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CONSULTATION AS A MODE OF FIELD INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

In recent years both pedagogical and pragmatic considerations have prompted numerous experiments in field instruction for social work education. A novel approach used by one school is based on a consultation model. In this mode of field instruction a faculty based field instructor serves as a consultant to the student placed in a community agency. The relationship between consultee and consultant is distinctly different from that which exists between a student and a "teacher," "instructor," or "supervisor" in traditional field placements. Rather than a hierarchical, obligatory relationship, there exists between consultant and consultee a coordinate, facultative relationship in which the consultant's role is primarily that of problem-solving. Advantages of this approach include maximization of faculty resources, increased school control of field learning, utilization of a greater variety of field agencies, and facilitation of student choice in developing programs for learning as recommended by numerous reformers in professional education.

I. The Need for Experimental Approaches to Field Instruction

During the past decade there has been a proliferation of theory, research, and experimentation regarding modes of field instruction.¹ This effort has been brought about by several factors.

The first set of reasons for the experimentation in field instruction modalities are educational in nature. Many of the newly tried ideas have been attempts to deal with the shortcoming of the traditional type of curriculum model sometimes referred to as the work model.² One widely recognized problem with the traditional model has been the dichotomy of class and field.³ The need for linkage between class and field has long been recognized. For instance, in 1951 Hollis and Taylor wrote that "the objectives of field teaching should be identical with those of classroom work and should be as carefully organized into teaching units."⁴ As schools have sought to establish this linkage and provide the most effective balance and timing possible between the knowledge base and practice or skill components in social work education, numerous experiments in field instruction have been tried.

Many of these experiments also reflect the attempts of schools to act on the growing conviction in social work education that schools must carry primary responsibility for their total curricula, including field instruction.⁵ Based on this conviction ways have been sought to utilize school employed or full-time field instructors rather than agency personnel to provide the desired field learning experiments for the students. The importance of faculty field instructors has been voiced by numerous social work educators. Briar, for example, advocates the use of faculty members or mentors in teaching centers as the best means of giving the school control over all the students' learning experiences.⁶ Also, Cassidy maintains that the use of faculty field teachers does more than make sure the students "are getting it" in practice placements; more importantly, total curriculum development is enhanced as representatives of both modes of learning participate in the planning of content, sequence, timing, etc.⁷

Another reason for experimentation with field instruction is the theory subscribed to by many social work educators as to how adult learning occurs. Through his analysis of the "three levels of learning," Walter Kindelsperger has provided a theoretical base for understanding the types of learning which may take place in the class and in the field and the consequent planning of the appropriate experiences in each.⁸ The learning which the student encounters in the classroom (both cognitive and cognitive-vicarious) should be paralleled by learning experiences from empirical events in the field (cognitive-vicarious-social learning). In seeking this paralleling, schools have given careful attention to the development of field placements, often with novel results. Furthermore, since field learning is conceptual learning (learning of generalizations drawn from specific, related experiences),⁹ it is important that these experiences be carefully planned, varied, and intense. With the traditional field instruction model these criteria are often unmet; the usual field agency is able to provide only a narrow, limited experience.

Beyond these educational reasons there are other practical considerations which have brought about experimentation with modes of field instruction. The lack of available agencies to provide field training and the lack of qualified field instructors have constituted problems for some schools. Increasing student enrollments and the opening of new schools with consequent demands for more agencies and field instructors have magnified these problems. Schools have coped with these problems by using preceptors in agencies without qualified instructors, by using faculty teachers as field instructors in some capacity, by using group "supervision," by using multiple agency placements for the individual student, and so on. Some of these field arrangements have been based on sound educational premises, while others have reflected reckless attempts to accommodate every student with some type of placement.

Another practical consideration which has led to innovation in field instruction arrangements in recent years is an economic one. The cutback in federal funding of schools of social work has had implications in two direc-

tions. First, agencies which offer sound learning experiences and can provide stipends for students but which lack qualified field instructors are now being reevaluated. Ways are now being sought to utilize such agencies, often through the use of faculty members as field instructors. Second, the reduction in funding has meant that some schools which have previously used full-time faculty field teachers, as in teaching centers, are now finding it necessary to reduce faculty size and, therefore, must reexamine their policies on deployment of faculty members.

II. Development of Consultation as a Mode of Field Instruction in One Agency

During this past year an experimental field placement arrangement was developed by the University of South Carolina Graduate School of Social Work. This development was prompted by several of the reasons described above.

