

# WELCOME TO SW 408

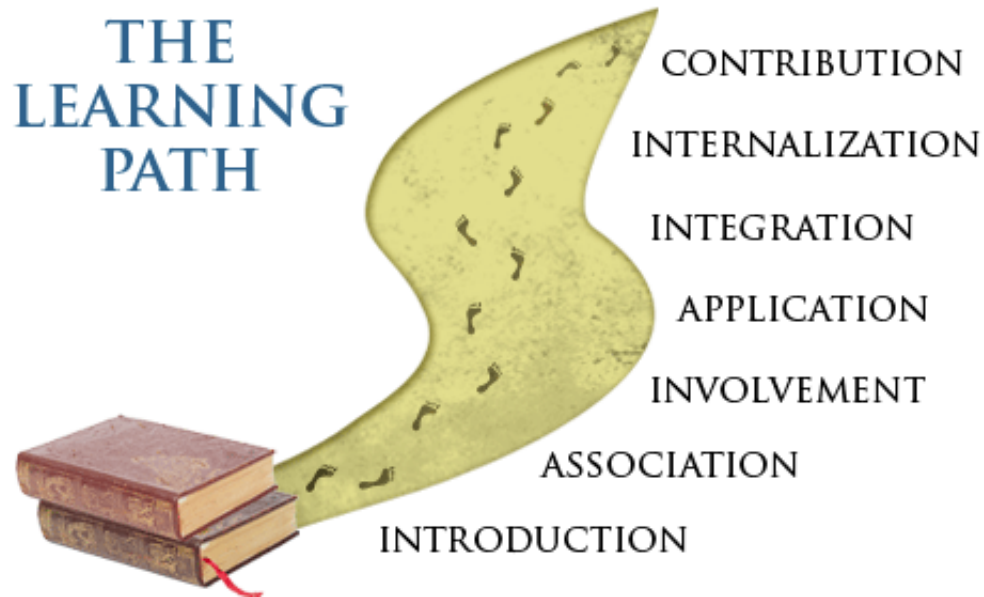
## FIELD PLACEMENT

Field placement represents a milestone of accomplishment and an opportunity for learning and growing professionally and personally while making a difference in the lives of others. For students, it is a time to apply in a human service setting the knowledge, values, and skills gained in the classroom as a means to integration, internalization, and mastery. For Field Instructors, it is an opportunity to make a contribution in the professional development of a colleague.

The *Learning Path* (Berger, 1993), *Student Learning Tasks for Professional Development* (Loganbill, et al., 1982; Garrison, 1989), and *Developmental Phases of Change* (Loganbill, et al., 1982; Marks & Garrison, 1996; Garrison, 1984) provide a philosophical and theoretical framework for understanding the significance, focus, process, and desirable outcomes of Field Placement. This understanding will enable all participants in the field education experience to structure, support, and engage in the learning/teaching process in a way that fosters professional development specific to the learning needs and challenges of social work students.

## Learning Path

There are a number of ways that knowledge, values, and skills for generalist social work practice can be presented to promote holistic learning. The Learning Path is especially useful in attending to the affective, spiritual, behavioral, and cognitive processes of learning, and in sequencing and presenting knowledge, values and skills for development of professional competency. The components of the learning path - introduction, association, involvement, application, integration, internalization, and contribution - are illustrated in the graphic. Berger identified six of the steps of the path; my colleague, Vickie R. Marks, MSW, CMSW, and I (Becky) added the step of integration. We are indebted to Berger for giving us permission to include his model in this manual.



The first step of the path is *introduction*, the presentation of new concepts, ideas, theories, and processes. Generally, definitions and descriptions of concepts, principles, and characteristics of the content to be introduced are presented in required readings (e.g. agency policy and procedures manuals, population specific articles and books, intervention strategies) and discussed during supervision conferences.

*Association* is the process of linking new information with that which the learner already has experienced and knows. Berger stresses that teachers and field instructors routinely check with learners to ensure that they are making associations of the new material with their experiences and existing knowledge. Knowing what associations learners are making enables the teacher/field instructor to assess the degree to which learners grasp the new information and can facilitate the development of activities for engaging and guiding learners through the learning path. To foster association, teachers/field instructors can provide examples of ways to link the new information with learner experiences or provide practice experiences for associating the new information.

