The Dynamics and Skills of Classroom Teaching:

Integrating Content and Process in a Social Work Practice Course

A Teaching Manual With Accompanying Video

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During the last 25 years I have had the opportunity to present teaching workshops to hundreds of novice and experienced social work faculty members and PhD students at the CSWE Annual Program Meetings (in the Faculty Development Institutes), as a part-time faculty member in a social work doctoral program, and as an invited presenter at a number of schools of social work. I have been struck by how many of the participants described feeling ill-prepared to make the transition into the class room. Novice and experienced faculty have shared difficult moments in their classes that often left them at a loss for how to effectively intervene. Most also described a lack of ongoing support, mentoring, and a culture of safety needed to help them develop their teaching skills. Some examples of the issues described include the following.

- A PhD student prepares (actually overprepares) to deliver an effective lecture in her first class when a student with extensive experience challenges her and asks how much experience she had in this area as a social worker or was she going “to teach a lot of theory that has nothing to do with what we face in the field.”
- A relatively new teacher returns first assignments with what he thinks are tough but fair grades and faces a revolt in the next class with students telling him they are getting. As in all of their other classes and asking why is he such a tough grader.
- A comment is made by a Caucasian student in an early foundation practice class that suggests some underlying negative attitudes toward clients of color (for example, “these people”), and the instructor notes eyes rolling among the students of color in the class. Not knowing the best way to respond, the instructor ignores it, and in the next class all of the students of color are sitting on one side of the room with the Caucasian students on the other. The signal is clear, but the intervention needed to address this polarizing split is not so clear.
- Students in a part-time program challenge the instructor’s expectations for the amount of reading required, pointing out that they all work, have families, and are taking other classes as well. Other instructors in the school understand and are not so demanding, they argue.
- One student talks all the time and seems to regularly take the class off topic. The instructor tries subtly to restrain this student and encourage others to talk; however, the “monopolizer” won’t stop. The instructor can see the frustration on the faces of the other students waiting for the instructor to do something.
- Some students in the small group seminar never speak, and their silence gets louder as each week passes.
- A student presents a case example of working with a client with a substance abuse problem. In response to a question from another student, she shares that her own father was an alcoholic and starts to cry. The other students are taken aback and look to the instructor to respond. The instructor does not know how to respond as a

teacher but would feel comfortable responding as a clinician.

- A student presents an example of a difficult moment in a parent support group she is co-leading in her field practicum. Members in the parent group had bombarded the person presenting a family problem with “answers,” while the presenting client responded to each with defensive “yes, buts.” The social work students in the practice class immediately begin to suggest interventions that could have been used. However, the presenting student responds defensively to each with her own version of “yes, but.” The practice problem presented by the student is now being acted out in the class, and the instructor does not know how to handle it.
- An instructor who is openly lesbian encourages discussion in a practice class focusing on work with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual clients by creating safety for straight students to raise their issues and attitudes about working with this client population. After class, a lesbian student (who is out to the instructor but not to the class) attacks the instructor for allowing these comments to be made in class, calling for the instructor to crack down on the homophobic students.
- A student in an early first-year practice class responds to another student’s case presentation by saying: “It’s obvious that the client needs to have some help with her lack of religious values.” She wonders if the presenting social work student might consider taking the client to church one Sunday. She indicates she has just done that and it worked for her client. The faculty member feels at a loss as to how to respond without seeming to attack the student or her religious convictions.
- An instructor is dealing with the issue of abortion and a woman’s right to choose when a student says that abortion is a sin and social workers should be committed to protecting the life of the unborn child. The comment is met by silence for a moment and then a roaring argument breaks out with neither group in the class actually listening to the other.
- An instructor notes a pattern of students mentioning problems with difficult clients but without revealing that there is an intercultural relationship involved: for example, a student of color with a White family; a straight social worker with a gay client. Only after the case is discussed are these differences identified. It begins to appear that the subject of intercultural practice is somewhat “taboo” in the class.
- An African-American student placed in an inner-city middle school describes resistance by African-American high school students in her anger management group. At one session, a group member attacks the student social worker of color as being a “sell out” for working with the “man,” and another joins in calling the student an “Oreo.” The student is angry but does not know how to deal with this intracultural issue professionally. The Caucasian social work instructor can offer no help.
- In a class on trauma an instructor shows a video that describes in some detail the

> incest experienced by a young female client and the passiveness of the nonoffending mother, who did not protect her daughter. The class discussion of the video is marked by anger at the abuser but also at the mother. The instructor has indicated in the syllabus that some of the course material may be difficult for students, and that they may leave class if uncomfortable. However, when a female student starts to sob and immediately leaves the class, the instructor and the other students are stunned and not sure how to respond. The instructor thinks that if this happened in his practice group, rather than in class, he would know how to intervene.

These are just a few of the many difficult moments described by faculty workshop participants that are addressed and illustrated in this teaching manual. Many of the issues are related to what I call the “hidden group in the classroom,” to be described in more detail later. Workshop participants report that when teaching is addressed at their schools, the focus is usually on effective lecturing, the use of PowerPoint or Blackboard as an online tool, constructing a syllabus, designing assignments, and so forth. The issues described above are not usually addressed, and yet they can have a powerful effect on the learning that takes place in a classroom and on the students’ evaluation of the instructor’s effectiveness.

In addition, because of the parallel practice issues faced by the students (for example, the common example of the young unmarried social work student asked by the client, “And how many children do you have?”) students will watch the instructor’s responses closely. I suggest that we actually model—in the way we handle issues such as challenges to our authority in the classroom—what we really think about the helping process with clients, and that more is “caught” by our students than “taught” by us.

This is the area of teaching that this manual attempts to address. It focuses on the process of teaching, the core group dynamics that affect the class, the relationship between the instructor and the students (to be referred to as the “authority theme”) and the relationships among class members (to be referred to as the “intimacy theme”) and how these affect learning. It will also offer a model of intervention that enables the instructor to manage the classroom process, work on developing a positive class–group culture for learning, and provide meaningful content through lecture or other means.

Accompanying Video Program (VP)

Many of these issues also are addressed in a series of videos of seven monthly 1-hour workshop sessions. These were led by the author over a school year for PhD students and part- and full-time instructors who taught several courses (practice, policy, research, etc.) at the BSW and MSW levels. The videos series is called *The Skills and Dynamics of Teaching: Addressing the Hidden Group in the Classroom*. The series can be viewed online or downloaded without charge from the University at Buffalo School of Social Work page.

A more detailed description and a list of the video programs and their contents are provided on page 87 of this manual. In addition, this manual content will be linked to segments of the videos that deal with similar examples and issues. The videos are indexed by session and subject matter so the reader can go to a particular segment that addresses his or her own current classroom issues. A link to the pertinent VP is given in this manual at each point where it relates to the discussion (e.g., ►VP Session 3).

►VP Introduction to the Series: Purpose, Usage, Participants, and Descriptions of the Seven Sessions

The VP refers to the introduction of the series, which describes the purpose of the workshop and suggests how it might be used by the viewer. The program also describes the composition of the workshop group, which included participants from a previous year's series and first-time participants. The last part of the introduction summarizes the content in each of the remaining seven sessions.

Session 1 of the series is the first meeting of the workshop group and is an illustration of contracting in a first class. I try to model the contracting skills of clarifying purpose, clarifying my role, reaching for feedback (problem swapping), and addressing the workshop structure and issues related to authority.

►VP Session One: Introduction, Operating Assumptions, and Identification of Issues

Although this manual and the video series focus on core issues involved in teaching social work practice, many of the examples come from other areas of the curriculum (for example, policy, research, ethics, and diversity).

Finally, there are many ways of organizing a practice class and different perspectives on what constitutes the essential elements. Faculty views may also differ on the comparative emphasis to be placed on specific content for foundation and advanced practice courses. One purpose of this manual is to identify, from my perspective, what the essential content of such courses should include regardless of the particular structure, theoretical framework, practice model, or content emphasis employed by the instructor. This is consistent with the common-factors approach of interest to practice researchers as they identify variables that cut across practice models. Thus, the hope is that this manual will be helpful to new or experienced faculty in constructing and teaching their own versions of a social work practice course.

Underlying Assumptions About Content and Process

Numerous assumptions will be addressed in the manual, including the following.

1. There are core ideas, values, intervention strategies, and specific skills that we can agree should be included in a foundation year practice course. These constitute the "constant"

elements of social work practice.

2. Some important content areas need to be introduced when addressing the variant elements of social work practice, including

- the nature of the population served (for example, stage of the life cycle);
- the client problems or issues being addressed (for example, dealing with an addiction, addressing posttraumatic stress for war veterans, or the impact of childhood victimization);
- the setting (for example, a school, hospital, or community mental health agency);
- the modality of practice (for example, individual, family, group, community, policy, or organizational practice); and
- the relevant research findings (for example, from evidenced-based practice models) that relate to the population, problem, or setting.

3. Significant parallels exist between classroom teaching and practice with clients. A class is an educational encounter, not a therapy group, and the instructor's role is that of an educator not a therapist. Nonetheless, as instructors teach they are modeling, consciously or not, what they believe about the helping process, especially in the group context. This manual contains numerous examples in process recording format, some from my own teaching and others provided by participants in my presentations, workshops, and post-MSW classes on teaching. These demonstrate how an instructor emphasizes key practice ideas (the content) through the process in the class. Some examples follow.

- Contracting, including clarifying the purpose of the course, the instructor's role, asking for examples of student areas of interest related to the purpose, and clarifying mutual expectations, in first classes, parallels the contracting skills required in practice with clients in the beginning phase of work.
- The interventions of the instructor in creating a safe and supportive atmosphere in the class models for the students the skill needed to create a similar culture in an individual or family session or a client or community support group.
- How the instructor deals with issues related to authority (for example, grading, or an older and experienced student's challenge to the instructor's knowledge) also demonstrates the dynamics and skills required to address authority issues when raised, directly or indirectly, by clients.
- Recognizing and addressing underlying and often taboo intercultural issues that may affect teaching and learning (for example, a Caucasian instructor with students of color; a male instructor with female students; a straight instructor with gay students) models practice skills in the educational context needed in practice with clients when similar intercultural issues may exist.
- Dealing with intracultural issues (for example, a Hispanic faculty member with

> Hispanic students who expect a special relationship) may also need to be recognized and addressed. Parallel issues may emerge in practice when, for example, the African-American client asks the African-American social worker to "cut me some slack, brother."

4. Assignments may vary according to the organization and content of the course as emphasized in the school and the instructor's views on curriculum. However, I believe all assignments should allow students to connect course content with current or future social work practice. I present illustrations of this type of assignment in Appendix B, recognizing that they are suggested as examples and are not meant to limit the instructor's own versions.

5. This manual also deals with an issue often ignored and yet essential to effective teaching: how a department or school can create a support group for faculty that provides concrete help in making the transition from practitioner or PhD student to the role of instructor. Many assume that having been a strong social work practitioner or an excellent PhD student, and having a mastery of the content, will automatically make one an effective teacher. My experience in workshops with hundreds of new and experienced faculty members, many conducted as Faculty Development Institutes held at CSWE Annual Program meetings, challenges this myth. Most report struggling as they attempted to move into the educator's role. My experience as a dean working with new faculty members has informed and reinforced my views on this issue.

As mentioned earlier, many colleges and universities or schools of social work offer some help to new faculty. The help often is directed at issues such as how to construct a syllabus, the use of online technology (for example, Blackboard, clickers), effective lecturing, designing assignments, assessing student learning styles, the skillful use of PowerPoint presentations, and others topics.

These are important, but they do not address the issues discussed in this manual, which have more to do with the process of teaching. These support programs most often do not recognize what I describe as "the hidden group in the classroom," its powerful effect on learning, and the skills required to work effectively with this group. The instructor cannot see the properties of this "organism," the class-group-as-a-whole. For example, there may be an unstated but shared belief that certain taboo subjects should be avoided. Although this "property" is not visible, the instructor can infer its existence through the behavior of the students. If students consistently avoid discussing a taboo issue related, for example, to race, sexual orientation, abortion, and so forth, then a shared norm of avoidance exists and needs to be addressed by the instructor. Note that addressing these difficult issues also models for the students the way in which they will have to address them in working with clients or with other professionals. An instructor's avoidance also sends a powerful message.

6. Another issue, particularly important with the emergence of interest in evidenced-based practice (EBP), is the need to teach the unique role of the social work profession in our society.

If you examine the publications of the many well-known EBPs, they often are written by researchers in other professions. Although they offer helpful ideas and strategies about the nature of the helping process, they often fail to consider the role of the helping professional in system's change—whether within the agency, the community, or our larger society.

Although these publications may address affecting the agency or setting to influence the adoption and sustainability of a particular EBP model, they do not always look at the agency or setting as what I would call "the second client." Schwartz (1969) addressed this issue in his classic article, "Private Troubles and Public Issues: One Social Work Job or Two?" He traced the unique history of the social work profession emerging from two streams. One stream was from the settlement house movement concerned with social change and was most identified with social work pioneer Jane Addams. The second came from the Charity Organization Society movement and the "friendly visitors," identified in our history with Mary Richmond, and was concerned with healing individual hurts.

Schwartz suggested that social work's unique professional function was dealing with both the private troubles and the public issues. The original three-legged stool of casework, group work, and community organization merged eventually into the notion of generalist practice. I believe we need to guard against the loss of this historical and unique functional role by integrating it into our foundation and advanced practice courses. We want our students to refer to themselves as social workers and not what they sometimes believe to be the more professional terms of "clinician" and "therapists."

With the emergence of EBP and the movement toward private practice, unless this concept of the "two clients" is clearly articulated, our unique role as a profession could be threatened (see Specht & Courtney, 1993).

7. Finally, one issue consistently raised in my teaching workshops over the years is the importance of creating a safe culture for faculty to learn their craft. To do this, faculty members must be able to make mistakes and grow from those mistakes through self-reflection. This issue most often comes up when faculty members share their difficulty in dealing with hot-button and taboo issues (for example, abortion, race, sexual orientation, religion). Workshop faculty participants describe "walking on egg shells" in these areas, afraid to make a mistake, to be reported to the administration, and to jeopardize their hope for future tenure. Therefore, they say nothing, even in the face of an obvious need to address these difficult issues as they emerge in the classroom. Thus, instructors unintentionally model for students a lack of courage and skill for dealing with potentially toxic issues that can also emerge in direct practice.