The need arose for a community organization field placement for two second year students with an interest in drug abuse prevention and treatment. The logical agency was the South Carolina Commission on Narcotics and Controlled Substances. This office is concerned with the planning and coordinating of all drug abuse programs in the State. At the time the placement began, the Commission was in the process of preparing a State plan for drug abuse programs which was to be submitted to the federal government as the State's funding request. Development of the plan required extensive research concerning the State's needs and resources, as well as involvement with local communities across the State to motivate and assist them in creating drug abuse prevention and treatment plans geared to fit their particular needs. While these types of activities offered obvious excellent learning opportunities for community students, there was no one employed by the Commission who was qualified as a field instructor. Because of the educational needs and desires of the students, the learning opportunities potentially available in this setting, and the fact that the Commission provided a much needed student stipend, attempts were made to discover ways the School could use this Commission as a field placement.

It was obvious that a faculty member could not be assigned to work in the agency or function in the manner of a field instructor in a teaching center. Furthermore, while there were other personnel in the Commission with professional training in areas other than social work they were not capable of providing social work instruction. Consequently, it was decided that agency personnel would serve as preceptors and would provide administrative supervision for the students. A faculty member assumed the responsibility for the students' educational experiences in the field and the linkage of these experiences with the rest of the curriculum. The next question was how the faculty member could best carry out this function while not being in or involved with the agency and with relatively little time to devote to this task. The pedagogical device decided upon which would best meet these criteria was that of consultation between the faculty member and student. It then became necessary to determine how a consultation approach

would relate to the School's broader curriculum, and to decide upon the specific theoretical framework within which the consultation would take place.

III. Relation to School's Curriculum Model

Three general curriculum models have been described by Mark P. Hale who analyzed them in terms of how they differ in (1) the focus of the program; (2) the way they define and put together class and field learning; (3) the way they use faculty available to them; and (4) the agency/school set required by them.¹⁰ With the work model (the traditional model and the one used in our school) the chief characteristic is the involvement of the student as a "worker" in an agency. The student's "work" or "cases" are the organizing factors in his learning. The agency "supervisor" is the primary teacher and apprenticeship is the main pedagogical method. The focus is on developing skill in practice and the agency and School share in teaching this--the agency supervises the field work and the School teaches the classes.¹¹ The deficiencies of this model, such as those mentioned at the beginning of this paper, have led to the development of the second model.

In the practicum model the focus is on the curriculum. The School arranges a wide variety of "field learning" experiences providing students learning in a number of service methods and in relation to curriculum areas other than direct service methods. Faculty field instructors arrange the learning experiences around a variety of services, clients, and problems. Students are based in a teaching center, a community, or in several agencies. The School assumes most, if not all, of the responsibility for field instruction. The student usually does not engage fully in a worker role and he is not an apprentice--he is a learner. Group instruction is the usual pedagogical device. (The third model, the intern model, is rarely used in schools of social work and is inappropriate for analyzing the relation of the consultation modality to curriculum models.)¹²

Whereas our School's program is based on the work model, the placement of students in the Commission constitutes a deviation from this model. The learning structure provided to the students in this arrangement is more akin to that found in the practicum model. However, while exposed to a wide variety of experiences as in the practicum model, the students encounter a greater intensity in learning experiences in this experimental placement than is usually true in the practicum model. This intensity results from the fact that the students are involved rather heavily in worker roles in the Commission, moreso than is usually the case with the practicum model. While lack of variety is a problem with the work model, lack of intensity is often a problem with the practicum model. Thus, the consultation approach used in this experimental placement avoids or minimizes the problems of each of these models while maximizing the advantages of each. While these attractive inherent features of the consultation field arrangement were apparent from the beginning, it was also recognized that in order for consultation to be a viable

form of field instruction it must be based on a theoretical framework which separates it from other modes of field instruction and which clearly delineates the activities which it includes.

IV. A Theoretical Base for the Consultation Approach

In order for consultation in any setting to take place in a deliberate, planned, goal-directed fashion it is necessary that the consultant operate within a clearly defined conceptual framework. Unfortunately, such a framework is not always used and the result is a haphazard process in which neither the consultant nor consultee knows what is happening or where the process is leading. It is essential that the consultant have a clear understanding of the structure and function of his consultation and that he communicate this beforehand to the consultee--the result is mutually understood expectations with a consequent mutual involvement in a goal-directed process.

