

FIELD NOTES

THE NEED FOR RADICAL CHANGE IN FIELD EDUCATION

Julianne Wayne

University of Connecticut

Miriam Raskin

George Mason University

Marion Bogo

University of Toronto

This article relates the evolution of field-related accreditation standards since the 1982 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Curriculum Policy Statement to the changes that have occurred in agencies, students, and educational institutions. It demonstrates how CSWE modifications helped solve some problems while creating new ones. The authors argue that radical approaches to field education must be explored in order to overcome the roadblocks to high-quality field experiences. The discussion includes a report of a meeting attended by 33 directors of field education who met to engage in such a problem-solving process. A plea for continuing such dialogue and action is urged.

FIELD EDUCATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN an integral component of social work education, recognized as having a major impact on graduates' preparation for professional practice. The fundamental philosophy, beliefs, structure, and processes of field programs have endured throughout the 1st century of formal social work education. However, in the last few decades it has become increasingly difficult to consistently provide students with high-quality field experiences because of significant and critical changes in agencies, universities, and in the student body. While the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation standards continually evolve to address new realities, the ongoing revisions can inadvertently create new problems. Recently, social work educators have been challenged to engage in new thinking about field education (Lager & Robbins, 2004).

This article identifies CSWE's responses over time to the changing context of field education and analyzes their positive and negative impact on agencies, universities, and students. The authors argue that in order to improve field education, social work educators must engage in a holistic rather than a piecemeal approach to problem solving that includes a critical examination of the overall framework within which problems arise and solutions are developed. The article includes a report of a meeting of 33 representatives from 27 baccalaureate and master of social work programs to address shared concerns and to encourage creative approaches unbounded by current standards and traditions. The authors conclude with new approaches to field education that emerged from the meeting and with a plea for ongoing dialog that could result in the development of more effective field education programs.

The Changing Components of Field Education

Changes in Agencies

Social work programs report increased difficulty in recruiting and maintaining high-quality field settings and instructors for all their students (Bogo, Raskin, & Wayne, 2002). The possibility of this situation arising was recognized as early as 1964, when agency directors at a national conference in New York City acknowledged that staff shortages, agency pressures, and inadequate resources could play havoc even with agencies having the strongest commitment to education (Kendall, 2002). More than 2 decades ago, Frumkin (1980) repeated this caution to social work educators about their continuing reliance on the professional commitment of agency administrators to provide field education opportunities. He observed that it was unrealistic to continue to depend on agencies to voluntarily provide practicum sites and resources in the face of their growing fiscal constraints and urged schools to re-conceptualize the nature of agency-university relationships. Social work educators did not heed these calls and continue to rely on informal and impermanent relationships with agency administrators and the goodwill of individual social workers to provide field instruction.

Today, social workers rarely receive workload reduction for serving as field instructors and those who assume the role usually do so for intrinsic rewards. They find satisfaction in contributing to the next generation of social workers (Globerman & Bogo, 2003; Wayne, 1989), staying current with practice, and value their connection to the academy (Bogo & Power, 1992). In the absence of agency supports, schools

conscientiously search for methods to recognize and reward the contributions of these field instructors (Lacerte, Ray, & Irwin, 1989).

In the 1990's, managed care and fiscal constraints led to downsizing and restructuring in human service agencies and institutions that provided field education (Bocage, Homonoff, & Riley, 1995; Jarman-Rohde, McFall, Kolar, & Strom, 1997; Raskin & Blome, 1998). Demands for increased productivity resulted in a low priority given to non-reimbursed services such as field instruction (Donner, 1996). In a study of the impact of managed care, Raskin and Blome (1998) found that agency social work staff were expected to carry heavier caseloads, use short-term, crisis- or task-centered practice, and had little time for field instruction. In some managed care agencies, there were fewer social workers than previously employed.

Social workers in hospitals have also experienced organizational changes that dramatically affect their practice. Hospital social workers today deal with increased volume, greater acuity and complexity of cases, decreased length of stay and time to work with clients, and reductions in social work staff (Berger, Cayner, Jensen, Mizrahi, & Scesny, 1996; Berkman, 1996; Globerman, 1999). In hospitals where central social work departments have been replaced with program management models, the decision to offer field placements requires individual field instructors to negotiate with their multi-professional teams for agreement to take a social work student (Globerman & Bogo, 2002). With the demise of the position of director of social work in hospitals, there were no longer senior-level advocates to ensure that student training for health professions included students from social work.