Active use of new information in familiar and common ways is the process of *involvement*. Role-play exercises or discussions in supervisory conferences are excellent ways to engage learners and involve them with new information. For example, to teach about the application of systems theory in practice, students could develop an ecomap with a client system and discuss the ecomap with the field instructor using the concepts and characteristics associated with systems theory.

*Application*, the use of new information in similar situations, follows involvement. Conducting an interview with a client system, or reviewing a

case study prepared by the field instructor and identifying the systems and their qualities and characteristics revealed in the interview or case study, is an example of how learners might apply new information about systems theory.

*Integration* is the internal process of synthesizing the new information with what is already believed and known. As a crafts person weaves new thread into the emerging cloth to create pictures and patterns, so must new information be interwoven with that which is already known to create understanding, clarity, and meaning. As a process of synthesis, once new information is interwoven with the old, the knowledge, values, and skills become dynamic and unique. Even though integration is an internal process, teachers/field instructors can facilitate it by exploring with learners how the new information is fitting with what they already believe, know, and understand. This exploration is beneficial in identifying and discussing value and knowledge conflicts that may be blocking integration.

The next step, *internalization*, is the process by which the integrated knowledge, values, and skills becomes a part of the self. When knowledge, values, and skills are internalized it means that the capacities and competencies related to effective professional practice are synthesized with the self. From this perspective, separation of who we are as persons and who we are as professionals is neither possible nor desirable. Most social work educators have had experiences with those few students who excel in the classroom yet have tremendous difficulty when it comes to performance in field placement. Often these are students who have been able to integrate learning but not internalize it.

Frequently, our educational processes jump from application to expectation of contribution without facilitating and fostering the more abstract internal processes of integration and internalization. This is unfortunate as it is during the processes of integration and internalization that change occurs and makes it possible for learners to develop their personal styles for engaging in professional practice. Exploring with learners what they are discovering about their feelings, behaviors, and beliefs that are both similar to and different from their teachers, field instructors, and colleagues can stimulate the process of internalization.

The final component of the learning path in which the person is able to use the integrated, internalized knowledge, values, and skills in service of self and others is *contribution*. This is a point of celebration as it means that social work is a part of our identity, a part of who we are, and enables conscious use of self in our interactions with others.

While new learning will occur during field placement, the focus of this experience is on the application of the knowledge, values, and skills gained in

the classroom to enable integration, internalization, and contribution.

## Student Learning Tasks for Professional Development

This description of student learning tasks for professional development represents a synthesis of input by field instructors and Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth's (1982) framework for the interaction of student learning tasks and developmental phases of student change. The fundamental learning tasks are:

### 1. Knowing and understanding:

The degree to which the student has integrated and internalized practice knowledge and is able to utilize this knowledge to develop an understanding of the client system, its dynamics, needs, and goals, that is operationalized through a plan of action for creating change. Included in this task is the ability to balance the real and the ideal.

### 2. Respect of human difference:

The degree to which the student appreciates human and cultural differences and operationalizes this appreciation in practice.

### 3. Competency:

The degree to which the student demonstrates mastery of the skill (doing) components (application of knowledge and values) in practice such as relationship building and maintenance; communication (both written and oral) skills and processes; and, assessment, intervention and evaluative planned change process skills.

### 4. Professional identity:

The degree to which the student has internalized professional knowledge and values into a unified knowledge and practice base. Included in this category are the degree to which the student is aware of her/his personal motivations within the profession, has incorporated professional ethics as a part of his/her practice, and (for rural practice) is able to integrate and balance personal and professional roles.

### 5. Autonomy:

The degree to which the student is self-initiating and able to identify and exercise his/her own choices, decision making, and professional judgment in practice. Included in this category is the ability to differentiate between situations, experiences, and assignments in which autonomous functioning is appropriate and when it is not.

#### 6. Self-awareness/use of self:

The degree to which the student is able to identify and effectively use her/his own feelings and experiences in the change processes of others and identify areas of professional competence and deficiency. This includes the ability to differentiate between own feelings and experiences and the feelings about and experiences with the client system.

## Developmental Phases of Change

Another way to think about the professional developmental process through which students progress was developed by Loganbill, Delworth, and Hardy (1982). They identify three developmental phases of change: stagnation, confusion, and integration. Assessment of where a person is in terms of developmental phase of the professional developmental process is beneficial in identification of appropriate strategies for facilitating growth toward desired outcomes.