Typologies and classifications of consultation activities have been designed by consultants from various disciplines as they have attempted to conceptualize, organize, and plan the activities they carry out during their consultation practice. The best known typology is probably that of Caplan, who classified consultation into the four following categories by problem and focus: (1) client-centered case consultation; (2) program-centered administrative consultation; (3) consultee-centered case consultation; and (4) consultee-centered administrative consultation.¹³

In client-centered case consultation the consultee's problem relates to the management or treatment of a particular case or group of cases. The consultant assists by assessing the client's problem and recommending how the consultee should deal with the case. The primary goal of the consultant is to communicate to the consultee how the client can be helped. The consultant is only secondarily concerned with improving the consultee's knowledge or skills so that he will be better able in the future to deal with similar problems. Similarly, in program-centered administrative consultation, the consultant's primary goal is to deal with problems of planning and administration--how to develop a new program or improve on existing one. He analyzes the situation and draws upon his knowledge to make specific recommendations as to what should be done. He is only secondarily concerned with whether or not the consultee learns something which will help him in similar future situations.¹⁴ While these two types of consultation are valid and useful in certain situations, they are not appropriate to use when consultation is being provided as a mode of field instruction. In consulting with students the field instructor must focus his efforts toward change, learning, and improvement within the student (consultee) rather than direct his efforts toward cases or program.

Since the focus of the two following types of consultation is on producing change within the consultee, both types seem appropriate when consultation is used as a mode of field instruction. Consultee-centered case consultation is concerned with the management of a particular client; however, the consultant focuses his attention on trying to understand the nature of the consultee's difficulty with the case and on trying to help him remedy this. The difficulty may be due to lack of knowledge, lack of skill, lack of self-confidence, lack of professional objectivity, etc. The primary goal of the consultant is to remedy the shortcomings he finds present so that the consultee will be better able to deal with this and future cases. The clients provide learning opportunities and the consultant is not concerned about making recommendations about the cases. Similarly, in consultee-centered administrative consultation the consultant is not concerned about making suggestions to improve the program or to remedy administrative problems. Instead, his primary goal is to deal with the consultee's shortcomings or difficulties which prevent him from being able to deal with the administrative problems. Again, the consultee's problem may be lack of knowledge, skills, self-confidence, leadership abilities, etc.¹⁵ Both consultee-centered case consultation (with groups and communities viewed as clients, following Lippitt et al.¹⁶) and consultee-centered administrative consultation are used in the experimental field placement. It was explained to the students in advance that this approach was to be used.

It is also necessary for the field instructor who is assuming a consultation role to differentiate the activities which take place in this type of practice from activities which may occur when other methods are used. It is this distinction which, perhaps more than any other, gives consultation its favorable uniqueness as a mode of field instruction.

To begin with, the consultation approach should be distinguished from traditional agency supervision. While a supervisor has administrative responsibility for the work of the supervisee, this is not the case with the consultant. Thus, the faculty field instructor assumes no administrative responsibilities with students placed at the Commission; the students are administratively answerable to one of the staff members. A supervisor can exercise his authority and enforce decisions on the supervisee by virtue of his higher position in the power hierarchy; in consultation there is a coordinate relationship with no power differential between consultant and consultee. It was made clear to the students at the Commission that the field instructor would not invoke his power as faculty member to induce them to handle their jobs in certain ways; instead, the relationship is such that they are able to accept or reject any ideas or suggestions proffered by the field instructor. They are assumed to be responsible for their learning and it is believed that they will make appropriate use of any help given by the field instructor (whether or not he agrees with the way they may use the help). Supervision also involves an ongoing process with the supervisor's "inspecting" the supervisee's work and initiating discussion of those aspects which appear unsatisfactory. Consultation, however, is ini-

tiated by the consultee and usually takes place in an ad hoc pattern around specific problems or difficulties which arise. Thus, it was explained to the students that the field instructor would see them at a set time once a week and that it would be their responsibility to bring to this meeting any problems or difficulties which they were experiencing. The field instructor does not review their work to see what they are doing but depends on them to introduce problem areas for discussion. If they have no material to discuss, their judgment about this is accepted and no time is wasted discussing irrelevant matters.

Consultation as a mode of field instruction should also be differentiated from the "teaching" activities which sometimes occur in field placements, as in teaching centers. In traditional teaching, there is the hierarchical obligatory relationship between student and teacher. In consultation, however, the coordinate facultative relationship which exists means that the student can make of the experience what he desires and he can accept or reject what the consultant has to offer. Also, in most teaching situations, the teacher has some clear idea of the content that he wants to impart to the student, whether it be factual knowledge, skills, or values. The field instructor functioning as a consultant, however, does not approach his student with some preconceived content area which he intends to impart in a series of planned steps. Although he may have the goal of increasing the knowledge or skills of the student and perhaps evaluating the degree to which he has succeeded in this, he does not assume responsibility for imparting content unrelated to problems or difficulties which the student introduces. He believes that the student, seeking to learn and enhance his skills, will introduce for discussion those areas in which he needs help.¹⁷ With this distinction between traditional teaching and consultation having been explained to them in advance, the students at the Commission recognize that the amount they can learn from the consultant is directly related to how much data they bring to him for problem-solving.