The proliferation of social work programs is yet another factor in the challenge to place students. In many areas, field placement personnel rush to contact agencies to take their students before a particular setting fills with students from other schools. The competitive feelings that this situation creates serve as yet another unproductive pressure for those connected with field education.

In the face of diminishing resources, it is understandable that field coordinators could yield to the pressures they face by changing their expectations of who could serve as field instructors, including their credentials. Perhaps as a response to this potential danger, the CSWE field education standards have become more prescriptive. The 1982 CSWE *Curriculum Policy Statement (CPS)* allowed each program to establish its own criteria for field education including the personnel assigned as field instructors. The 2001 CSWE *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)* requires that field instructors have a BSW or MSW to teach BSW students and an MSW to teach MSW students in field practica. Programs must assume responsibility for providing the social work perspective if these conditions cannot be met. Earlier, in 1992, the CPS made it mandatory that schools offer orientation and training programs to field instructors. The expectation that they attend the training was yet another demand on agencies and individual workers.

Many programs have long required field instructors to have MSW degrees and to attend field instructor training, and it would be difficult to argue against such policies. However, the now explicit CSWE requirements address the symptom of the problem, but overlook the real, remaining issue of too few available

agency resources. These CSWE revisions have addressed the problem by assuming that field education, as we have known it, should remain essentially unchanged and by insisting that field coordinators continue as if the shortage does not exist. The profession needs to address the problem and not just the symptom.

Changes in the University

The traditional faculty-field liaison model envisioned a faculty member who integrated the academic social work program with the agency learning experiences. The faculty-field liaison linked the field instructor to the university, assisted in student learning through monitoring and evaluating student progress, and consulted on educational issues (Faria, Brownstein, & Smith, 1988; Rosenblum & Raphael, 1983). Increasingly in the past decades, and especially in research-oriented universities, expectations for productivity in research and scholarship for tenure-stream faculty members have risen (Gibbs & Locke, 1989; McMahon, Reisch, & Patti, 1991; Peebles-Wilkins & Shank, 2003; Wheeler & Gibbons, 1992). Within this context, it is understandable that as scholarly expectations increase, the commitment and interest in liaison work diminishes, and faculty have become less engaged with field teaching and liaison roles (Kilpatrick, Turner, & Holland, 1994).

The faculty movement away from field-related activities has been supported by the ongoing changes in the CSWE accreditation standards and curriculum policy statements. In 1971, faculty members were required to assume responsibility for the development and administration of field instruction and were to carry on "regular planned communication" with agencies and field instructors (CSWE, 1971).

By the 2001 EPAS, workload expectations of faculty are discussed with much less specificity and need only to support the achievement of "institutional priorities," with no requirement of field or community responsibilities (CSWE, 2001). Staff as well as faculty may now carry out field liaison activities, thus freeing faculty to devote more time to scholarly pursuits.

In many programs, field liaison functions are assigned to staff who are hired on a limited or part-time basis and have little or no decision-making power with respect to curriculum matters. In this model, there is the danger that field education could become peripheral to classroom curriculum and teachers, and the notion of integrating class and field becomes more difficult to maintain. Furthermore, if field-related personnel have no influence on educational policy they are limited in their ability to participate in the development and maintenance of high standards for field education. Conversely, the faculty who do develop educational policies may have minimal experience with or interest in the field component.

It is an even greater problem when tenure-track faculty members remain responsible for field liaison work, but are not held accountable for their performance in this area. Bennett and Coe (1998) found the best predictor for field instructors' satisfaction with liaisons was their availability and number of contacts. They conclude, "it is difficult to imagine how tenured and tenure-track faculty could be consistently available and spend enough time with field instructors to optimize their satisfaction with the institutions" (p. 350).

While the 2001 EPAS states that the majority of the full-time master's social work program faculty must have a master's degree in social

work and a doctoral degree, the field education director is only required to have a master's degree in social work and two years post-degree practice experience (Accreditation Standards, Sec. 3.0.5). In most schools today, that would exclude directors from tenure-track positions. This permits them to devote time and energy to administrative functions, but relegates them to lower status positions within their programs.

