to see why work with clients seems easy when you read about it in a book yet can be so difficult in your practice reality.

Part IV: *I Feel Like Spaghetti—All Strung Out* is centered on the stressors and stressful relationships you will encounter in all spheres that will impact the

professional role. These may be with clients, field instructors, and faculty. Discussion about countertransference and how to manage your own personal history is included. Other stressful relationships that will impact your role in field work are considered, including the personal relationships and demands of family, friends, and significant others. These added factors, which focus on transitions, endings and moving forward, are discussed.

SUMMARY

This chapter is the first step in your journey to a successful field work experience. As you have seen, field education is about practicing and utilizing theory and values to guide your work. Equally important is self-reflection. Utilizing the approaches discussed in this text, such as the feedback loop, allowing your field instructor to play the role of coach, the five stages of experiential learning, and the Johari Window, will help you to grow in your role as a social worker. Finally, it is important to remember that you will experience frustrations and obstacles in your work with clients. Keep the seven maxims in mind to help you connect to your clients and adapt to various situations.

Chapter 2 describes the social work professional role in field work.

Everyone associated with this volume wishes you every success as you begin. We hope the tools supplied here will guide your positive and productive performance.