For example, in an early foundation year course a comment might be made about an African-American family by a Caucasian student, in a class with a Caucasian instructor and some students of color. This comment might be interpreted as having a racist or classist overtone (for example, referring to "those people"), and the instructor often either ignores it or over-reacts by attacking the student, thus guaranteeing majority students will not risk saying what they really think and feel rather than what they think others want them to say. Students have also described this as being so cautious it is like “walking on egg shells.”

Either reaction has a powerful impact on the class culture, which is just starting to develop. When the issue is ignored, it won’t just go away; in the next class, all of the African-American students may be sitting together on one side of the room and the Caucasian students on the other. The process cries out for an effective intervention. In an example such as this one, students are really watching the instructor closely, and more is “caught” than “taught.” A possible response to a moment such as this one is described later in this manual.

The way the instructor addresses this moment in the class, or more often in the next class, will model for the students the importance of how they address intercultural issues in their work with clients. For example, the Caucasian social worker with a group of African-American girls suspended from school for violence needs to learn how to understand, respect, and address the cultural differences as they affect his or her practice. If the message the instructor sends is to ignore the taboo subject of race and simply hope it will go away, then that is what will be caught no matter what class or textbook content is taught.

Each of these seven assumptions and associated issues, as well as others, is addressed in this manual. Many of these concerns affect experienced as well as novice teachers. The manual is conceived not as a way of solving all the issues involved in teaching practice but rather as a sharing of what I have learned over the years from my own teaching and the teaching of others, and when available, what research has told us.[1] Each faculty member has to work hard through self-reflection, often painful, to integrate the suggested skills and content into his or her own model of teaching.

In one excellent example of self-reflection, a PhD student in one of my midsemester workshop sessions reported hesitantly that she had received some negative feedback in a confidential midsemester student survey that was part of the school’s evaluation process. This was not on the agenda for our session; however, she shared this when I noted a sense of preoccupation by all of the participants at the start of the session. I could see it in their faces and commented on it by asking “What’s up?”

This student responded to my invitation by describing her negative midterm evaluation results. Once she broke the barrier, others in the workshop also reported negative comments from their students from this midsemester survey. After discussion of the survey content, and the support the first student received from what I have called the “all-in-the-same-boat” mutual aid phenomenon, I suggested she might take the results back to her next class and openly and nondefensively discuss them with her students.

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[1] I should point out that much of the research about teaching in our profession, and related professions, does not focus on the process of interaction in the class but rather on the structure and organization of the class. My own research, some of which is cited in this manual, explored the skills and interventions described here in direct practice, field instruction, doctor–patient relationships, supervision, and management.

After further discussion of the difficulty she and others had with this idea, she resolved to do just that. At the next workshop she reported how positively the students had received her efforts, informing her that this was the first time at the school that any faculty member had reported in class on the survey results, positive or negative. Suggestions for changes on the part of the faculty member and the students emerged from the discussion and were then implemented.

In the second semester of the workshop year, the student reported with pride the distinct difference in the classroom atmosphere after the discussion, her more positive feelings about teaching each week instead of “dreading” the class, and the extremely positive evaluations she received at the end of the semester. In addition, she provided an excellent example of how her social worker students could use feedback to strengthen their work with clients. Her discussion of the experience 1 year later is included in Session Five of the video series.

►VP Session Five: Discussing Poor Midterm Evaluations

I recognize that developing these teaching skills can be a life-long endeavor and can be difficult. Self-reflection always is. However, I hope this manual will help faculty members go easier on themselves, and that when they make mistakes it will speed up the process of learning from and correcting them, so they can then make more sophisticated mistakes.

Assumptions About Content in a Foundation Practice Course

One of my central educational assumptions is that beginning students, with or without prior social work experience, start their professional education with a keen interest in the "how to" of practice. A first course should provide an introduction to methods that students can use to conceptualize and apply to their work in the field.

Although the focus is on method and skill, the introductory course needs to cover more than just learning about techniques (listening, empathy, etc.). It is important for the students to gain a sense of their unique social work role and how that professional role is implemented in the social work agency or host setting (for example, hospital, mental health agency, substance abuse treatment center, school). This sense of professional function guides a social worker’s interaction with clients. Method becomes the means by which the social worker puts this function into action, and specific interpersonal skills are behaviors that are the tools for implementing social work practice method. Among these skills is the ability to make appropriate assessments to guide practice interventions.

Underlying constructs about human behavior in general, as well as ideas about client behavior in a helping relationship, can be described as *theory for understanding.* Such theory helps us understand behavior but does not necessarily tell us what to do about it. I have described a common mistake as the “inductive fallacy”; if we know enough about a client and a problem, we will be able to “induce” the proper intervention. In contrast, a practice theory is a *theory for action* that builds on this knowledge base. Theories for understanding and supportive research need to be introduced in the first practice course, as well as in the often concurrent human behavior and social environment courses. It is important to make specific connections in the practice course between what we know about people in general and clients in particular, what we hope to achieve and our practice methods. These connections between what we know about clients and the helping process (knowledge), what we wish to achieve through our interventions (valued outcomes), and our practice strategies and interventions designed to achieve our valued outcomes (skills) can be termed middle-range practice theory for action. This constitutes a deductive, rather than inductive, approach to practice theory development.

An Illustration of Construction of a Practice Theory for Action

One illustration of the elements of a practice theory relates to the concept of contracting in the beginning or engagement phase with clients (individuals, families, groups or communities).[2] Practice wisdom and research tells us, among other things, that clients bring a number of unstated questions and concerns to first sessions. These include the following:

- Who is the social worker, and what kind of person is he or she?
- How can this social worker understand and then help me with my problems?
- What is the purpose of our getting together?
- Do I have any sense of investment in this conversation? Will it address my concerns?
- Can I trust the social worker?
- Will our conversations be confidential, and if not, under what conditions might this social worker share what I say with others?

Given these assumptions (knowledge) about engaging with clients, we have to identify our specific valued outcomes. What would we like to achieve in the first session or sessions? The possibilities might include the following:

- Help the client to understand the purpose of the encounter. If it is initiated by the social worker, it needs to be spelled out in clear and understandable terms.
- Find out what brought the client to the agency/setting and what he or she is looking for from counseling.

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[2] For a detailed discussion of the practice wisdom and research associated with this author’s interactional practice framework, see Shulman, 2011a, 2011b. For a discussion of this author’s model as applied to supervision and the parallel process in that relationship, see Shulman, 2010.

- Help the client identify the connection between the service of the agency or setting and the client's felt needs.
- Help the client understand the role of the social worker and how he or she may be able to help.
- Clarify the limits of confidentiality.
- Obtain an appropriate form of informed consent to treatment.

These are generic goals (valued outcomes) associated with any mode or model of practice. More specific valued outcomes may be associated with variations, such as when working with mandated clients, different modalities of practice (such as family, group, or community practice), or using a particular practice model (for example, motivational interviewing). For example, confidentiality issues are affected when we work in a group context and other clients are hearing what is being shared. The confidentiality assurances given in an individual session may not hold true in a group meeting.

At this point the discussion is two thirds of the way toward developing a practice theory related to engagement and the beginning phase with clients. We have our underlying knowledge about people, and especially people in the beginning phase of practice. We have identified our valued outcomes—what we would like to accomplish in the first session or sessions. The final element of a theory for practice is based on the first two sets of ideas. Given what we know about clients in the beginning phase of practice and what we hope to achieve, we need to describe social work interventions and specific skills to accomplish these goals. Some examples follow.

- Make an early, direct, and clear statement of purpose of the engagement whether already determined, in a general way, or if the purpose is to explore the current felt needs of the client.
- Clarify the social work role—how we help—without using professional jargon. For example, *facilitate*, *enhance*, or *enable* are examples of jargon that, when attached to overly general goals such as "facilitate individual growth and development," actually obscure a functional definition of what we do rather than clarify it.
- Reach for feedback, getting the client's sense of what they want out of the engagement. Even for a mandated client, the feedback might be: "Get the agency (or judge) off my back!" A response to this comment might be: "OK, let's see what we have to do to get the judge off your back."
- Address the issue of informed consent so the client's right to engage or not engage in the work is clearly stated even if lack of engagement will have consequences such as for a mandated client.
- Raise the authority theme, which may include a number of issues, such as confidentiality or concerns about the ability of the social worker to help (for

example, “Have you walked the walk and talked the talk?” asked by a client at a substance abuse agency).

The Phases of Work as an Organizing Framework for Practice and Teaching

This is an illustration of one element of a larger practice theory demonstrating how our knowledge informs our valued outcomes, which in turn generates social work interventions in the beginning phase of practice. A similar sub-element of a model can be developed for other phases of work (for example, endings and transitions with clients) or other modalities of practice (such as the issues raised by the presence of other clients in group work practice or unique issues associated with online practice).

Although a first practice course may introduce a number of theoretical models, I believe a review of several practice theories is not a useful organizing framework for the first practice class. Foundation year students who are preoccupied with issues of engagement with the client, contracting, dealing with client affect, leading a first family or group session, and so forth may be overwhelmed by introductory courses that, for example, just survey different models of practice. First practice courses organized by models of human behavior such as object relations theory, learning theory, or systems theory also may miss the mark. Elements of any or all of these theories may and should be included in the first course but do not make a sound organizational structure.

My experience has taught me that most students learn best by starting from the specific, then moving to generalizations. Given the sense of urgency felt by students in their first practice class, the course is more appropriately organized around method (for example, engagement skills, confidentiality issues, ethical issues such as informed consent, dealing with resistance). I have personally found the phases of work a useful organizing principle for introductory courses, these being the preliminary, beginning, middle, ending, and transition phases.

I recognize that other formats can accomplish the objectives previously identified and that the dynamics and skills of beginning have been more often researched and supported in practice, field instruction, and supervision than in classroom teaching. This suggests an important area of needed future research.

Given this caveat, phases of work makes a useful structure for exploring practice with individuals, families, groups, and communities and working with the other professionals in the system. Each modality of practice can be presented against this backdrop of time. Thus, students can compare beginnings, middles, and endings with individuals, families, groups, and communities and identify the common elements of practice as well as the variant elements introduced by the different modalities.

The Variant Elements in Practice

The importance of differentiation in practice can also be introduced in the first courses. This can be done in a number of ways. For example, my former colleagues at Boston University (Bernstein, 1970) described the differentiation factors as the “four Ps”: place (setting); population (age, etc.); problem (mental illness, family violence, etc.); and processes (unique differential strategies and skills that are responsive to place, population, and problem). Although elements of differentiation should be introduced in a foundation course—particularly in terms of practice that recognizes social, cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, and other differences—the method focus of the course should be kept in the foreground.

The first year social work curriculum usually includes courses on human behavior and the social environment, oppression and resiliency, social policy, research, and so forth. In the foundation practice course the instructor helps students integrate and connect content from the rest of the curriculum to the key practice content in the method course. The schools where I have taught and believed did the best job of integration were those in which faculty in the different content areas made strong efforts to communicate with each other and look for ways to align their content and even their assignments. (If nothing else, not having all of the written assignments due on the same date was helpful.)

Inter- and Intracultural Issues in Practice

Another important area for inclusion is what I refer to as “intercultural” and “intracultural” practice. In an intercultural situation the social worker may be working, for example, across differences in race such as a Caucasian worker with an African American client. Another example would be gender differences, such as a male social worker practicing with a female client or vice versa. Later in this manual I will address the process issues in the classroom that parallel the issues in practice. You could easily have a faculty member of color with Caucasian students or the reverse. Under the assumption of what I call the “parallel process” I believe the instructor’s handling of these often difficult and mostly “taboo” issues in class demonstrates for students how they might handle similar issues in practice. In essence, I once again suggest that more is caught than taught, and that our students watch us closely.

Sometimes even more complex and difficult to address are intracultural issues in practice and teaching. How does an African American social worker, for example, deal with an African American client who calls him or her “Oreo” (Black on the outside and White on the inside), a “sell out,” or even more painful accusations. How does the “out” lesbian teacher deal with the lesbian student in the class who accuses her of not coming down hard enough on perceived homophobic comments by straight students?

►VP – Session Two: Lesbian Teacher Feeling Attacked by a Lesbian Student

Many of these issues are dealt with in the University of Buffalo School of Social Work teaching video programs and also have been addressed by myself and a colleague in a CSWE-produced video series on practice and diversity (Council on Social Work Education, 1993). The video consists of two parts. In the first my colleague and I lead a diverse group of social work master's students that we have not met before at the University of Connecticut, in a morning workshop on practice and diversity. A number of powerful inter- and intracultural issues between the student social workers and their clients emerge.

In the second part of the video a facilitator leads my colleague and me in a discussion of issues we faced at various moments in the morning workshop. We discuss (without the students present) our reactions to the morning session—my colleague from the perspective of an African American, female, relatively new instructor; and myself who experienced the morning as a white, Jewish, senior, tenured faculty member. Our different reactions at key moments in the morning session reveal how much who we are enters the equation when we teach.

I address some of these issues again in this manual, because I believe that although social work curriculum does focus on oppression and diversity practice, as well as the impact of concepts such as "privilege," less attention is paid to inter- and intracultural practice method issues. In particular new and experienced faculty members and practitioners with whom I have worked often indicate that even though some intercultural practice issues are addressed, little or no attention is paid to the intracultural dynamics.

Empirical Base of Practice

The first course is also the place to introduce the empirical base of those theories for understanding and theories for practice that guide our work. The early emphasis is mostly on the student as a consumer of research, although beginning efforts to help the student develop a research/evaluation stance toward his or her own practice are also essential. The selection of supplementary research articles for this first course should focus on method-related research that speaks to the learner about his or her own practice. Outcome studies that simply evaluate the effectiveness of a global intervention (group treatment, individual counseling, etc.) but fail to operationalize the independent variable (what it is the worker actually did in interaction with the client) are less meaningful to students. A study that describes a particular approach to counseling or the use of specific skills under prescribed circumstances, I believe, is of greater interest and assistance to the beginning learner.

At the same time, it is important that although practice is in the foreground in a practice course, students need to connect to research and policy issues as well as those raised in human behavior in the social environment (HBSE) theory, in the background that inform practice. Resistance and even fear (for example, fear of statistics) can emerge as the instructor attempts to make these important connections.

►VP Session Four: Teaching Research, Program Evaluation, and Policy Overcoming the Culture of Negativity

Students also need to be introduced to emerging models of practice (for example, spirituality, crisis intervention, feminist approaches) and EBP (for example, solution focused practice, cognitive-behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing). My own approach is not to teach students to practice a model itself in the first year but rather to help students understand how to evaluate models and to understand the criteria that leads to their certification as "evidenced-based."