## Stagnation

In general, stagnation is characterized by:

- naïve unawareness of any difficulty or concern in a task or stuck/frozen in old patterns;
- gullibility;
- naïve or false sense of security or may present an unrealistic or inflated sense of competency and mastery;
- simplistic black and white thinking;
- absence of awareness and insight regarding impact of actions on others;
- "mechanical" actions and reactions to situations and events;
- rigid and narrow thought patterns and view of the world;
- low self esteem and strong dependency on authority figures – new learning must come from outside the person;
- exhibits a pattern of cognitive or emotional blocking, blind spot with regard to functioning in a task;

- idolizes authority figures as all-knowing, wise, and omnipotent but unnecessary; and/or
- unaware rather than hostile or angry.

In the context of the specific learning tasks for professional development, stagnation might be exemplified as follows:

1. Knowing and Understanding
  1. absence of awareness of the significance of practicing social work from a purposive, unified knowledge base;
  2. inconsistent and inflexible in use of knowledge for understanding system functioning; and/or
  3. simplistic view of the world and client/agency/community systems.
2. Respect of Human Difference
  1. denies human and cultural differences;
  2. is judgmental and overly critical of client systems;
  3. limited capacity to engage with client/collegial systems characterized by difference;
  4. directive with client/collegial systems and imposes own values, beliefs, and solutions on client/collegial systems; and/or
  5. unaware of acting in a way that is discriminatory or oppressive.
3. Competency
  1. limited skills for practice; or
  2. is routine, mechanical, and rigid in execution of skills without regard for differential client system needs and experiences.
4. Professional Identify and Values
  1. denies or is unaware of motivations for becoming a social worker;
  2. is aware of ethical standards yet does not apply these standards in practice; or
  3. is blind to ethical issues or ramifications of own behavior in practice situations.
5. Autonomy
  1. is overly dependent on the Field Instructor or other authority figures;
  2. views the Field Instructor as omnipotent and all knowing; or
  3. overgeneralized sense of own capacities and competencies and exhibits inappropriate independence and decision making.
6. Self-awareness/Use of self
  1. unaware or denial of feelings toward client/collegial systems (e.g. anger, inadequacy, intimacy, loss of objectivity);
  2. unaware or denial of feelings generate in client/collegial systems (e.g. anger, frustration, intimidation); and/or
  3. unaware of own strengths, capacities, and limits as a professional.

The phase of stagnation has value in providing an opportunity for regeneration of energy necessary in preparation for the next stage.

While people appear to be "stagnating" (admittedly not the nicest thing one can say about someone), they may be gathering strength.

## Confusion

The second phase, confusion, is characterized in general by:

- instability;
- disorganization;
- erratic fluctuations of behavior;
- disruption;
- conflict;
- confusion;
- desperate seeking of equilibrium and balance, may revert to old comfortable patterns;
- "unfreezing" of attitudes, emotions, and behaviors;
- questions world view and fit with profession;
- realizes something is out of sorts and is struggling for a solution;
- fluctuates between feelings of incompetence and failure and feelings of great expertise and ability or may be aware of skills and competencies but unsure as to how these are perceived by others and how useful they are in practice;
- perceives the authority figure as magical and all-knowing and withholding of knowledge from him/her or as incompetent, inadequate, and someone who has failed to come through when needed. Feelings for the authority figure may change from admiration to feelings of disappointment and anger as the person begins to realize that authority figures are not omnipotent and all knowing. This can be a very difficult and frightening phase for the authority figure; and
- a very raw affective period of social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral awareness and turmoil.

In the context of the specific learning tasks for professional development, confusion might be exemplified as follows:

1. Knowing and Understanding
  1. feels work with client/collegial systems is inadequate;
  2. unable to identify realistic goals in practice;
  3. confused about what happens with client systems; and/or
  4. fluctuates from one approach to another in attempts to understand dynamics and situations.
2. Respect of Human Difference
  1. fluctuates between denial and intolerance of human and cultural differences, and recognition and appreciation of difference;
  2. may experience guilt and distrust of self and ability to work with

client/collegial system difference.