It becomes obvious by now that in this theoretical framework problem-solving is the essence of the consultant's role, regardless of which of the four types of consultation he uses.¹⁸ The consultant and consultee come together around the problems that the consultee brings to the relationship, and as they engage in the process of solving these problems together the consultant is able to provide his help. A consultant is able to assist as a problem solver because of his knowledge in the particular area, his skills in diagnosing causes and prescribing remedies, and the objectivity that he brings to the situation. Thus, the faculty field instructor who acts as consultant brings to the consultation experience his knowledge of social work, his skill in dealing with social work problems, and his objectivity as an outsider of the agency in which the student is placed. Equally important is the faculty field instructor's knowledge of the entire curriculum, and he draws upon this knowledge to assist the student in solving problems by relating them to relevant components of the curriculum to which the student is exposed.

In any consultation the role of the consultant and the expected relationship between consultant and consultee should be agreed upon at the beginning and should be a part of the contract, either written or unwritten. Such a contract was negotiated with the two students in our experimental placement; it has proven valuable in holding consultant and consultees to their agreed upon roles and assuring fulfillment of respective responsibilities throughout the process.

Thus far this approach to field instruction has been considered successful by all concerned--the students, the agency, and the School. The students are learning much in their placement and are relating it appropriately to classroom curriculum; the Commission is benefitting from the work done by the students and by the knowledge gained from the experience of having students; and the School is able to utilize an otherwise unusable agency which has great learning potential for students by using a faculty field instructor in such a way that a minimum of amount of time is required.

V. Potentialities and Cautions

The use of the consultation model deals with many of the problems which have prompted the use of other experimental approaches to field instruction as discussed earlier in this paper. To begin with, it does provide a wider scope of learning experiences than are normally available in field work under the traditional model. Hence, it provides one answer to the issue with which many schools have struggled--that is, in the language of standards, how to assure students an opportunity for "diversity and breadth" in field learning as well as "new knowledge and understanding in all content areas of the curriculum."¹⁹ While offering more variety than the traditional work model, this approach also provides more intensity than the practicum model by virtue of the fact that the student does assume full responsibility for dealing with problems as a professional worker in his placement. Relatedly, this approach to field instruction offers an answer to another problem of the traditional apprenticeship model--that is, the potential for the student to become dependent and to operate on his field mentor's practice wisdom and knowledge, rather than on his own understanding and knowledge. The consultation approach provides one means of promoting responsible learning and developing student initiative, creativity, and independence.²⁰

The use of consultation as a mode of field instruction also provides a solution to the problem of the need for linkage between class and field. Numerous educators have cited the need for the field to reflect, parallel, and build on what goes on in the class. Too few have voiced the need for feedback from the field to the class, which is equally important, particularly if we remember that historically class teaching began as an academic extension of and support to experience in the field.²¹ Usually "the structure of social work schools alienates classroom from practice by isolation,"²² and there is the need for faculty members to be reminded of what the student's practice problems are and to share in the responsibility for

solving these. The use of faculty field teachers as consultants makes possible this two-way communication. Similarly, this model makes it possible for the School to exercise control over the entire curriculum, rather than turning over a significant part of it to someone who might or might not relate his teaching to the rest of the student's learning experiences.

Perhaps one of the foremost advantages of this mode of field instruction is the type of relationship it fosters between faculty member and student. The relationship is professional and collegial, rather than vocational and pedagogical. Briar voices the need for this type of relationship in social work education in contrast to the "I teach, you learn" relationship which is so pervasive. "... [F]aculty and students should regard themselves as professional colleagues--of unequal competence, knowledge, and status, to be sure, but colleagues nonetheless--jointly engaged in a search for better, more effective solutions to the problems and tasks confronting their profession, a search in which each of them can make a contribution."²³ Briar advocates the establishing of this type of relationship in teaching centers, but admits the difficulty of doing so because it involves a departure from traditional patterns of instruction that is more attitudinal than structural in nature. However, the nature of the consultation role itself, as described earlier, necessarily creates this type of relationship.

Finally, the use of faculty field teachers in the consultation role provides a means of responding to many of the problems described in the beginning of this paper which are non-educational in nature. Increasing student enrollments have intensified the problems of lack of qualified field instructors and agencies. The consultation approach provides sound, broader curriculum-related field instruction and makes possible the use of agencies otherwise unavailable for field work. Furthermore, it provides a different means of deploying faculty members in those schools which have previously used the teaching center concept and are now faced with budgetary cuts.