I also focus, when appropriate, on concepts and practice interventions from these frameworks that can enhance their practice. For example, understanding the stages of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) from motivational interviewing or inquiring about when a client had been able to maintain sobriety for a period of time, and asking what was going on in the client's life for that period that helped him or her maintain the recovery, drawing on solution-focused techniques, are examples of concepts and skills that can be integrated into a general social work framework of practice.

Thus, foundation-year students should begin to develop a curiosity about models based on practice wisdom and evidence without locking themselves into a particular framework, no matter how tempting that may be. I believe a successful first-year course teaches social work students to be lifelong learners, skillful at self-reflection, able to tolerate some ambiguity and not rush to closure. Second-year practice courses and electives are the place to teach models of practice, evidenced-based and others, to deepen a student's understanding of the concepts involved. At the same time, the two-client idea and our social work responsibility for social change within the agency, the community, and our larger society should be emphasized in both of the foundation years.

Of course, these assumptions are based on my own teaching experience and my work with faculty; the reader may reasonably have other views.

A broad view of the many ways in which students can evaluate their practice offers the instructor in the first practice class opportunities to develop the spirit of inquiry in students without requiring a full-scale research design. Single-case study is one example. Tools for qualitative analysis of practice process recordings are also means for students to develop attitudes and skills required to be lifelong learners and evaluators of their practice interventions.

Ethical and Risk-Management Issues

Finally, the foundation-year practice course needs to address ethical and risk management issues (see Reamer, 1990, 1998, 2000). Students need to be aware of the code of ethics that guides their practice and understand how to use the literature, the code itself, and colleagues in a process of addressing the many "ethical dilemmas" they will face. This starts in the early days of the practice course when client engagement and contracting processes are linked to key concepts of informed consent and other ethical issues specifically needing to be addressed in the early stages of practice. They need a beginning awareness of professional boundaries and the importance of avoiding improper relationships with clients, and at times, with colleagues.

The first practice class is a place to begin to learn how to consult with colleagues and supervisors when faced with a complicated ethical issue.

Given these assumptions about the beginning student, a course with a method focus, employing middle-range theory with an introduction to the empirical base for practice and beginning skills for self-evaluation of practice makes a sound fit between the objectives of the curriculum and needs of the student in the first practice class or classes.

Assumptions About Teaching an Advanced Practice Course

Once the basics are communicated in an introductory practice course or courses, then the social work student is ready begin grappling with a more holistic approach to thinking about practice. Elements of this approach are introduced in the first course. For example, students must begin to think about issues of oppression and resilience and how they affect clients and the practice experience in the engagement stage. Issues related to diversity—for example, related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, and so forth—must be addressed as students consider how to engage and work with clients. Ethical considerations, such as the principle of informed consent, need to be brought up in discussion of first sessions and contracting. These issues in the background in a foundation practice course may move to the foreground in an advanced practice course.

One way of organizing an advanced practice course, or a final integrating seminar, is to expand on themes introduced in the introductory classes by exploring such issues as how social context affects clients and workers, supervision, agency policy, social support, cost-containment efforts, and so forth.

Method is still central in the advanced practice course. The difference is in the organizing structure. In the first course, method was in the foreground, and the broader theoretical issues were in the background. In the advanced practice course, method is still important; however, the holistic nature of our practice, theoretical models, and empirical evidence are brought into focus, providing the organizing structure for the course. Once again, elements of these areas need to be introduced in the foundation course. We can't wait until the second-year courses to explain ethical issues involved, for example, in the duty to warn if our clients or others are at risk; but we can use the advanced practice year to explore the concepts and issues involved in greater detail, as well as the variations introduced by different state laws and the effect of practicing at a federal facility.

An advanced practice course is also the place for an appropriate review of a range of practice theories and models. I believe social work students must first gain a sense of mastery of a core practice, skill-based model before they can appropriately make comparisons with other theories. An introductory practice course that attempts to survey a wide range of theories may lead students to feel overwhelmed and unclear about their function and the skills required to implement their social work role. Acknowledgement and discussion of other models in a foundation course can be helpful, as long as a clear core of practice theory is evident to the student.

Another issue that needs attention has to do with the requirement for fidelity to the protocols of EBP models. When a model provides a detailed manual, suggesting a manualized approach is required, a degree of worker flexibility may be lost. My own practice and teaching approach is to suggest the need to develop a core practice model, perhaps using the more recent “common factors” approach that identifies intervention and variables that cut across EBP and other models and represent “universals.” In keeping with my own belief that there is artistry to social work practice, and that science (our research) should be designed to free this artistry rather than restrict it, I caution against adopting of a mechanistic approach to practice. More recent discussions addressing the acknowledged problem of “sustainability” when agencies implement National Institutes of Health-funded EBP have begun to recognize that the requirement of fidelity may be one source of the problem.

Although I have addressed some of my core assumptions about teaching practice, I believe there may be a number of frameworks for organizing and teaching these essential concepts. In the balance of this manual I address a number of the content and process issues involved both in what we teach and how we teach it. A continuous major theme will be the one introduced earlier when I discussed the parallel process: More is caught than taught, and our students are watching us closely.

Modeling the Helping Skills Through Effective Teaching

The classroom provides an important opportunity for the instructor to model many of the practice skills in the educational context. In fact, one can assume that the students will learn at least as much about the helping process from the way the instructor teaches as from the content of the lectures or the readings.

For example, consider the instructor who, responding to a student's lack of expressed empathy for a client, provides a critical response. If the instructor is not empathic at that moment with the student and fails to explore the student's affect that may have obstructed his or her ability to be empathic with the client, the class members will observe a helping professional modeling the opposite of what the instructor wants to teach. The instructor will be asking the student to be in touch with the client's feelings, while at precisely that moment the instructor is not in touch with the student's emotional response to the client and to the instructor’s critical comments.

The instructor who genuinely inquires of the student, "What were you feeling at that moment when you found it hard to connect with that client?" not only models the empathic skills but will also help the student hear the substantive content being presented. When examples such as this emerge early in a course, it is not unusual for a student to feel vulnerable and exposed even when the instructor has been supportive.

Recognizing an opportunity to influence the class culture, the instructor can say,

> Good for you Jane, for sharing your practice so honestly with the class. I know it feels uncomfortable, but I suspect everyone in this room, including myself, has had a time when it was hard to respond to a client with supportive emotions. How about it? Is Jane the only one?

Inevitably, students will jump in to support Jane, pointing out how as they listened to Jane's example they were thinking of their own clients, who were also tough, and how they made the same mistakes. What we can observe is the mutual aid factor I call the "all-in-the-same-boat" phenomenon, which not only helps Jane but also starts to shift the culture of the class. It is not the "perfect" student who always presents "perfect" practice who is valued in the class; it is the student who, early in the term, is willing to risk sharing mistakes.

Similarly, the instructor who never confronts students or makes a demand for work models a helping professional who is one-dimensional and not helpful. The helping process often involves the subtle blending of support and confrontation. Asking Jane to describe her work in detail is an example of a "demand for work," and providing support for her as she does it illustrates what I call the "supportive confrontation." Students observe closely and learn from the way the instructor uses (or abuses) authority.

The instructor is a teacher, not a social worker, and the classroom is focused on educational purposes. It is not a therapeutic group. Nevertheless, many parallels in this educational helping process offer opportunities for a practice instructor to use the class as a form of experiential learning. Unfortunately, the term *experiential* is often associated with an approach to teaching that more closely resembles an encounter or sensitivity group. That is not the sense in which I use the word.

The class described in this instructor's manual is knowledge-based, guided by a structured syllabus, with substantial content to be learned. It is suggested, however, that as the class explores the academic substance of the course, the process between instructor and students (the authority theme) and among students (the intimacy theme) will contribute to the learning, whether the instructor acknowledges this fact or not.

False Dichotomies and Phony Dualisms

In this way I hope to challenge the false dichotomy often posed between *process* and *content*. I am suggesting that the content is taught through the process and one does not have to choose between the two. The instructor teaches the student (and the class) about the power of empathy through empathizing with the students. The expression *false dichotomy* will come up a number of times in this manual. I suggest that in practice and in teaching we may find ourselves struggling with what we experience as a dichotomy and believing we need to make a choice. These will include the following:

- Content versus process
- Structure versus freedom
- Support versus confrontation
- The individual versus the group
- Personal versus professional
- Science versus art

In each case I suggest that either choice is usually wrong. Our understanding that the dichotomy does not really exist is the key to resolving the apparent conflict. This is true in practice with clients and the practice of teaching.

In the following discussion, I focus on how the instructor can model important practice constructs and intervention. The illustrations are drawn from my own classes as well as from situations presented by other faculty members and PhD students in workshops I have offered on classroom teaching and a weekend class for doctoral students on teaching practice offered over the past 3 years at another school. I was fortunate to be able to videotape seven 1-hour sessions of 1 year of the workshop offered at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work during my last academic year as a full-time faculty member. A DVD of these sessions, with analysis, was produced by the University at Buffalo School of Social Work with the support of Dean Nancy Smyth.[3] The seven sessions are indexed by session as well as topic and are available online, at no cost, for viewing or downloading to a DVD. I have embedded references to sections of these tapes in the text that follows. The programs can be viewed or download at no cost at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/facstaff/skills_dynamics.asp.

Illustrations of Modeling Good Practice in a Practice Class

These examples demonstrate how skills can be harnessed to the teaching function in pursuit of an educational purpose. The discussion is organized using the same time framework presented in my texts on social work practice (Shulman, 2011a, 2011b). The four phases are the preliminary (preparatory), beginning (contracting), middle (work), and ending/transition.

The Preliminary (Preparatory) Phase

The tuning-in exercise, described in this author's practice framework (Shulman, 2010, 2011a, 2011b) involves a preparatory effort to develop a preliminary empathy for the client's feelings and concerns and is equally useful for the instructor who prepares for a first class. The structure of the first class can be designed to address some of the underlying issues directly. For example, based on the assumption that students are usually wondering, "What will this class be about?" and "What kind of instructor will he or she be?" the contracting skills of *clarifying purpose* and *clarifying role* can be as important in the first class as they are in the first client interview or family or group session. The instructor models these skills by making an opening statement that starts to frame the work of the class. An example of such a statement is provided in the next subsection (the beginning phase).

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[3] The sessions were taped, edited, and then produced by Steve Sturman on the staff of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work.

Tuning in also alerts us to the issues of authority that are part of any classroom interaction. For the student, a central issue in the first class relates to the assignments for the course: "What will be expected of me in this class?"; "Can I manage the assignments?"; "Will the instructor provide help if I need it?" By addressing these questions in the first class hour as part of a review of the syllabus, the instructor can provide some answers and also the reassurance that help will be provided (see next subsection for an example). The instructor is not only clarifying what he or she expects from the student, but also what the students can expect from the instructor. If these questions are not addressed at the start, they often stay beneath the surface, making it more difficult for students to hear and remember any other content shared in the first class.

For a presentation of a classic model of group development with a focus on the authority theme—the relationship between the instructor and the class (Bennis & Shepard, 1956)—see

►VP Session Five: Group Theory and Understanding Class Dynamics—Bennis and Shepard

The instructor can also tune in to another major question on the minds of the students: "Will this class connect to my sense of need and my sense of urgency?" For the first-year student with little or no experience, anxiety may be high. It is often related to the following questions: "Am I really suited for this field?"; "Have I made the right choice?" Even the experienced student in the first year may wonder, "Can they teach me anything in this program?"; "Will it be too elementary?"; "Are they expecting me to know more than I really know?" “I have been in child welfare for 3 years but I never received clinical supervision.”

These issues often will be raised indirectly, for example, in the way students describe their prior experiences during first class introductions. The older student who lists a long résumé of experiences (if allowed by the instructor); the older student just returning to school who says, “I haven’t had any experience. I have only been a housewife”; or the recent graduate from an undergraduate program who says, “I just finished my BA in psychology but I don’t have any practical experience,” may all be in their own ways disclosing their concerns about mastering the course and perhaps the program. I have often observed that the same underlying concerns exist, in different ways, for the young student, the older student returning to school, and the student with practice experience. I have found it helpful to point out the different subgroups of students after the introductions and even identify the common or different concerns.

For example, I might say,

> “I suspect that some of you with very little experience are concerned about getting what you need to develop the skills required to work with clients. I also often hear, from returning-to-school students, that they are concerned about being able to master the academic requirements. I noted the comment about having just been a housewife and parent and thought to myself, ‘What better preparation for practice than developing the skills needed for those demanding roles?’ And for you students who have had work experience in the field, the question is often, ‘What will I get from this program and will my experience be valued,’ or, ‘Am I just hear to get my ticket of admission to the profession?’”

These comments often lead to a sense of relief in the class and a brief discussion of the concerns from each of the perspectives, providing me an opportunity to reassure the class. Thus, in the introduction process I have demonstrated the skills of tuning in, responding directly to indirect cues, and the capacity to empathize. I have also influenced the culture of the class by providing permission to talk about what people really think and feel as opposed to what they think others expect them to say.

►VP Session Five: Teaching Inexperienced Students—Field Assignment Does Not Provide Appropriate Foundation Experiences

Students taking an advanced course will more likely be second-year students. These students often experience the phenomenon I call "second-year regression," in which they feel incompetent when faced with the challenge of a new and different field placement and a different category of clients. They often express doubts about how much they learned in the first year. The second year of the program may be seen as their "last chance" to fill gaps in their learning in areas they did not even realize existed at the start of the first year. They are often unaware that their understanding of how much they need to learn is, in itself, a sign of their professional growth, and that professional training is just the start of a lifelong learning process. An early discussion of this phenomenon is also often a source of relief. I try to reassure them that they know more than they think they know and that this second year involves deepening their understanding as well as learning to apply their knowledge and skills to a new population in a new setting.