A review of the CSWE standards reveals a notable omission. While the standards address the minimum percentage of time a program must allot for a field education director, it does not address the critical issue of the placement personnel-student ratio. In most schools, those responsible for placing students do not have the time to personally interview, or request and review, references of potential field instructors. The most that many can do is screen out agencies and field instructors that do not meet the program's field criteria. Yet, having earned an MSW degree does not assure that one is truly a master of practice, or has the ability to educate a student. Field instructors are arguably the single most significant educator a student could have in any academic year, but their selection is often the most haphazard. Ironically, while the authors believe that placement ratio guidelines could be helpful, they too could create new problems for under-funded programs.

Changes in the Student Body

The time required to fulfill field education requirements presents a great challenge to most of today's students. Many students now must give up all or a portion of their needed income for 2 years. In addition, there are efforts to increase the diversity of the student body

and to accommodate students with family responsibilities. All of these factors have resulted in a student body that needs more financial aid, accommodation for special situations, and classroom and practicum experiences in the evenings and weekends (Jarman-Rohde et al., 1997). These non-traditional arrangements require field education personnel and agencies to expend more time and energy to develop unique and individualized placements.

Required hours for field education appeared for the first time in the 1982 CPS. BSW programs require 400 hours in the field, and MSW programs require 900 hours. It may well be that the inclusion of hours resulted from, among other factors, the movement of some programs to reduce field hours as a response to the time pressure on students and to the expanding academic classroom component of social work curricula. While the field hours remain "protected," the challenge of accommodating students often leads to educationally compromised field arrangements.

Another current standard of note relates to the employment needs of students and appeared in the 1991 edition of the revised version of the 1988 *Handbook of Accreditation Standards and Procedures*. Students could be placed in an agency in which they were already employed as long as their field education experiences and supervision were different than what occurred in their jobs. Permission to fulfill placement requirements in a place of employment eases the financial burdens created by lost income. However, it supports the use of placements that frequently do not meet the educational needs of the student. Many students regret having availed themselves of employer placements and report that their agency was not suc-

cessful in placing their learning needs above the agency's need for their employee-related services (Bogo et al., 2002).

The diversity in background experiences, educational objectives, and career goals of students presents a challenge to setting uniform competency outcomes and expectations regarding engagement in field learning (Bogo et al., 2002). While many students still enter social work programs with only minor volunteer experience, there are also students who have had extensive work experience in a wide range of service areas. Many of these students wish to receive recognition and educational credit for their skill and exemption from regular practicum requirements. Currently there are no mechanisms or standards that would allow a program to do this.

Constraints on Achieving Radical Change in Field Education

As a result of the above factors, field education administrators have been treading water for years to maintain high standards in their respective programs. There are many forces and traditions from within their own schools and from agencies that serve as constraints to the creation of an effective problem-solving process and the subsequent development and implementation of untried approaches. The interpretation by many of the EPAS standards also continues to keep field structures, expectations, models, and day-to-day activities in relative status quo.

Resources, Influence, and Disincentives

Field directors face tight time constraints that prevent a shift in focus to the more macro issues that plague field instruction.

Accountability for daily program obligations severely limits their ability to contemplate radical changes to the programs they administer. Their concern about being perceived by colleagues as disloyal to traditional field approaches is yet another constraint to their proposing far reaching changes. Field directors may believe that the faculty expects them to advocate for meeting existing standards rather than to challenge the standards that exist. Many field directors are on administrative, rather than faculty tracks, and have lower status and power than tenured faculty. As staff rather than faculty, they may find it particularly difficult to initiate and influence needed changes. In addition, "making waves" is seen as counterproductive to keeping CSWE accreditation.

Similarly, because of their own strained resources, agencies may not agree to innovations that could require more time and attention than would traditional field arrangements.

Misinterpretation of EPAS Requirements

The perception exists that the CSWE greatly limits structural field education options (Bogo et al., 2002). Yet the 2001 EPAS has few specific mandated field requirements and almost no proscriptions on ways to carry out those mandates. For example, the EPAS requires that programs help students integrate theory and practice in the field. It does not say it must be done through weekly seminars, as many programs believe. By operating in similar fashion, many programs reinforce each other's beliefs that they are mandated to do as they do, when in actuality they are bounded more by tradition than policy.