A number of studies have dealt with the subject of reform in several areas of professional education.²⁴ One common reform measure recommended by these studies is that of increased flexibility in the curriculum so that students can have more freedom to choose and develop programs consistent with their own needs and interests. These studies recommend this type of reform on the basis of such factors as the demands of society, the cost of education, and students' changing demands. Argyris and Schon, however, make the same recommendation based purely on a theory of practice directed towards effective professional education.²⁵ Although this increased freedom of choice of learning experiences is advocated on the bases of both pragmatic and theoretical reasons, this reform is not easy to implement. The consultation model described in this paper, however, does provide a valid means of effecting such freedom of choice.

It is noteworthy that the consultation model is consistent with the theoretically based model described by Argyris and Schon, and, by its nature,

offers a viable means for applying their model. Argyris and Schon's theoretical based model is an ideal, and they acknowledge the difficulty inherent in shifting from the traditional educational model to the one they recommend. Briefly stated, Argyris and Schon describe a model for professional education in which control over the learning situation is shared by educator and learner so that both can experience psychological success. This means that the educator helps the students to help themselves to define their goals, define the paths to these goals, develop their own realistic levels of aspiration, and relate goals to their central needs. Freedom of choice and internal commitment to the choice are both conditions and consequences of this process. Unilateral protection of oneself on the part of either teacher or student is not sought. In this type of relationship both parties are minimally defensive and open to learning; they are facilitators and collaborators; and they hold their theories firmly but are equally committed to having them confronted and tested. Trust, individuality, power-sharing, and cooperation become norms, with competition being confronted when it becomes dysfunctional. As these norms are emphasized, authenticity, autonomy, and internal commitment tend to increase. In this type of learning environment learning cycles will be set in motion. That is, as individuals come to feel more psychological success and more likelihood of mutual confirmation or disconfirmation, they are likely to manifest higher self awareness and acceptance, which leads to offering valid information, which again leads to feelings of psychological success. As individuals feel higher degrees of freedom of choice, trust, and authenticity, they are more likely to test their assumptions publicly, which enables others to feel higher degrees of freedom of choice, trust, and authenticity--all of which makes everyone more willing to give valid information that enables individuals to test their assumptions. Hence; an individual's learning tends to facilitate others' learning, which in turn facilitates one's own learning.26

While Argyris and Schon's model for professional education has merit, there is obvious difficulty in designing and structuring a learning situation in which it is possible to implement their ideas. The consultation model does provide such a structure. Therefore, if professional education is to move in the direction called for by Argyris and Schon and the other writers mentioned above, the consultation model might serve appropriately as a vehicle by which this progress can take place. Such usage of the model could thus extend beyond the area of social work education into all areas of professional education.

Some words of caution should be interjected however. First, not every student is able to function well in the type of relationship suggested by this consultation model. While it is the philosophical position of this writer that graduate students will take responsibility for seeking learning experiences on their own if given the opportunity, it is also recognized that all students are not able to accomplish this to the same degree. Some students need more structure, guidance and dependency relationships than others, and the consultation model might prove frightening and overwhelming

to these students. The model requires that a student be willing and able to take responsibility for his learning; to seek out appropriate experiences; to function rather independently and autonomously; and, at the same time, to recognize his needs and deficits and to take the initiative in bringing his problems to the consultant. Furthermore, because of these reasons, the consultation model is more appropriate for second year MSW students than for first year. Because of their one year training they are closer to the point of responsible entry into professional practice and are perhaps better able to function in the role of consultees, not only in terms of their knowledge base and skills, but in terms of their professional self-concept.

Second, not every social agency is able to make use of the consultation mode of field instruction. Some agency heads would be threatened at the prospect of assuming administrative responsibility only, with the school's assuming responsibility for the students' learning experience and often becoming aware of many of the agency's problems and "secrets." Furthermore, many agencies may not be able to provide experiences of enough scope and depth for the student. As is true in considering any type of field placement, the school should inventory in advance the experiences available in the agency.²⁷

Third, not every teacher can function in the role of consultant. Consultation necessitates a coordinate relationship between parties; otherwise the activity is something other than consultation. Hence, consultation requires an attitudinal posture which may be comfortable if not impossible for some teachers more accustomed to the hierarchial patterns traditionally found in social work education. Relatedly, some faculty members may find it extremely difficult to commit themselves to a model in which the student must assume the responsibility for his learning, and to relate to the student in a problem-solving capacity only.

If the student, agency, and school can assume the necessary philosophical positions and make the requisite logistical arrangements, consultation can serve as a mode of field instruction which is valuable to all concerned.

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