Problem Swapping: Developing the Culture for Work

Recognizing the intensity of this question in the first class for all students, and wanting to establish a positive *culture for work* that involves student participation and sharing, the instructor could structure the second half of the first class as an opportunity for students to "problem swap." This involves sharing with each other and the instructor the problems and issues students ran into in their first-year placements. First-year students can reflect on experiences predating their social work education or on anticipated problems. The request by the instructor corresponds to the *reaching for feedback* practice skill, which is crucial in establishing a working contract between social worker and client. The goal is to help students see the connection between what they want and need to learn and the content of the course. In a parallel to the first session of a support group, the instructor can share with the students some “handles for work” that represent common issues. For example, in my group work classes I will often “prime the pump” by suggesting the following common issues faced in early sessions:

- Wanting discussion in the first group session and all you get is silence. You wonder if you should have brought a film.
- The client in an individual or family session, or a parenting group, who asks you: “And how many kids to you have?” (Or, “Have you walked the walk or talked the talk” in an addictions recovery group).
- You have members in the group who never speak and those who monopolize and never stop speaking.
- You have a “deviant member” in the group who attacks your ideas and who, in your opinion, should never have gotten past intake.
- You are leading a driving-while-intoxicated mandated group and all 10 the members sit there with their arms folded their faces saying: “OK, go ahead and try it.”
- All of the team members agreed to refer clients to your group but after 4 weeks you have not had one referral.

The examples I would share in a generalist practice course might include the following:

- You have a client who actively resists every suggestion by saying: “Yes, but…”
- You have a client who passively resists by agreeing with everything you say but not meaning it—much tougher than active resistance. You know they are making “New Year’s resolutions” meant to be broken.
- You have a client who is in denial—“Everyone drinks on weekends. My problem is I got caught.”
- A teenage client who won’t respond and simply remains silent or answers every question with “Yes” or “No” and nothing else.
- You know the client has experienced sexual abuse but avoids discussing it or even admitting it happened.
- You are involved in an illusion of work in which the client says what he or she thinks you want to hear but never expresses real thoughts or feelings.
- Your problem is not with the client—it is with other professionals who, at a case conference, are sure they know what’s best for the client (the “Who owns the client?” battle).
- At your first session with a family they tell you the problem is with their teenage son, please fix him soon. Also, don’t expect us to talk about our family. That’s private!

The point of sharing these handles for work is both to stimulate the class members to share their own versions and also to signal to the students that the course content will be real and connected to their past practice experiences or anticipate their upcoming field work. This can be reassuring to both brand new students and those with experience.

As the students share these issues, the instructor can point out some of the connections between the issues and concerns and the areas included on the syllabus as outlined in the first hour. As the students sense that the topics to be explored in the course will be on target in terms of their own concerns, their interest in and excitement about the course will start to grow. Inexperienced students are reassured that their fears are understandable and their concerns will be dealt with. Experienced students start to shift from a stance that seems to say, "I'm only here to get my ticket of admission to the profession" to "Maybe this course can teach me something after all."

For example, in response to a student sharing frustrating work in the engagement period with an apparently unmotivated client, the instructor could point to the segment of work ahead that will explore motivation as an issue and strategies for intervention in the beginning phase of practice. A brief comment about the different stages of change such as the precontemplation or contemplation stages in the motivational interviewing framework can also be shared. If the client is a member of an oppressed and vulnerable population, identifying the connection between issues of oppression, public policy, and the lack of motivation begins to help the students understand the holistic nature of the practice course and how diversity will be integrated into the discussion.

Also, asking the student who shared the problem with the unmotivated client what feelings he or she had when trying to deal with such and overwhelmed and apparently unmotivated client can accomplish a number of purposes. It models for the students the skill of *reaching for and acknowledging feelings*. It communicates something about the instructor and his or her interest in and concern for the student. It begins to create a culture in the class in which students realize that it is all right to have these feelings, questions, and concerns, and that it is safe to express them to the instructor and each other.

Connecting the instructor's empathic inquiry about the student's feelings to the syllabus by pointing out the segment of work that will deal with the worker's feelings and reactions as a central part of the helping process can enhance the student's sense of the common ground between the content of the course and the student's needs. This also strengthens the mutual aid process I referred to earlier as the all-in-the-same-boat phenomenon. Hearing other students with similar concerns can be a source of relief and a release of the energy needed to hear, understand, and remember the content discussed.

►VP Session Three: The Impact of Emotions on Learning—How Much Time Do We Spend Dealing With Student Emotions

Tuning In and Responding Directly to Cues Related to the Authority Theme

Tuning in also prepares the instructor for what might be other indirect cues emerging in the first or early classes. For example, if the instructor has a reputation as a good teacher but also a demanding instructor and a tough grader, he or she might listen for the indirect cues of concern in this area. For example, the preliminary chatter, conversation between students before the class appears to start that is loud enough for the instructor to hear, may refer to the heavy load described in a previous class. Or a student's comment, "I am really looking forward to this class but I'm a bit worried about my total load this semester," may be an indirect way of raising the issue. The instructor who reaches for the underlying concern would be demonstrating two skills: *articulating the student's feelings* and *exploring taboo subjects* (authority).

For example, the instructor might say,

> "I think you are all a bit worried about the demands of this course. I suspect some of you have heard things about my being a tough grader and a demanding teacher. If so, what have you heard? Perhaps I can clarify how I approach grading and what my expectations will be."

This openness demonstrates the parallel to the skills required by the social worker when a client hints at the authority issue in the first sessions by talking about the "terrible" previous social worker.

If a brief silence ensues, the instructor could model the skill of *reaching inside the silence* by saying, "I suspect your silence means you are not too sure of how much you can risk with me. That's understandable. Give me a chance. Try me out on this one and see how I handle it." Usually, this opens up the discussion with students, particularly in the second year, sharing some of the perceptions they are bringing into the class about the instructor and the course.

The instructor has also provided a powerful model of how a person in a position of authority needs to train students to be open with him or her. The practice parallel, for example, is when a social worker or a parole officer first meets a client and picks up the cues that the parolee has heard about his reputation. It may turn out, after reaching for it, that the parolee has a dossier on the parole officer or social worker at least as thick as the one the parole officer has on the parolee. In a practice example, when the parole officer reached for the underlying issues, the parolee said: “The word back at the pen is that you are a real dink.” When the officer asked what that meant the parolee indicated the parole officer’s reputation was that he was “tough” on the rules. This gave the parole officer an opportunity to clarify exactly what the expectations were and the consequences if they were violated.

►VP Session Three: Grading Issues—Giving Lower Grades in a Grade Inflation World

The most difficult part for many instructors is that in the early stage of their careers, when they most need this feedback from students, they feel most insecure and vulnerable. They do not immediately reach inside of the silences because they are afraid of what they will find. This is when the instructor’s support system, a dean, director, colleague, or senior mentor, can make an important difference. Some of the best discussions in the previously mentioned video sessions on teaching were when participants in the teaching workshop were able to share some of their concerns in this area and find that they were “all in the same boat.” Unfortunately, unless the culture of the school encourages and supports some form of mentoring, faculty often are reluctant to ask for help.

►VP Session Five: Reemergence of the Issue of Vulnerability of the New Instructor

Tuning In to One’s Own Feelings as Instructor

These are just a few examples of how tuning in can help an instructor prepare for classes. Other examples are shared in the discussion of the next three phases. What must be stressed is the importance of the instructor tuning in to his or her own feelings prior to the first class. No matter how much experience an instructor brings to the engagement, there is always that early anxiety (and excitement) that accompanies a new beginning.

If the instructor is using a new text or teaching new material for the first time, the concern may be heightened. By tuning in to his or her own feelings, the instructor can develop strategies for managing his or her own affect as a required step to helping the students manage theirs. Instructors who indicate they are using a new syllabus, a new book, or some new assignments, and as a result indicate they will want ongoing feedback from the class as to how things are working, will be modeling a positive, adaptive, professional response to understandable concerns.

If the instructor is not tuned in to his or her own feelings, or is lacking in support and feeling particularly vulnerable, then a more defensive and maladaptive response may emerge to students' direct or indirect criticism. Hope is not lost, because the instructor can acknowledge the mistake in the next class or after a few classes and reopen the discussion. This can be an even more powerful demonstration of an important professional stance and a crucial skill that students need to develop. Fortunately, it is not necessary to "plan" such mistakes to have the opportunity to demonstrate how to catch them quickly. Even the most skilled and experienced instructor will have more than enough opportunities to catch their mistakes during the course of a semester.

In one example presented in my doctoral class on teaching, a participant described conducting a “class” for court mandated men arrested for urinating in public. The process and the instructor’s reflection were close to what might happen in a mandated course, so it is included in this manual. It represents a good example of the emergence of the authority theme in a first session and the impact of an instructor’s defensive reaction on the process. You will note in the process examples in the manual, my own and those contributed by others, I include sections introduced as teaching points to add my own reflections on the work.

Court Mandated "Class" for Men Arrested for Urinating in Public

Teaching Point: The following excerpt is an example of being challenged at the beginning of a mandatory class and not managing this successfully. Although it is a more extreme example of mandated "students," the principles of dealing with anger and defensiveness when students do not accept their need to take the "class" is illustrated dramatically and openly. The instructor begins by acknowledging the anger and frustration in the room.

> **Instructor:** Hi everyone. My name is …. I know you've all been here awhile already—I apologize for that. I know this can be a frustrating experience, and it is not what you expected when you came here today. Let me start by reviewing what will happen in here today. First, I'm going to tell you about the mission of the Midtown…

Teaching Point: The instructor thinks that by acknowledging the frustration and anger, she can now move on to the class content. In her analysis she says: "This seems to be going okay, no one is freaking out yet." Not so fast! The instructor clearly does not want to hear the underlying anger; however, it needs to be expressed. In fact, the participant who responds, whom she experiences as her "deviant member," is actually her ally, expressing the feelings of others in the class. She understands the importance of this moment as evidenced in her comment: "I am aware that how I handle this is going to set the stage for the class—whether I earn respect or look like an idiot."

> **Participant (P1):** This is bullshit. I got a ticket for urinating in public—there are no public restrooms in this city! Where are we supposed to go to the bathroom?
>
> **Instructor (I):** Yes—that is a problem in this city for sure. We're going to get to that for sure…first …
>
> **P1**: Oh—you're gonna get to that? What does that mean? I've been here for 4 hours already. How much longer will I be here?
>
> **I**: Sir, please let me tell you what's going to happen here today. The sooner I do that, the…
>
> **P1**: This is what my tax dollars go to? For some social worker to tell me I shouldn't piss in public?
>
> **M**: Sir, you can sit through this class or you can go see the judge. It's up to you.

Teaching Point: Even as she tries to use her authority and the threat of reporting the student to the judge, she understands she is not handling this well. She reports that she can see that the rest of the class is responding to his comments. She suddenly feels it has been a long day, and she is angry and upset with him. She also realizes she could have handled the challenge differently. Having shut him down without further discussion of the effect on them of being caught and brought into a courtroom for the act of public urination, she makes a short presentation on why the act is not acceptable and then tries to involve the group members in the discussion. She accurately reads their silence but does not share her reactions with the group.

P2: Look, no one saw me. I was very careful. The street was empty, and I was between two cars.

I: Would anyone like to respond to that?

Class: (Nothing.)

This is tough. Many are probably thinking the same thing; others don't want to look like they are "joining" the "authority."

P1: You know, dogs urinate on the street. How is this different?

I: You're right. What do you think (to the class) about that?

I: (To herself). No one ever responded. I always answered the question, making it as interesting as possible and trying to bring in some humor, which helped. How could I get them to participate more?

Teaching Point: As is often the case, the question the instructor asks of herself is exactly the one she should be raising with the participants. For example, early in the session instead of squelching the "deviant member" she might have accepted the feelings of anger and then commented,

> "One of the problems I have in leading a group such as this is that I know your anger and frustration makes it hard for me to make the discussion worthwhile for you. I believe most of your feel angry but also embarrassed about being brought to the court for what you don't think is a major offense, or even an offense at all, and then feeling as if you are being lectured at. But you are here and I wonder if there is any way we can make this time worthwhile for you."

Reflecting on the Class Process as a Way of Integrating Content and Process

In all of the examples described in this manual, the instructor who asks the students at the end of a class to reflect on the class process and its possible connections to their struggles with their clients will be modeling effective integration of process and content. For example, after apologizing for defensiveness and creating conditions for honest student feedback, an instructor could say at the end of the class:

> "Let's take a few minutes to look at what happened here today. In some ways we face similar problems—I as a teacher and you as a social worker. What do you do when you feel you have been defensive and want to catch your mistakes? How did you experience this discussion in class? Can you see any parallels with your own work with clients?"

A brief reflection on the process that is directly connected to substantive practice issues and content can lead to the most powerful learning in the class. I emphasize "brief" because it would change the nature of the experience if class discussion became preoccupied with process discussions and shortchanged the substantive content. In my early teaching efforts to explore process in the class as a medium for teaching, I fell into this trap often. On reflection later, I realized I was not completely comfortable with the substantive content, and getting lost in process was an escape. As I became more comfortable with my grasp of what I was teaching, I had to remind myself to pay attention to the process. With more experience came the understanding that process and content needed to be constantly integrated and that the supposed dichotomy between them was a false one. The question was not, "Do I deal with process or deal with content?" Rather, the question should always be, "What is the connection between this class process and the course content?"

The Beginning (Contracting) Phase

I have already identified the skills and a possible structure for the beginning phase (first classes). What follows is an illustration from one of my own classes. I hasten to point out that there is a great deal of room for individual style and variations in teaching approaches. This is the artistry in our work. The suggested dichotomy one often finds between science and art is also a false one. In social work practice good science should free our artistry, not take it away.[4] The following example is meant to be illustrative and not prescriptive.

Process Recording of a Sample First Practice Class Opening Statement

Teaching Point: This is from a first session of a second-year MSW practice class. Twenty-two students were sitting around the outside of an eight-sided table in a manner designed to maximize their ability to see each other and the instructor. I chose to make some introductory comments prior to asking the students to introduce themselves. I was attempting to model an opening statement in which I briefly clarify the purpose of the course, lay out some assumptions about how we would work, and try to reassure the students about the academic nature of the class. The following is a sample opening statement taken from my class notes:[5]

> The focus of this course is on social work practice and theory. We are going to build on the introductory practice course by deepening our understanding of the interaction between the social worker and the client. In addition, we are going to use a holistic model in thinking about practice, one that places the social worker and the client within the social contexts that affect them both.

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[4] I have mentioned “false dichotomies” a number of times already and will continue to do so. What I mean is that it is not unusual for dichotomies to be proposed, for example, between “structure” and “freedom,” and that accepting the dichotomy causes major problems in practice and teaching. We soon learn that without structure there is no freedom, and that a good structure creates freedom. At the end of this manual I will review the false dichotomies challenged in this approach.