3. Competency
  1. experience of intense frustration with the pace of client system movement toward desired outcomes;
  2. generalizes feelings of inadequacy experienced in one situation to all practice experiences; and/or
  3. desperate seeking of answers for "what to do" in work with client/collegial systems.
4. Professional Identify and Value
  1. questions choice of social work as a career;
  2. is frightened of or questions own motives for choosing social work; and/or
  3. experiences an intense ethical dilemma between professional ideals, agency rules, and/or personal values.
5. Autonomy
  1. fluctuates between dependence and rebellion or extreme independence.
6. Self-awareness/Use of self
  1. gradual or sudden awareness of own feelings and of feelings toward client/collegial systems;
  2. alarmed, fearful, or overwhelmed by self-awareness to point of immobilization in carrying out tasks and assignments, anger toward those involved in learning experience, and/or avoiding interactions that stimulate feelings; and/or
  3. vacillates between feelings of confidence and of inadequacy.

While this phase can be very frightening, it is the experience of confusion, tension, and conflict that is crucial to the development of creativity and synergistic processes and outcomes. It is during the phase of confusion that old ways of thinking, feeling, understanding and believing are shaken that can open up the way for creativity, and new learning and behaving.

## **Integration/Internalization/Contribution.**

The phase of integration/internalization/contribution, the culminating phase of the professional developmental process, is characterized by reorganization, flexibility with stability, security, competence, and mastery, confidence, hope, a renewed sense of direction, and vision for a preferred reality. Integration offers the student the opportunity to realize potential by moving forward as a professional equipped with the resources for meaningful action.

In the context of the specific learning tasks for professional development, integration/internalization/contribution might be exemplified as follows:

1. Knowing and Understanding

1. demonstrates a unified, integrated, internalized knowledge base; and
  2. ability to apply knowledge consistently and differentially with a variety of client/collegial systems in assessing and understanding the dynamics of client system functioning and interactions, in developing planned change processes and strategies, and in evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness.
2. Respect of Human Difference
    1. demonstrates an appreciation of human and cultural differences;
    2. acknowledges own biases and prejudices; and
    3. has developed a mechanism or process for guarding against the expression of biases and prejudices, and for continued exploration and identification of biases and oppressive behaviors.
3. Competency
    1. consistent application for skill in interactions with client/collegial systems;
    2. acknowledges ownership of and identifies skills and strengths; and
    3. adapts and applies skills differentially depending on the dynamics and needs of client/collegial systems.
4. Professional Identify and Values
    1. articulates a personal style consistent with professional purposes and values;
    2. is aware of personal motivations for choosing social work and channels these motives for constructive contributions in practice; and
    3. demonstrates integrity in operationalizing professional ethics in practice.
5. Autonomy
    1. demonstrates a realistic view of his/her capacities; and
    2. differentiates circumstances in which assistance and guidance are necessary from situations in which autonomous functioning appropriate.
6. Self-awareness/Use of self
    1. consistent, accurate awareness of self and other;
    2. able to use this awareness effectively in her/his interactions with client/collegial systems; and
    3. identifies capacities and strengths as well as areas for growth and change.

## Intervention Strategies

The process of influencing change is built on the foundation of a relationship and sense of belonging characterized by respect and positive regard for the other, genuineness, and integrity. The effectiveness of the implementation of intervention strategies identified for facilitating movement from one developmental phase to the next depends on the stability and nature of the student/field instructor relationship. Empathy

(awareness of and understanding the meaning of the experience of the other), parallel process (self awareness and conscious use of self), and encouragement (building on the strengths and capacities of the other) define the nature of the relationship.

Readiness for and timeliness of the intervention are factors in each of these phases. While each of the developmental phases has value, there are dangers associated with remaining in a phase too long. For example, stabilization (without challenges) can become stagnation in patterns and behaviors that no longer serve one's needs. Staying "stuck" too long can lead to entropy or diminishing capability to use energy and carry out functions. Alternatively, confusion without eventual movement into integration and internalization can become contempt of self and others, especially client systems and supervisors or anyone in a position of authority or authority figure. The intervention strategies described below enable facilitation of movement through the phases with the ultimate goal of integration, internalization, mastery, and competency. One caution: as noted above, because of the discomfort, turmoil, and chaos associated with the phase of confusion, there is a natural tendency for people experiencing this state to grasp for some resolution - either moving back to what "was" before experiencing confusion; or pushing too soon into "integration" or what "will be." Integration and internalization will not be complete without the dynamic tension associated with the phase of confusion. The intervention strategies identified for working with people who are stuck in old patterns (stagnation) are designed to create confusion and disrupt the status quo. Thus, it is desirable to anticipate implementing the intervention strategies for the phase of confusion when the intervention for stagnation is applied. Be prepared to feel and experience the disruption and turmoil of the student (parallel process) as you engage in the intervention strategies associated with facilitating movement through the phase of confusion.