Achieving Radical Change

For all of the reasons stated in this paper, the authors assert that today's problems need more radical solutions than the evolutionary incremental process that was espoused by Nyquist (cited in Kendall, 2002). Nyquist believed that "it is a well-known principle that developments in accrediting are evolutionary not revolutionary" (p. 148). It is not that the current process is too slow. Rather, it is ineffective. A process to encourage thinking out of the box has already begun.

A Process for Creative Thinking

While regional and national meetings provide opportunities to present field-related "best practices," innovations, and research findings, opportunities to move beyond information exchange are rare. Extended time is needed to engage in critical thinking about principles and approaches to field education and for creative "thinking out of the box." A 1-day meeting of field education directors from schools in the Northeast was proposed for this purpose, and in June 2002, 33 directors of field education and other faculty from 27 schools representing four consortia met in New York City. Focused discussion and brainstorming led to the following suggestions for radical changes to field education.

New Partnerships With Agencies

The participants recognized that, with changes in both agency resources for field education and university expectations for faculty members, new models and new relationships between schools and agencies were needed. Models used to train students for

health science professions were referred to where institutionalized, formal, and continuing partnerships between the university and its affiliated hospitals ensure the availability of learning opportunities in practice settings. In these models, faculty members are fully engaged in teaching practice in the setting, and there is greater integration between the academy and the practice site. Little time is expended in contracting, as there are permanent allocations for specific numbers of students. This model eliminates the need for a faculty liaison because it is currently provided in schools of social work, and it reduces the danger of assigning students to unqualified field instructors.

Field Learning Separate From the School

Participants also examined models in professional programs such as law where there is no required practicum. In this model, the university prepares students to "think like a lawyer (social worker)" while the professional regulatory body organizes a paid apprenticeship experience to learn professional practice, and then tests for competency and admission to the profession. If this model were adopted in social work, an educational program of courses and skills laboratories would be followed by a 2-year paid internship in a social work position. After completion of the internship, students would be required to successfully pass a licensing exam to demonstrate competence and readiness for admission to the professional ranks. The responsibility of final preparation for practice would move to the profession. The paid internship would assist with students' current financial burdens and

they would not experience the service they provide as "unpaid labor."

Hybrid Model

A model was proposed that would include aspects of both approaches presented above. The 1st year of study is entirely in the university where the student learns about practice in laboratory simulations and observational field visits. In the 2nd year, students have a traditional field education experience in "accredited" settings. This model requires a permanent partnership between the school and the sites and includes an institutional commitment, a set of standards for field education, and an accrediting body and process that ensures standards are met. With accreditation, responsibility for field learning is transferred to these sites, the current liaison model is no longer needed, and students face only 1 year of lost income.

Individualized Approach

Finally, a model that is responsive to the many students with prior social work related experience was proposed. These students wish to receive educational credit for their practice experience and exemption from part of the practicum requirements. Frequently these students have financial responsibilities such that they cannot leave their current place of employment and work-related practica are developed for them. In a new model, reliable and valid measures of practice competence would be used to assess whether students could be exempt from part of or the entire practicum requirement. For exempt students, an individual program would be designed that focused more on theoretical knowledge than practice skills.

Conclusion

Field education was designed in the societal, organizational, and academic environment of the early 20th century. As changes in contextual conditions and in the student body revealed problems in an aspect of field education, social work educators addressed each problem as a discrete issue. Without intending to do so, this piecemeal approach has at times created new problems resulting in compromised field education experiences. A process of thinking about approaches heretofore untried is needed if social work education is to maintain its commitment to preparing highly qualified practitioners.