[5] Indented text consists of process recordings reconstructed from class notes and/or video tapes.

I will go into more detail as we review the syllabus, but first let me share some assumptions about how we will work together. First, we will be practice focused in our discussions. Method and skill, you in action with your clients, will be central to our work. Your knowledge, hopes, and aspirations for the client are all important, but what the client experiences is you in action.

My second assumption is that there are core, or constant, elements in all helping relationships. We will focus on what is generic about practice in work with individuals, couples, families, groups, and community. Some attention will be paid to the variant elements that are introduced through the use of different practice modalities—a first individual session will be different in some ways from a first group session—but it is the commonality of social work practice that will be central. The same assumption holds about a common core to practice that cuts across settings, such as practicing in a school compared to a hospital; populations, for example, working with children compared to adults; and types of problems, such as substance abuse compared to normative family stress.

My third assumption is that we will use many examples of social work practice in our discussions. Some I will bring in; others will come from your own work and a number from the course textbook. Others we will create through simulations based on real practice examples. In this way, we can always have in front of us a real social worker, with a real client, tackling real problems. I think this will make our discussions less theoretical and more closely grounded in your day-to-day realities.

Finally, I realize that as I teach this course I am leading a class group. You will be watching me and learning as much about what I think about helping by the way I teach as by what I put on the blackboard. I see a class as an enterprise in mutual aid in which you can be of help to each other. In addition to sharing content with you, I see my job as helping you tap the potential for support you can provide to each other. At times, it will be useful to reflect on how we work as a class and the parallels to your practice experiences.

However, I want to reassure you that this is a class with substantial academic content, and I am a teacher, not a social worker, in this context. Don't worry: We will not become an encounter group. You don’t have to share intimate details about your history with your neighbor, as interesting as they may be, and there won’t be any touchy-feely stuff. Of course, you’re on your own after class. We have enough to deal with just focusing on social work practice theory, and that's what we will do. Are there any comments or questions about these assumptions?

Teaching Point: This was my opening statement to the class, designed to spell out the general purpose of the class, my role, and some of my assumptions about how we would work. When I finished, I asked whether there were any questions about what I had said. When none was raised, I suggested we each introduce ourselves and that we share a brief description of our past practice experiences and the potential clients in their current field placements. I asked them to be very brief, explaining we would have time to get to know each other as the term progressed. I began with myself, and we started to go around the room in order. The following is from my class process notes.

> One student mentioned, in a light-hearted manner, the difficulty of working with a particular type of client in her previous placement. Class members laughed in recognition of similar experiences. I acknowledged her humor and then said to her and the class, "I think sometimes we have to laugh to help us get through the stress. This population is really very difficult to work with, isn't it?" She agreed, and in a more serious tone explained that she had felt very discouraged by the end of the year. I explained that I would give her and the rest of the class time to talk about some of the difficulties they had experienced in their efforts to help people but asked them to hold these issues until the second hour of the class. I explained that I wanted to finish the introductions and to review the course syllabus with them. Most of the students nodded in agreement and we continued.

Teaching Point: My interventions had two purposes. First, I wanted to quickly acknowledge that I knew there was some pain under the laughter and that we were going to be dealing with real feelings about practice. Second, I wanted to demonstrate that there was a structure to the class. Even though I was open to the idea that students' issues would help to shape the discussion, I would take responsibility for keeping us on track.

Reviewing the Syllabus and the Assignments

After the personal introductions, I outlined the major areas of work for the course and reviewed the first area to give them a sense of the organizational structure of the syllabus/bibliography. I suggested they review the syllabus at home and be prepared to ask any questions about it the following week. I then reviewed the summary of assignments, explaining that they were described in more detail at the end of the syllabus. I asked that they read the first assignment, the Critical Incident Analysis, before the next class, and indicated that I would leave time the following week to go over it with them. I explained I would provide an exercise in class so we could do the analysis together, to allow them to see how it is done. I told them we would do that for each of the assignments as the term proceeded so they would always have an illustrative example in class before they tried it themselves. They seemed relieved at this reassurance.

After a break, I asked them to share with the class some of their most difficult experiences working with clients—some of the moments when they wondered whether they should have chosen another profession. I gave a few examples as handles for work (see above) and then turned to them. I encouraged them to try to start to talk to each other, as well as to me. There was a brief silence; I acknowledged it and said, "I know it's not easy to speak in the first class, but remember, I'm group work trained and I know how to wait." We all laughed, and one student jumped in. My process notes follow.

Joan, a White student, described her work with a young African-American woman, a mandatory client who had been referred to her by the state child welfare agency for counseling. The client had physically abused her child, who had been placed in a foster home. The woman was under a court order to get help as part of the plan for the child to return home. Joan felt their work never got off the ground. She continually felt that the woman was pretending in their interviews, and saying whatever she thought Joan wanted to hear.

I asked Joan how she felt about this "illusion of work," explaining to the class that I thought their feelings as workers would have a powerful effect on their practice. She said she was frustrated. I wondered whether she was also a little angry. She laughed and said, "Never mind a little, I was furious with her." I asked whether others in the class could identify with Joan's feelings in similar cases, and a number agreed they had similar experiences. I asked them to consider the source of their anger, and they reflected on their feelings of incompetence. Joan also felt guilty about not reaching the mother and feared she would eventually get her child back and might abuse the child again.

I credited Joan and the class with their honesty and pointed out the issues in this example that fit into our course outline. We were going to explore the skills, particularly in the beginning stage of practice, that might help to develop enough trust in us on the part of our clients to allow them to risk being honest with us. I pointed out that the effect of authority would be examined in detail in Area 2 of the syllabus, and we could come back to Joan's example at that time if she wished. (I had been noting students' names and brief comments about their examples during the problem swapping.) I also suggested that we were focus at some point on how their own feelings as workers, especially when faced with problems of family violence, sexual abuse, terminal illness, and so forth affected their ability to work with certain clients. We would also look at how they could get support in these situations.

Raising the Taboo Subjects of Race and Class

Teaching Point: Another area that touched on issues in this example had to do with the fact that the client was a poor, African-American woman with a White worker. I suggested that issues of oppression in our society and how they affect our clients and our interactions with them would be part of our future work. This client faced the triple oppressions of being poor, a person of color, and a woman. A question of obvious interest would be how these factors might affect this client's vulnerability, motivation, and ability to take help. In addition, how might they affect the worker's ability to offer help? I suggested we would find an oppression model and a resilience model helpful in thinking about many of our clients, including the mentally ill, differentially abled, women, elderly people, gays, and others.

I then pointed out we had a White worker with a client of color, which raises the issue of intercultural practice. How had this difference affected the client's willingness to be honest with the worker and how had it also affected the worker? In addition to inter-cultural issues, we would be exploring intracultural issues—for example, a gay worker with a gay client. What might be the effect of potential underlying issues in this relationship? I pointed out that these were sensitive areas for discussion and we would need to do some work in class to make it a safe place for us, just like the safety needed by Joan’s client, to say what we really felt and believed and not what we thought social workers should say.

Finally, I suggested that we examine the contribution of the client in a helping process. This would open up the "interactional" element of our work. It was my hope that students would learn to take responsibility for their own parts in the interaction but not for the client's as well. Many of them were nodding as I identified the issues in the example and connected them to areas of our work. I thanked Joan and credited her for the courage to jump in and be first. I then asked for other examples, following the same pattern with each.

Analysis of the First Class

Teaching Point: My response to Joan's issue, and those presented by other students, was designed to acknowledge the reality of the problem and its shared nature for all of the students. I also wanted to encourage Joan and the others to share their honest reactions, even their anger with their clients. All too often students report how such affective responses are suppressed by supervisors and teachers who have described them as "unprofessional.” This is what I referred to earlier when I mentioned the false dichotomy between person and professional. I would be arguing that professional practice involved integrating one’s personal self into one’s professional role. What I would later refer to as “using oneself” instead of “losing oneself.”

I also began working on the issue by asking them to consider the source of their anger. I have found it useful in the first session to provide brief illustrations of how we might work in the class. I want the students to leave the class feeling they have received "content" and are launched in the learning process.

It is always interesting to me that the way a student presents an example, in this case in a light-hearted and joking manner, may in itself be significant. The student was concerned about the illusion of work, although she did not use that term. I gently challenged the illusion of work in our class by reaching for the more serious feelings underlying the example. I have come to the conclusion that with or without consciousness, students present their issues with clients by acting them out in the class. A defensive student, for example, may be having difficulty with a defensive client. How the instructor deals with the defensiveness should model his or her expectations for good practice. This would involve exploring defensiveness when we encounter it, not trying to overwhelm it or simply change the subject. It is almost as if the student is saying: “Okay, instructor, show me how to handle defensiveness.” Once again, the concept that more is caught than taught is important. In addition, the false dichotomy between process and content is also exposed.

Finally, I was demonstrating the skill of *partializing* by taking the problem of working with an apparently passive-resistant client and breaking it down into a number of more manageable content areas: skills for developing trust in the beginning phase, the effect of authority, the effect of oppression, clarity about the limited role and responsibility of the social worker in an interactional paradigm; the issue of intercultural practice, and the impact of the worker's effect on practice. As I shared these areas for investigation, I tried to convey my own enthusiasm and hopefulness about the work ahead of us.

Recontracting

The work of the beginning phase is not completed after the first class session. Contracting issues will persist for a number of weeks, during which students will test the instructor. For example, it is not uncommon for students to use an early class to complain about their field instructor not providing enough help. Acknowledgment of the difficulty and a brief discussion about how a student can use his or her faculty advisor or the fieldwork office to deal with the issue can be helpful. However, it is important for the instructor not to allow the class to become a gripe session that loses the focus of the outlined content.

In the example that follows, a doctoral student describes such an incident in her first teaching experience.

Human Behavior and Social Environment Evening Class with First-Year Students

Teaching Point: A key point in this description is the lack of support for a new teacher and the difficulty she had in asking for help. This is not uncommon. The unsupported assumption is that an experienced practitioner or someone with some competence in the subject area will know how to teach. As they approach midsemester, she reports on a culture that now allows students to challenge her and each other.

> This describes how I approached my first teaching experience. I thought, “These are very bright and intelligent students. They will know right away if I don’t know what I am talking about.” My anxiety was increased because of feelings of helplessness and aloneness. I was unfamiliar with the terrain, and I didn’t feel like I could ask anyone what to do. After all, when I applied to teach, I said I could do this! I was almost paralyzed when I saw the 20 students looking and waiting for me to begin the first day.
>
> My most difficult moment occurred in the middle of the semester. By this point the students felt comfortable enough with each other to disagree, and they even felt comfortable enough to challenge me. I started each class with a check-in activity. We would review what was discussed the last time we met and see whether they had been able to use anything they learned in class while at their field placements. This day, I could feel negative energy. As it was the middle of their first semester, I thought it might be good to take a few minutes and talk about how they were dealing with the stress of multiple assignments and

> field placements. One person started by complaining about her placement. It was not what she wanted, and she didn't feel they were prepared for her. The next person said it was what she wanted, but she didn't feel prepared to be there. The next one said it was not what he wanted, and when he asked to be moved he was told he could not be. Student after student began to complain about what was happening at their field placements or about what they perceived as a lack of responsiveness by the school administrators. This was not the direction I planned to go, nor was I able to stop it to get back on track. They were feeding off each other's complaints, and I was being eaten alive! I had lost control of the class.

Teaching Point: The instructor had used the check-in at the beginning of each class to see where things stand with the students. Her invitation to discuss how they were connecting class content to field opened the door for a barrage of complaints. She originally described the students in this class as mostly inexperienced. Even those who were in solid field placements might have a negative reaction to what was happening with clients because of the "stage" of their educational experience. It is not unusual for students with little experience to have unrealistic expectations about how easily they can help; when they find clients not responding quickly, there is a sense of failure. It is important for the instructor to address and acknowledge the problems in some field placements and to identify steps students should take to deal with them, but also to reach for the underlying anxiety about students' helping skills.

> I realized fairly quickly that I had taken the top off of a pot of crabs, and it was going to be difficult to put it back on. What I thought would be a 10 minute check-in turned into an hour. I found myself caught between wanting to support them by listening and offering suggestions and wanting to defend my friends and coworkers. I tried to turn it into a teachable moment by relating what they were feeling to what their clients might feel when dealing with bureaucracy but was met with resistance. Because I let this go on, I did not protect the educational contract of the class. I engaged the students in a subversion of it by opening and continuing the conversation. I functioned as a social worker in the class and not as a teacher.
>
> I realize now that it is normal at midterm to begin to feel stress and that this is the point when new students begin to feel comfortable enough to raise concerns. Looking back, I don't think it was bad to talk about the stress, but I should have taken control of the discussion and tried harder to tie what they were experiencing and feeling to what clients' feel. The theme of expressing concern to or complaining about those in authority could have easily been intertwined in the discussion of human behavior in the social environment. I also should have limited the time allowed for this discussion. This was a missed teachable moment.

Teaching Point: This was a good opportunity for the instructor to demonstrate what I have called "guarding the contract." The class is not a place to work on all of the problems in the field. Other opportunities exist for this work. By listening and acknowledging the issue and referring students to the appropriate resources, an instructor can model setting boundaries. This is a skill very much needed in work with clients, who often complain about issues that are outside of the parameters of the work. Although the instructor in this example felt she had missed a teachable moment, I believe she had an important insight that made this a teachable moment for her own learning. If the ongoing support and mentoring I mentioned earlier were available to her, she might well have gone into the class the next week and discussed openly and directly her analysis, including discussing their potential feelings of frustration at the difficulty of practicing. In this way she would be illustrating catching a mistake quickly and the skill of recontracting.

The Instructor's Use of Authority

The instructor's use of authority will also be tested. Courageous students who challenge the instructor's views in an early class can be important allies if the instructor credits them for taking him or her on rather than passively accepting what is said. The rest of the class observes closely when a student accepts the instructor's invitation to disagree. All too often they have seen authority figures invite honest responses and then punish students who accept the invitation. The instructor can still disagree with students on the content while actively crediting them for arguing their position, with comments such as

> Good for you, Frank! You are taking me on. How about others in the class? I bet Frank is not alone in his disagreement on this issue. Let's argue a bit. It will make things more interesting. What do the rest of you think?