Movement from stagnation into confusion can be facilitated by implementing the interventions of clarification, catalyst, and prescription. These interventions may be internally or externally initiated and may be gradual or abrupt, depending on the nature of the situation and the intervention strategy utilized.

- Clarifying Interventions

Clarifying interventions are activities and interactions that focus on defining, articulating, and giving meaning to the activities and assignments in which the student is engaged. Clarifying interventions may occur during supervisory sessions with the student, through assigned readings, in staff meetings, or anytime in which the focus is on

understanding the philosophy and rationale underpinning an activity or assignment. It is through this process of clarification that the students' knowledge, values, and skills are highlighted and made conscious.

- Catalytic interventions

Included in catalytic interventions are making a demand for work, facilitative clarification that highlights discrepancies and contradiction, increasing the degree of challenge of experiences and activities that introduce opportunities for disturbing the existing equilibrium and requires the development of new adaptive responses; and questioning, probing and raising issues. Catalytic events may occur voluntarily or involuntarily and may be imposed or offered. While devastating, natural, mechanical, or human caused disasters which are usually involuntary and imposed can be catalytic for the people affected by them. "Family interventions", utilized by substance abuse sponsors or professionals to encourage substance abusers to seek treatment, may be imposed involuntary catalytic events. At the larger system level, in 1996 a catalytic event was created when President Clinton vetoed the legislature's budget proposal that shut down many governmental offices and services.

Offered voluntary catalytic events might include voicing to the student an option or consequence that is desirable or undesirable which generates an intense reaction and stimulates action. Another example of an offered voluntary catalytic event might be to accept the offer of purposely being exposed to fear inducing, difficult, and/or challenging experiences, people, places, or things. For many students this can be the first time they are engaged in an interaction with a client system alone or without the Field Instructor present. For others, it might be meeting with client systems in the presence of the Field Instructor.

- Prescriptive interventions

Prescription is the process by which the student is provided a specific plan of action for use in a particular situation. Prescriptive interventions are useful especially in situations in which the monitoring of the student's behavior is necessary to ensure client system well being. This is a very directive intervention and may enable the student to engage in activities that disturb her or his equilibrium to foster recognition for change and development of new adaptive behaviors. An example of a prescriptive intervention is the Ten Commandments.

Facilitative and conceptual interventions enable the experience of

confusion and facilitate movement from confusion into integration/internalization/contribution.

- Facilitative Interventions

Empathy diffuses contempt and enables the natural progression of movement through confusion. Components necessary for facilitative interventions are accessibility of the Field Instructor or authority figure, patience, supportive unconditional positive regard, warmth and acceptance, creating an atmosphere of safety and security, providing the time and opportunity for the student to engage in reflection and introspection, providing feedback that clarifies strengths and effective behaviors, expression of confidence in potential and proposed behaviors, and conveying hope. As Helen Northen (1982) noted: "Support sustains motivation and capacity." The key is the safety of the environment for the expression of feelings, beliefs, and ideas.

- Conceptual Interventions

Conceptual interventions involve the reframing and clarifying goals and desired outcomes, and offering substantive content in the form of theories and principles for practice. Application of conceptual interventions can take the form of relating experience to theory or assigning (creating) experiences and assignments that illustrate specific practice principles or procedures.

Integration and internalization are not goals; they are phases in the process of learning and change. Integration and internalization without opportunity or challenge may quickly become stagnation. The interactions associated with the phase of integration/internalization/contribution enable continued growth and development as a competent professional with a commitment to and investment in using competencies and capacities for the well being of others – making a contribution in the service of others. Integration and internalization are maintained through encouragement, teaming and collaboration, and on-going evaluation of practice, programs, and outcomes.

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