References

- Bennett, L., & Coe, S. (1998). Social work field instructors satisfaction with faculty field liaison. *Journal of Social Work Education, 34*(3), 345-353.
- Berger, C. S., Cayner, J., Jensen, G., Mizrahi, T., & Scesny, A. (1996). The changing scene of social work in hospitals. *Health and Social Work, 21*, 167-177.
- Berkman, B. (1996). The emerging health care world: Implications for social work practice and education. *Social Work, 41*, 541-551.
- Bocage, M., Homonoff, E., & Riley, P. (1995). Measuring the impact of the current state and national fiscal crises on human service agencies and social work training. *Social Work, 40*, 701-705.
- Bogo, M., & Power, R. (1992). New field instructors' perceptions of institutional supports for their roles. *Journal of Social Work Education, 28*(2), 178-189.
- Bogo, M., Raskin, M., & Wayne, J. (2002). *Thinking out of the box: Developing new approaches for field education*. New York: Field Consortium.
- Council on Social Work Education. (1971). *Manual of accrediting standards for graduate professional schools of social work*. New York: Author.
- Council on Social Work Education. (1982). *Curriculum policy statement* (Sec. 7.21). New York: Author.
- Council on Social Work Education. (1992). *Curriculum policy statement* (Sec. M6.16). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2001). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Council on Social Work Education. (1991). *Handbook of accreditation standards and procedures* (Sec. 4.2). Washington, DC: Author.
- Donner, S. (1996). Field work crisis: Dilemmas, dangers, and opportunities. *Smith College Studies in Social Work, 66*, 317-331.
- Faria, F., Brownstein, C., & Smith, H. Y. (1988). A survey of field instructors' perceptions of the liaison role. *Journal of Social Work Education, 24*, 135-144.
- Frumkin, M. (1980). Social work education and the professional commitment fallacy: A practical guide to field-school relations. *Journal of Education for Social Work, 16*(2), 91-99.
- Gibbs, P., & Locke, B. (1989). Tenure and promotion in accredited graduate social work programs. *Journal of Social Work Education, 25*, 126-133.
- Globerman, J. (1999). Hospital restructuring: Positioning social work to manage change. *Social Work in Health Care, 28*(4), 13-30.
- Globerman, J., & Bogo, M. (2002). The impact of hospital restructuring on social work field education. *Health and Social Work, 27*(1), 7-16.
- Globerman, J., & Bogo, M. (2003). Changing times: Understanding social workers motivation to be field instructors. *Social Work, 48*, 65-73.

- Jarman-Rohde, L., McFall, J., Kolar, P., & Strom, G. (1997). The changing context of social work practice: Implications and recommendations for social work educators. *Journal of Social Work Education, 33*(1), 29–46.
- Kendall, K. A. (2002). *Council on Social Work Education: Its antecedents and first twenty years*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.
- Kilpatrick, A. C., Turner, J., & Holland, T. P. (1994). Quality control in field education: Monitoring students' performance. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 9*(1/2), 107–120.
- Lacerte, J., Ray, J., & Irwin, L. (1989). Recognizing the educational contributions of field instructors. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 3*(2), 99–113.
- Lager, P. B., & Robbins, V. C. (2004). Field education: Exploring the future, expanding the vision. *Journal of Social Work Education, 40*(1), 3–11.
- McMahon, M. O., Reisch, M., & Patti, R. (1991). *Scholarship in social work: Integration of research, teaching, and service*. Washington, DC: National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work.
- Peebles-Wilkins, W., & Shank, B. W. (2003). A response to Charles Cowger: Shaping the future of social work as an institutional response to standards. *Journal of Social Work Education, 39*(1), 49–56.
- Raskin, M., & Blome, W. W. (1998). The impact of managed care on field instruction. *Journal of Social Work Education, 34*, 365–375.
- Rosenblum, A. F., & Raphael, F. B. (1983). The role and function of the faculty field liaison. *Journal of Education for Social Work, 19*(1), 67–73.
- Wayne, J. (1989). A comparison of attitudes towards students supervision between supervisors of micro and macro practice. *The Clinical Supervisor, 6*(3/4), 77–87.
- Wheeler, B. R., & Gibbons, W. E. (1992). Social work in academia: Learning from the past and acting on the present. *Journal of Social Work Education, 28*(3), 300–311.

Accepted: 12/04

Julianne Wayne is associate professor, School of Social Work, University of Connecticut. **Marlon Bogo** is professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. **Miriam Raskin** is professor, Department of Social Work, George Mason University.

Address correspondence to Julianne Wayne, University of Connecticut School of Social Work, 1798 Asylum Avenue, West Hartford, CT, 06117; e-mail: juliannewayne@msn.com.

Copyright of *Journal of Social Work Education* is the property of Council on Social Work Education and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.