Frank helped in two ways: (1) giving the instructor an opportunity to influence the culture of the classroom by reducing the inhibiting effect of the instructor's authority and (2) raising an important content issue that would never have emerged if students had remained passive. By understanding student resistance as part of the work, as one does in practice with clients, and exploring the resistance, instructors can grasp the opportunity for deepening the learning.

In my experience, often the student who disagrees is the one doing some of the most significant work on the content issue. The resistance is a sign that the discussion is hitting home. This will be illustrated further in the discussion of the next (middle) phase of teaching. Also note that the response refuses to accept the false dichotomy between the individual (Frank) and the group (the class).

►VP Session Three: Grading Issues

►VP Session Six: Student Anxiety over Grading

►VP Session Three: Disruptive Students and the Instructor's Sense of Support and Safety

Of course, responding in this way was easier for me as my confidence in my teaching grew. For many of the participants in my teaching workshops, some of them PhD students and adjuncts or new faculty members who are just starting to teach, a challenge to their authority is experienced differently. This is why I always stress the idea of making mistakes, catching them, shortening the distance between when we make mistakes and when we catch them, and then making more sophisticated mistakes. New instructors need to hear that developing teaching skill is a process, and they should not be too hard on themselves if they make mistakes as long as they learn from them. This is exactly the attitude we are trying to convey to our students, and they in turn with their clients, so once again, more is caught than taught.

Addressing the Authority Theme in the Class: Encouraging Negative Feedback

Early class sessions are an opportunity for the instructor to model openness to feedback about his or her teaching. Speaking openly to an instructor, a symbol of authority and the person who will grade you, is not the usual norm in a class. Students may wait to see the outcome of content challenges before they risk raising issues about the process.

Teaching Point: In a class taught very early in my career, students were asked to complete a log that included comments on the class process as well as on readings and content issues. The first entries were turned in after the third class. A few students commented on my habit of getting excited about the discussion and that I sometimes interrupted students before they had finished speaking. To me, this was an opportunity to explore the culture of the class, the norms about being direct with the instructor, the taboo areas that were evident in the avoidance of certain issues, and so forth. I raised this issue in the next class:

> "A number of you commented that I had cut off other students too quickly and had not given them a chance to finish their thoughts. That's important feedback to me, and I think we should discuss it a bit. Did others in the class note that as well?" The students looked at each other and then one said, "We don't want you to stay out of the discussion, but sometimes you get so excited about an idea you move too fast for us. It can be annoying if we can't finish a thought." I agreed and said it was a bad habit of mine which I work on all the time. I asked whether there were other things about my teaching that were problems for them. After some discussion in which they were quick to reassure me that they liked the class, they went on to voice other criticisms.
>
> I credited them for their honesty and asked why they didn't raise these issues with me when they were happening. I asked, for example, why they let me get away with cutting them off. One student looked shocked and replied, "But you're the teacher!" We all laughed, and a brief discussion ensued about experiences with teachers and the dangers of being too direct.
>
> I acknowledged their concerns and said that I realized it was risky for them to be honest, but that I had hoped we could create an atmosphere in the class where they could speak honestly. I pointed out how easily these issues and feelings become submerged while still having a blocking effect on our work. They were not going to hear the discussion

> or learn a good deal if they were churning away inside, angry or upset.
>
> I said I knew it would take some time. I would try to create the conditions in which they felt more comfortable risking, but they would also have to take some responsibility for the class culture. There was a brief, thoughtful silence as the class seemed to come to an understanding that they too were accountable for our work. I then asked whether they could see some parallels in relation to the authority theme and their work with clients. Did they think their clients were honest with them about their work? A discussion ensued as they reflected on how hard it was to encourage clients to risk with them and their real struggle about whether they really wanted to hear what the client had to say.

Teaching Point: Once again, it is important to acknowledge that these skills are difficult for both the beginning and experienced instructor. Our days as students did not provide many models of this approach to teaching. The most important feedback we get as teachers may be the most difficult to hear. All too often the culture within schools of social work ignores teaching technology issues of the nonelectronic kind. The assumption seems to be that if you received your doctorate in a substantive area, you will know how to teach. This myth leaves faculty unsupported as they attempt to cope with the ongoing development of their teaching skills.

A PhD Student Teaching a Course Usually Taught by a Popular Professor

Of course this openness to feedback on content (and process) becomes easier for the instructor with experience. In my workshops for new teachers, PhD students, and adjuncts who are teaching for the first time, such as in the earlier example, they express how daunting the first classes can be. They feel deeply their lack of comfort with both the content they are teaching and the process of teaching.

Teaching Point: In some cases they describe teaching a course that was usually taught by an experienced and popular instructor who was on leave. They say they can feel that they are being judged from the moment the class starts and that leads them into the very mistakes they are concerned about. They experience the need to demonstrate their knowledge, so they overprepare and overpresent in the first class without addressing any of the beginning phase issues. Very rarely do they acknowledge the concern, for example, by saying something like

> I know you were expecting to get Professor X for this course and are probably a little disappointed by being taught by an adjunct (or PhD student). Although I’m not Professor X, let me assure you that I’m going to do my best at making this an effective and interesting course for you. I am very excited by the subject area, because it has proven to be so important to me in my practice, and hope I can convey that enthusiasm to you. I will need your help, so I will be inquiring as we go along about how the course is going and what, if anything, I can do to improve it. I hope you will take me up on my offer.

Most beginning teachers are not able to be so direct and nondefensive in their first class. That is why I encourage them to go back and pick up the issue in the second class. The same statement above preceded by the comment, “there was something I should have addressed last week,” is a wonderful model for students who will face the same type of issue when working with a client who expected to have “a real worker” instead of a student.

Catching Your Mistake When Responding Defensively

Whenever I give this advice in a teaching workshop, I am reminded of, and usually share, an experience from my own early teaching more than 40 years ago. It was a first practice class for mostly older students who were returning to school for a professional education, usually in an area much different from the one they had studied in their undergraduate programs. These were students who generally did not have a great deal of social work experience and were making a decision about a career change.

Teaching Point: In the second class, I was making a presentation on the idea of “tuning in” as part of the preliminary phase of work when a young student interrupted and said that she thought the idea of tuning in and responding directly was junk. I was shocked, because one of my core practice ideas was being challenged. I responded defensively:

> I’m sorry you feel that way, because this is an important skill for new social workers to learn. I have found it very helpful in my own practice and have had a lot of practice experience.

Then, in an effort to enlist allies in the class, I asked what others thought about this idea. The initial responses, rather than disagreeing with the student as I had hoped, appeared to support the negative comment. I felt myself sinking deeper and deeper and found myself becoming more defensive, providing many examples of the importance of the skill and at one point reading from my notes and not even looking at the class. I clearly took over control of the class and the discussion. As we were ending the class, in a classic “door knob comment,” one of the mature students in the class asked me gently if I could discuss how “authoritative” a group leader had to be. I know I had blown it but was totally unable to dig myself out of the hole. Fortunately, I caught my mistake and began the next class as follows:

> Last week I invited you all to feel free to express your opinions and even to disagree with me. Then, when Allison commented on her reaction to the idea of tuning in as junk, I cut her off. One of my most valued beliefs was being challenged, and I became defensive. I want to apologize to you, Allison, and to the class. I’m also going to ask you now, what I should have asked last week: What did you mean when you said the idea was “junk”?
>
> I could feel the change in the atmosphere in the room as some students smiled and all seemed to relax. Allison went on to say she thought it sounded like they would be “junior psychiatrists,” and she did not know if that is what she really wanted. She was not sure about dealing with all of this feeling stuff. This time, when I asked whether other students had similar concerns, an important discussion emerged about many of them not being clear what social workers actually do, whether they were suited for the field, and whether this was really the field for them.

Teaching Point: Allison was not my enemy; she was my ally by raising an issue that should have been discussed in the first class. She was not attacking one of my favorite concepts; she was asking for help on an issue that confused most students. Note that I had fallen into the trap of accepting another false dichotomy between Allison and the class group-as-a-whole. Allison was actually, in her own way, raising an issue for the whole class.

At the end of the class, when I asked for comments and reactions, a number of class members noted my coming back and admitting a mistake. They appreciated that and felt they could more freely disagree with me after that class. When I asked how this experience might speak to their first sessions with clients, they were quick to see and to discuss the comparison of when they might become defensive and how important it was for them to go back and correct the mistake.

Teaching Point: What I learned through this experience, and what I try to convey to all new teachers, is that what they have learned to do in practice, over time, can be useful in teaching. Many of the dynamics are similar, and their skills can be harnessed to this very different purpose (educational) and different functional role (teaching). They always indicate that this is a great relief for them and a confidence builder. As for Allison, she went on to get an A in my course and was a brilliant student in the MSW program. When she was preparing to graduate, she came to me and thanked me for the course. She was going on to law school and asked whether I would provide a reference. I did so, and she went on to be an outstanding law student as well. I often thought that from the beginning she had a sense that she wanted to move into a related but different helping profession. This was what she was struggling with in the first class, and that is why she "volunteered" to be my "deviant member"—risking thoughts and feelings that she felt most strongly but that also reflected issues for the class group-as-a-whole.

The Brilliant Student

Another common difficulty described by those new to teaching or teaching a new course for the first time is finding one or more very experienced students in a class. One participant in a doctoral class I gave on teaching practice described the problem as having "the brilliant student." The participant described the problem as follows:

> I taught for the first time this semester, teaching HBSE to first-year and part-time master's level students at a school of social work. The class consisted of 14 students of varying backgrounds and levels of experience. A few of the students had a little bit of experience to inform their learning; however, one student had at least 10 years of experience and directed a homeless outreach program in town. I struggled with two main problems in the teaching of HBSE: (1) having a student with a good deal of experience and intellectual capacity that in some ways rivaled and even surpassed my own; and (2) translating theory into concepts for social work practice. These issues were related, so I will examine these as one larger problem that came up while teaching the class.

Teaching Point: It’s interesting that at first the new instructor does not see the experienced student as a potential ally in connecting theory and practice. Instead, the new instructor sees this experienced and bright student as a competitor who may expose his inexperience. The instructor described the problem as follows:

> HBSE has been conceived of as a theory course, and it covers a wide range of theories drawn from sociology, political science, and economics. The course presented some major challenges for me: having the time to complete the readings, developing a presentation, and coming up with classroom activities to bring theory to the level of practice. But it was my challenge with a student I perceived as “difficult” that is my main focus. My struggle started when I attempted to explain how macro theories could be translated into theory for direct practice. In the early part of the course, the class read about theories of social capital, poverty theories, and theories of culture and community.
>
> To illustrate the concepts for the students, I brought in client case examples. The very bright student challenged my taking a macro theory and applying it on a micro level, stating that one cannot directly translate a broader theory of human behavior to the individual level of assessing and/or intervening with clients. I knew I might be challenged on this but was stumped by his comment and began to sense that perhaps there was a greater intellect in the room with whom I would have to contend for the entire semester. I felt a growing sense of inadequacy about this topic of macro versus micro level theory.
>
> Critical thinking skills were a central part of the course, as well, and in another instance, I attempted to demonstrate a critical analysis of one of the theories we were studying through the use of a case example. Again, the very bright student challenged my statement, arguing that the theorist’s ideas were undeniable from a rational point of view, leaving me and the other students at a loss as to how to respond.

Teaching Point: It is common for the new teacher to experience these “challenges” as personal confrontations questioning his or her competency. Already nervous, the new instructor’s defensive response is understandable. An alternative and more usual interpretation is that the experienced student is expressing concerns about his own competence coming back to school for a graduate program and being confronted by concepts and theoretical frameworks that are new to him. Just the idea of being a student again can be hard for an adult who has been out of school for a while. If the instructor can shift the framework from experiencing this pattern of behavior as saying something about himself and instead understand it as saying something about the student, then alternative paths for intervention become possible. After attending an academic conference and participating on a panel discussing EBP the young instructor believes he “can establish more credibility by casually mentioning in class the fact that he had gone to a weekend conference of academics to speak about EBP.” He continued,

> After I dropped the comment about the conference, the student in question responded, “Are you familiar with the program going at the mental health centers related to EBP?” My

> thought was, “Uh-oh. This guy knows something about EBP, and I’m going to get embarrassed and/or undermined by him.” So I was, again, thrown off by this student’s “challenge” and responded in an offhand way, “Sort of,” and changed the subject to avoid a discussion in which I might not know what I was talking about.

Teaching Point: Again, in retrospect, it might have been an interesting discussion if the instructor had invited this “brilliant” student to talk a bit about his experience in the field in relation to EBP and mental health centers. The instructor described earlier his anxiety about connecting theory to practice, and this would have been an opportunity to do just that if the instructor was not feeling inadequate and competitive.

It’s interesting to note that this new instructor reported finding discussions with his wife, who had a master’s in education, helpful to him in starting to understand that he did not have to compete with this student and could actually “let him be brilliant.” It is clear that he did not have a colleague or a mentor at the school with whom to discuss his feelings and his struggle. It’s only when this student stumbles in his performance in class and discloses that he was working long hours as a director of a homeless outreach program and still trying to meet the requirements of the program that the instructor begins to have a “glimpse into his humanity, not the sort of unflappable characterization I had given him.” He also notes that this student stayed after class for a while each evening, and after getting over being concerned about “favoritism” and engaging with the student the instructor can see an experienced adult who wants to be seen and treated in a more collegial manner.

After the second to last class and after a spirited class discussion about the effect of foundation funding on social movements, the instructor had the following conversation with the student.

> The “brilliant” student had been making interesting comments in class and contributing a good deal. I said to him, “You really added something to the conversation tonight. You know, you’ve really been helpful to others and me throughout the semester in understanding the materials.” “Thanks,” he said. “I think the course has been different than I expected. I’ve gotten more out of it than I originally thought.” I responded, “I’ve been trying to make it real for you all so that it’s not just theory but theory for use. This course on paper looks like a sociological theory course, but my goal has been to relate the theories to practice.” He said, “Somehow, this course doesn’t get the kind of importance that research and practice get. It seems like the school is very research heavy.” “Well faculty members have heavy research requirements, and this is where the school seems to have focused its efforts.” He responded, in his brilliant fashion: “It’s almost as if the emphasis on research and going after research money has cooled off interest in the practice and human behavior sequences.” I said: “What a great analysis. I’m really going to have to put some thought into that one.” He thanked me and left.

BSW Students in the Final Year With a Negative Reputation: Dealing With Unfinished Class Business

In some situations the students are essentially immature and, as one workshop participant put it, consider themselves "entitled." In an example from the video series, a PhD student is beginning with a class of BSW students, four of whom the rest of the faculty describe as acting like a negative subgroup ready to "pounce" on any faculty member's mistakes. They sit in the back of the room and feel completely free to talk to each other during class or text message friends (a growing problem as even graduate students come from learning cultures where extreme multitasking is condoned) or roll their eyes at points in the discussion. The previous class instructor, also a participant in the workshop, described what she considers a "lack of respect" for faculty. The new faculty member is clearly inheriting unfinished business from the previous year.

►VP Session Four: Negative Subgroups (BSW Students)

Discussion of the class (on the teaching tape) reveals a very homogeneous group in terms of gender and race of young 20 and 21-year-olds. It becomes clear in the discussion that there is a need to partialize the problem into segments, each of which may contribute in some way to the disruptive behavior. These include the following:

- Simple immaturity and the need for someone in authority to say "grow up" to them before they graduate.
- An inability to confront faculty directly so that it is done in an immature manner (for example, the eye rolling).
- A need to focus on what the conversation is in the classroom that immediately precedes these immature responses. For example, whether the discussion touched on an area of discomfort and the acting out a form of "flight."
- The role played by the "internal leader" of this group who often, in class, acts like the class clown but is respectful in private conversations with faculty.
- Lack of any diversity experience, resulting in great difficulty understanding issues related to race, sexual orientation, and so forth.
- Discussion also reveals that these BSW students come from two different community college programs that have a history of competitiveness in terms of how well their graduates are prepared.

Strategies for directly dealing with each of these areas, overlooked in their first year in the program, were developed to assist the new instructor. The core of the discussion is that behavior always has meaning and negative behavior is also a form of communication.

►VP Session Four: Cliques in a Class

The Middle (Work) Phase

As the class moves into the middle phase of the semester or year, new opportunities for modeling emerge. First, the authority theme (the relationship between the instructor and the class) remains unresolved. It simply takes on new forms in the middle and ending phases. Second, if the beginning-phase issues related to the instructor have been successfully negotiated, intimacy themes (relationships among class members) begin to take center stage in the developmental life of the class. Issues of trust emerge as students begin to risk with each other. Both the instructor and the students must work to create a class group culture that is supportive of work. Third, the content of the class will generate affective responses in students that should be explored as the work deepens. For example, issues related to supervision, trauma (for example, the death of a client), secondary trauma, oppression, agency policy, and cutbacks will evoke strong emotions in the class.

In the following illustrations I present examples of three major areas: the development of a positive culture for work in the class, continued work on the authority theme, and the emotional effect of content-related issues.

Strengthening the Class Culture for Work: The Intimacy Theme

One issue involves the development of trust among class members and the ability of students to risk discussing their mistakes and failures with each other. This is a difficult undertaking for students who tend to feel particularly vulnerable. They often believe that their problems are unique and that other students will listen to their presentations and judge them harshly. This problem is compounded when the immediate response of another student is “Well, I didn’t have that problem with my client” or “Here is how I solved that problem.”

The presentation of student practice is necessary to make the theory come alive; therefore, the instructor will need to focus on helping the class develop a supportive culture that not only allows the sharing of mistakes and problems, but also values and credits students who have the courage to risk. If this has been their experience in their first practice classes or skill laboratories, the task will be easier. However, each new class has a different composition, and the issue must be faced again.

As a result of addressing class culture, the students will not only use this specific class more freely, but the experience will also teach them the skills required to give and to accept help from colleagues. Once students have experienced a culture of mutual aid and support with peers, they reject other models that require them to be perfect in their work.

Teaching Point: There are a number of routes to this goal. One requires the instructor to adopt a consistent pattern of crediting students who risk and do so nondefensively. In the following excerpt from my class, a student (Sally) has shared a segment of a process recording of her work with a client group. With my encouragement, the class worked with Sally to analyze the interaction and to speculate on what Sally could have done differently and on how she might catch and correct her mistakes the next session. Sally listened to the suggestions in a nondefensive manner and worked hard with the class and the instructor to prepare to handle things differently. At the end of the class I credited her work:

> I think Sally showed a great deal of professional integrity and courage in being the first to risk her work in front of her peers, and to do so in such a nondefensive manner. It speaks well for her future professional development. You know, if we are to learn how to help our clients listen to feedback from group members, we are going to have to be able to do it ourselves. Sally has given this class a good start. I think it might help Sally if any of you who have been giving Sally your supportive feedback could tell her whether you see any of your own work in her mistakes. Let her know she is not alone.
>
> Class members jumped in to reassure Sally that they completely identified with her, since they could think of many moments in their own work when they felt equally stuck. One said, "The only difference between you and me is that you had the guts to share your work. I'm going to have to work up to that." I credited the class with their honesty and the helpful feedback and support they had provided. I told them that if we continued to make the class a safe place for them to risk their work, it looked good for our success this semester.

Process and Content: A Defensive Student's Presentation of a Defensive Client

The instructor can use the class process to strengthen class culture and to model the helping skills even if a student's presentation is marked by defensiveness. The key is in understanding the false dichotomy we often create between process (the way of working) and task (the content of the class session). Instructors often speak of having to choose between dealing with the interaction in the class or "covering the agenda." In reality, the process in any class, but especially a practice class, may be directly related to the agenda.

For example, it is not uncommon for students to re-create in class a process with which they are having difficulty in their work with clients. Whenever a student presents a problem with a defensive client, for example, I watch closely for possible signs of defensiveness in the student. I assume that the student may be acting out the problem and, on some level, will be watching how I respond. The other students in the class will be observing as well.

Teaching Point: In the following example, Rita shared an example of work with a client whom she was having trouble reaching. The context was a single-parent group, and the client was resisting any suggestions that he might be responsible for part of the problem with his child. Rita introduced the excerpt by describing the client as unmotivated and telling the class that other workers had experienced the same difficulty with this particular client. I heard these introductory comments as signals of her defensive feelings. It was as if she were saying: "It's not me with the problem, it is this defensive client; and I'm not the only one having trouble with her in the agency."[6]

They put me on notice to pay attention to her stress in presenting the case. I interpreted her comments as saying: "If you want to see what I am up against with this client, watch me as I present. I will show you what defensiveness looks like, and you can experience what I feel with this client. Then you can show me how to deal with it." These interpretations reframe student behavior in class as an indirect way of reaching for help.

As we began to respond to Rita, she answered with "Yes, but..." comments. The other students noted her defensiveness immediately and started to back off, uncomfortable and unsure what to do. I decided it was time to draw attention to what was happening and responded directly to Rita's indirect cue.

> I pointed out what I was observing. I said that Rita was asking for help with a defensive, "yes, butting" client, who had trouble accepting help from her and the group; however, even as she was doing it, she was sounding defensive herself. I pointed out that she was "yes, butting" the class. I told her I was starting to feel frustrated with her but then realized that she was probably feeling frustrated and angry with her client. I wondered whether this defensive client didn't make her feel a bit helpless, as if she had tried everything and still failed. Rita said she should have been able to reach him. I told her it must make it even more difficult to share with the class her frustration with this guy, because we all liked to impress others with how effective we are in our practice.

Teaching Point: I turned to the class at this point and tried to reach for the commonality they might feel with Rita's distress and frustration.

> I asked the class members if they also had clients they couldn't reach. I said that even though they were quick with advice for Rita, and I believed also a bit frustrated at her defensiveness, I suspected a part of each of them also wanted to come across in the class as very competent. John, emerging in the past weeks as an internal class leader, told Rita it was easy to give advice after the fact, with hindsight. When he was with clients like this one, he just pushed harder, which only raised the client's defensiveness. Louise told Rita she had courage in raising such a tough example. She had considered bringing in an example from her work, but she was waiting for something she felt she had handled well. She continued, "Unfortunately, I haven't had a good example yet and it's my fourth session." Everyone in the class, including Rita, laughed at this comment.

> I said I thought it was important that we establish a culture in this class in which each student could feel free to risk mistakes and failures as well as successes. If we could help

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[6] I have referred to these clients in my practice texts as "the agency client." This is the difficult client, sometimes with intergenerational agency experience, whom everyone had tried to work with. This is the client often assigned to students and new workers.

> Rita in this case to go back to this defensive client and deal with him differently, she would have caught her mistakes 1 week later, which, in my book, is skillful practice. Then she can go on to make more sophisticated mistakes. The students laughed at this comment, and John said, “It makes it easier to learn if we don't have to feel we must be perfect." I said, "Can we get back to Rita's client, and perhaps we can use what happened here in class to help us understand what is going on with her client and how she can help?"

Teaching Point: The class immediately began to explore the parallels between the process we had just experienced and those Rita experienced with her client and the group. Rita joined in, tuning in to the guilt that they thought her defensive client might feel, guilt which led him to be defensive. Another student, a single parent herself, said, "You know, all of these parents must feel so guilty about their kids having only one parent. It must make it hard on them to admit they make mistakes." Others tuned into Rita's group members and what they might be feeling toward this defensive group member. They could relate this to their own feelings when they sensed Rita's defensiveness. This was the moment in the class that I felt I could use our “process” to deepen understanding of the “content”:

> I then asked them what I had done in class that might parallel some of the steps Rita might take in her group. Students reviewed the process. First, they recognized that I had drawn attention to what was happening, but I had done it in a supportive manner. I did not blame Rita for her defensiveness, but rather understood that something else was going on. Rita agreed she did not like hearing she was defensive, but it was helpful to have me acknowledge her stress with the client. Another student pointed out that I shared my own feeling of frustration but did it by reflecting on Rita's feelings. I said that I had to use my own feelings as a tool to understand better both my client's and my students’ emotions.
>
> Rita said she saw how it should have been handled, but what does she do now? I asked the class to address this question. One student suggested reopening the discussion. Another suggested she point out that he (the client) had been defensive and then reach for what was underneath. I wondered what the clients would feel if Rita began her next session by admitting that she had noticed the client had seemed to be feeling a bit defensive the previous week, but that she had not dealt with it because she was not sure what to do. Fred said, “She would be modeling how she also makes mistakes and can admit it."
>
> I asked her whether she wanted to practice what she would say. She said she would give it a try and finally came up with a statement in which she admitted to the client that she had passed over the problem the previous week. Rita then said, “I'm wondering whether it's hard for you to admit you don't always handle things just right. It's tough enough to feel your marriages didn't work out, and now, to feel the kids have problems as well must be difficult." She agreed to tell us what happened the next week. I then used the remainder of the class to present the ideas of group culture (for example, norms, roles, rules, taboos) that I had used to understand the problem.

►VP Session Six: Bion's Emotionality Theory

►VP Session Six: Whining Students Who Blame the Client

Conflict: A Student Dismisses Another Student's Interest in Macro Practice

Conflicts between students can emerge around a number of issues including, in the example that follows, the value of different practice modalities. In addition, when a group of students find themselves in the same cohort in classes they may develop attitudes toward other students and the way they interact. A student in the first semester of a two semester class who is openly critical of comments by other students can be intimidating and thus have a negative effect on the class culture and bonding, or what is now referred to in the literature as group alliance. I have heard students describe starting a class in the second year of their training and seeing a particular student in the first class session and wondering whether there is an alternative section they can attend. When students have been together in classes, a new instructor should be aware that a class culture has already developed and may affect the class from day one.

In this example shared by a course teaching assistant (TA) in my doctoral workshop on teaching, the class is in the second semester of the two-semester foundation course for MSW students. Except for one student who joined the class for the second semester, all students have been in the same cohort since September. Although most students have limited experience in social work or a related field from their undergraduate work, others (including Jane in the example) have been social workers for many years. The person in my teaching workshop presenting this example was a TA for the course continuing from the first semester.

The following process occurred during the class discussion of the second-year options of selecting direct or macro practice concentrations. I came in after the discussion had begun.

> Cindy: I am interested in going into macro in my second year. I would like to go into government and would love a field placement in Washington.
>
> (TA's reflection: I am glad for her. She had been so quiet during last semester.)
>
> Jane: You have no experience (apparently attacking Cindy).
>
> (TA's reflection: I am so mad at Jane. Why does Jane have to act like such a know-it-all?)
>
> Jane: You need to go into direct practice, so you can learn what the issues are.
>
> (TA's reflection: Cindy looks devastated, and the other class members are staring at her.)
>
> Class came to an end with Jane attacking another student, Rose, during an exercise accusing her of "always running off at the mouth."

Teaching Point: An openly negative comment such as Jane's can be immobilizing for an instructor and particularly for a TA. The TA presenting this example admitted she was biased toward macro herself, fully identified with Cindy, and was angry at Jane. Added to the mix, Cindy had earlier identified herself as dealing with a bipolar diagnosis, so her assertion of interest in macro seemed appropriate and, in the TA's view, a positive step. With the class instructor and the TA ignoring Jane's comment, the message to the students was to avoid conflict in the class and perhaps in practice as well.

An alternative response would be to stop the class and acknowledge that Jane's comment had been difficult for Cindy to hear and perhaps for the rest of the class as well. The instructor could have continued,

> Jane, you seem to feel strongly about this. Can you tell us why? Have you had experiences with persons you have dealt with in the field who have advocated or even set policies that seemed out of touch with what your clients were experiencing? And Cindy, hang on for a minute and we can get back to how you felt when Jane made that comment.

The classic mistake is to identify with Cindy versus Jane and even to attempt to have Jane understand and take responsibility for Cindy's reaction to the comment. This will come, but first we have to understand what is going on with Jane before we can expect her to understand Cindy. All behavior is meaningful, but we don't always know the meaning behind the behavior. Jane has been sending signals through her behavior in class and, because no one has addressed the behavior, it has continued.

In my own view, this incident is also representative of a problem that developed in the profession when we dichotomized micro and macro. It is true that social workers who go into policy and research should bring with them an understanding of the guts of practice that can guide their work. If a student who has a first year with little practice experience in the field enters a macro concentration, he or she will graduate without a real feel for the social work practice issues that should be integrated into the policy work. In turn, micro or clinical students who lose sight of the policy issues that affect their clients will also be limited in their work as effective social workers.

Returning to the example, if the instructor can get past the initial negative feelings generated by the encounter, then an important discussion of the micro versus macro issue can take place in class. In addition, Jane has to be helped to understand that in her role as a social worker she needs to develop "professional impact" skills, so that when she speaks with other professionals, even policy and administrators, they are able to hear what she has to say. This incident is a teachable moment for Jane and the whole class if the instructor and the TA can get past their distress over the negative emotion expressed by Jane.

Creating a Safe Class Culture for Students to Discuss Difficult Issues

Earlier I addressed the importance of the instructor creating a safe atmosphere for discussion of difficult and taboo issues in respect to the authority theme—the relationship between the instructor and the students. Attention to this task in addressing the intimacy theme—the relationship between students—also is crucial. When class discussion includes topics such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender, and so forth it is particularly important that the instructor use class process as a way of helping the class group-work on its culture to develop one where students feel free to say what they really think and feel rather than what they think they are supposed to say. Some have attempted to address this issue using specific structures such as in the example that follows.

Research Into the Use of Structured Controversy

In one study on the use of a teaching approach known as structured controversy to teach diversity content and cultural competence, Steiner, Brzuzy, Gerdes, and Hurdle (1998) pointed to the importance of exploring this content as well as the reluctance on the part of faculty to deal with potential conflict.

> Delving into issues of diversity–beyond simply presenting information about diverse cultures–sets the stage for conflict. If well managed, some conflict can be useful in helping students advance their understanding of themselves and others. However, instructors often suppress classroom conflict, for a number of reasons. Some are uncomfortable with conflict themselves, and thus try to avoid it in their classrooms. Others may be concerned that they will be unable to control controversy once it begins. Many students will also avoid conflict unless it is structured into the work that they are assigned. This conflict-avoidance can hinder the process of helping students gain true cultural competence. Furthermore, conflict is frequently a presenting problem in all levels of social work practice (between individuals, in families, in communities, and in organizations). If students do not become comfortable with differences of opinions and intense emotional expression, they will be less effective in their roles as social work practitioners (p. 56).

The authors propose a teaching method designed to help students develop the ability to discuss potentially conflictual topics using structured controversy. This involves identifying a group of topics such as the following:

- Should American Indian tribes remain sovereign nations?
- Should White families be encouraged to adopt African American children?
- Should gay marriage be legal?
- Should bilingual Spanish/English education programs continue in area public schools?
- Should communities continue forced bussing of students to achieve racial integration?
- Should people from majority populations be the lead organizers in minority communities (p. 62)?

In the cited study, students in one BSW and three MSW community organization change classes were divided into groups of four students. Two students were assigned to research and then debate one side of the argument or another. At some point, the students reversed assignments and argued the other side of the debate. Following the exercise students completed a 25-question evaluation addressing such issues as their comfort with conflict, the level of conflict in their groups, any increased comfort with conflict after the exercise, improvement in conflict resolution skills, level of interest and level of difficulty in the assignment, and improvement in critical thinking skills. The questionnaire was completed by 57 (71.2%) of the 80 students who participated.

The authors point out the limitations of the study, particularly not having a control group of students; however, an overwhelming majority (98.25%) reported greater sensitivity to concerns of people from diverse populations. Student report of stress levels associated with conflict with their peers was mixed; however, a large majority (77.19%) reported feeling comfortable with the conflict in their group, more comfortable with conflict in the classroom (77.19%), and more skilled at resolving conflict (70.17%; p. 65).

I should point out that the debate questions were general in nature, dealing with sensitive subjects and policy issues but not directly related to the students or their practice. Also, it would be interesting to know whether the mixed results in feelings of stress associated with conflict were in any way associated with the demographics of the students. For example, a discussion of a number of these issues may well be experienced differently by students of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, or languages. For example, a debate on busing might affect the stress on African-American students differently from Caucasian students, and a debate on gay marriage might affect “out” and “closeted” gay students differently as well.

In the example that follows, drawn from an MSW practice class, the work becomes much more personal as a Caucasian student admits to fear of working in an African-American community. The response of an African-American classmate appears to be understandably affected by her race.

Jane, a young student from the Midwest, disclosed her discomfort with her placement at an inner-city school. Her presentation is upsetting to an African-American student, Ann, who confronts her in an attacking manner. The instructor, the TA, and the other students watched in silence as the confrontation created a defensive response from Jane. The instructor's comment at the end, inquiring what the other students think about the placement, completely ignores the confrontation.

> **TA’s Description of the Problem:** Most of the students were young and came directly from their undergraduate program into the MSW program. Throughout the course the students had the opportunity to discuss their field placements. During one of these discussions Jane, a Caucasian student from the Midwest, was discussing her placement at an inner-city high school in a mostly African-American neighborhood. She was sharing her concerns about not feeling safe traveling to and from the school due to the impoverished neighborhood. Jane was also discussing how “bad” the students were in the high school and how they had no respect for anyone.

While Jane was sharing her concerns Ann, who is an African American student and a city native, interrupted Jane and defensively stated that Jane was being judgmental of families from this part of the city and she should not be so quick to judge the students. Jane's face became red, and she appeared embarrassed; she tried to calm Ann by telling her that she did not mean to offend her and she does not think all the students at the high school are bad. However, Jane did state again that she has never been in an area like this one and she does not feel comfortable or safe. During this exchange between Ann and Jane, the rest of the class was silent. Initially, the professor did not intervene and allowed Ann and Jane to continue their dialogue. However, when they both stopped talking, the professor opened up the discussion to the rest of the class by asking them what they thought about Jane's experience at her field placement.

Professor: Jane, tell us about your placement.

Jane: I'm trying to get used to it. It's not what I expected. I have to drive to a really bad area and then walk a couple of blocks to get to the school. I don't feel safe. There are guys on street corners, homeless people, and rundown buildings. The school is total chaos. The students have no respect for anything or anyone. They cuss at teachers, they yell, they fight. It's terrible. I've never seen anything like it.

Ann: They aren't bad kids. They are just kids who have had a rough life. Just because they yell and fight doesn't mean they can't be helped. You shouldn't judge people just because they come from a poor neighborhood.

Jane: I'm not judging them. I'm just explaining how I feel at my placement. I know there are good people in every area but … (interrupted by Ann)

Ann: Those kids don't need your pity. They need people in their lives that see the good in them and support them.

Jane: I'm not saying they're not good kids. I want to support them, but it is difficult when they have an attitude and don't want to talk with me.

Ann: You are doing to them what everyone else in their lives has done to them, writing them off.

Jane: Ann, I don't want to argue, and I didn't mean to upset you. I'm sorry if I offended you.

Ann: I'm just saying not everyone grows up the way you did.

Professor: What do the rest of you think about Jane's experience at her placement?

SILENCE

Teaching Point: We know that silence speaks loudly, and it is a good guess that the rest of the class is thinking, "I'm not opening my mouth on this subject in this class." An intervention by the instructor is crucial at this point and may make the difference in the class culture for the rest of the semester. In my workshops faculty describe these moments, or variations on them, often but are at a loss as to what to say. This is when they fear that if they say the wrong thing, it will come back to haunt them, so they just say nothing.

Once again the basic intervention is to try to call attention to the moment but to do it in a way that does not take sides and try to deepen everyone's understanding of what has happened. For example, consider the following possible conversation:

> It is clear to me, Ann, that Jane's sharing of some of her fears and concerns about her placement and her reaction to the kids' behavior in the school have hit you hard and that you experienced them as hurtful. Jane, I'm thinking you had some courage in being honest about your feelings but probably, after Ann's comments, you regret having shared them. And I suspect that the rest of class is silent right now because they just don't know what to say. Race is one of the more difficult areas in which to have safe discussions, but if we can't create some safety in this class so you feel you can say what you really think and feel, then we will have superficial conversations treading carefully so that no one gets hurt or insulted. I don't think that will make for a good class. Remember Ann, we won't ever address the important issues of attitudes, values, and stereotypes if no one is willing to speak openly.
>
> Let's start by having Ann, if she is willing, explain why hearing Jane's comments is experienced by her as hurtful and upsetting. Let's also talk about Jane's reactions, which I suspect are not so different from what others in the class would have had in similar situations. And remember, Jane mentioned that the students in the school would not even talk to her, so we have to figure out what is going on there. We also (including you Ann) have to be helpful to Jane, who obviously feels like an outsider. Intercultural practice, in this case a Caucasian social worker with African-American clients, is hard; however, it is crucial in our work. As for the rest of the class, I don't expect you to hide behind your silence; you need to get in on this work and take some chances.

Teaching Point: Note that this example can be connected clearly to the work of the practice class by reminding the class of Jane's comment that the students are not talking to her. This is no longer Jane's issue alone, but rather an issue, at some point, for the whole class. Also, the instructor can acknowledge that it's not that easy for Ann working in this community, because she has to deal with intracultural issues; the reaction of the African-American clients to an African-American social worker.

Once again, I want to emphasize that it sounds easy, but at the time of the confrontation it is not easy at all. Still, a faculty member who acknowledges what happens and shares that he or she is not sure how to intervene in a helpful way is much more effective than one who ignores the situation. In addition, a faculty member who comes to the next class and references the previous class admitting that he ducked the issue will be modeling exactly what students such as Jane have to do in their placements.

Another Difficult Teaching Moment Involving Race

Prevention activities are often the best approach. If at the start of the course the instructor points out that the class will be discussing some sensitive and, for some, hurtful areas, he or she can ask for a bit of class conversation on what makes it hard to have these conversations and what would make it easier. The expectations are that both majority and minority students would share their responses from their own unique perspectives. It is striking that as they talk about what makes it hard and what would make it easier to talk about “it,” they are talking about “it.” This conversation could also take place after the discussion in the example above as a way of using class process, this confrontational discussion, to improve class culture and begin a discussion of the content related to practice.

Teaching Point: Even with this discussion one can expect that as the class continues in the middle phase the issue will reemerge as in the following example from a participant in a class on teaching. The issues, feelings, and fears are very powerful in our society, and one discussion will not resolve them in a class. The difficulty students have in these discussions will be particularly noticeable in a class focusing on racism in America.

> The class in which I experienced a difficult teaching moment was titled American Racism and Social Work Practice. This is a required course for all MSW students and explores racism in America as a historical and contemporary phenomenon. This course emphasizes the development of evidence-based knowledge about institutional systems of racism, analytical skill in understanding the complexity of institutional racism and other forms of oppression more broadly defined, self- awareness, and the implications of racism for social work services and practices. The class was comprised of a combination of experienced and inexperienced MSW students.
>
> This difficult teaching moment occurred approximately in the eighth or ninth week of the class. I felt that the class had gotten off to a good start during the first 3 weeks. This was reflected by flow of respectful conversation, contributions to the dialogue by a majority of the classroom participants, and the willingness and openness of three fourths of the students to self-disclose over the course of the first 4 weeks. By week five and six I noticed that the flow of conversation hit a lull and participation in the dialogue dropped to 40% to 50% of the participants.

Teaching Points: The instructor in this class demonstrates two important skills. First, she notices the pattern of conversation that in itself is a signal of something going on in the class. Second, she raises her observation and asks the students to comment on what is happening.

> After experiencing this lull for 2 straight weeks, I decided to share my observations with the class and inquire whether people agreed or disagreed with this observation and to share their thoughts on the etiology of the lull. After a period of silence a student of African- Latino decent shared that she felt the lull was due to the fact that most of the students in the class were afraid to speak in class because they were afraid of being honest. This comment was followed by an intense discussion which lasted for 45 minutes until the end of the class. While I think that there were some positive moments, overall I felt that the discussion was counterproductive and shut some of the students down from participation in future conversations.
>
> The following is some of the dialogue that occurred during this discussion:

Student A (African-American): “Professor L, to be honest I feel that the main reason why there is a lull is because most people are afraid to be honest and share what they really think. I know that I always try to say what I think here.”

Student B (White): “I feel I do say what’s on my mind most times, but I don’t understand how that helps me to learn what to say to a client who is of a different race from me. I mean I’m new to this field and don’t have any experience working with people of different cultures.”

Student C (African-American): “I agree with Student A. If people can’t be open and honest here, then what’s going to happen when you are doing a home visit with a Black client who seems angry and calls you out?”

Student D (White): “I know that it’s important for us to share, but I don’t want to be jumped on for sharing what I think if people don’t agree.”

Instructor: “I understand what you are saying (to Student D). That is why I spent time during our first class establishing the rules for the class. Do you all need me to redistribute them?”

Student A (African-American): “I don’t think that’s it. How can people take a racism class if they aren’t willing to push themselves to say what is on their minds? That’s why I sometimes say things just to see how people will react.”

Instructor: “I hear what you are saying, but keep in mind that this is a mandatory class, so people have no choice but to take it. In addition, because you’ve taken several classes on race and feminism, you come to this class at a different level of understanding and self-awareness than some of your classmates. As a result, they may not be as mentally and emotionally prepared as you are to always share their thoughts.”

Teaching Point: It is not uncommon to skillfully open up a difficult and taboo subject and then not know where to go with it. The instructor’s offer to redistribute the rules will not get at the problem, as one of the internal leaders, Student A, points out. On reflection, there are ways this conversation can continue. One has to partialize the statements of the students to get at the areas for further work.

First, recognize that handing out rules is not the answer, and that as the class proceeds into the term the reality of the difficulty of these discussions needs to be faced. The comment by one of the Caucasian students, “I know that it’s important for us to share, but I don’t want to be jumped on for sharing what I think if people don’t agree” is an excellent starting point for discussing the class culture.

The class could be asked by the instructor to explore what they could do to create the conditions for the honest discussion required. Another important comment was made by Student A, who admits to saying things to prompt a reaction. What kind of things does she or he say, and how do the other students feel when those comments are made. That student of color should share how it feels to him or her when others don’t speak up. Where does that sense of urgency come from, and how can this student contribute to a safe culture instead of trying to provoke comments.

For me, however, the most important comment is from the Caucasian student who says: “I feel I do say what’s on my mind most times, but I don’t understand how that helps me to learn what to say to a client who is of a different race than me. I mean I’m new to this field and don’t have any experience working with people of different cultures.” If the instructor can pick up on that comment, then we are connecting theory, history, and research with practice. An important discussion can take place about inter-cultural practice. This is often the missing piece that makes the content less meaningful for students— Caucasians and students of color. I believe the students of color can be helpful in thinking through strategies for Caucasian students to respond to the angry Black client mentioned by Student C.

I also believe an important discussion can take place on intracultural issues, because the question asked by Student C and directed to the Caucasian students can just as easily be asked of students of color when a Black client “calls out” a Black social worker.

Once again, analysis is easy after the fact. However, if the instructor came back the next week and pointed out that important topics were raised the previous week and that they needed further discussion, the class would have a place to go. It might sound something like this:

> “We touched on important areas last week but I did not know at the time how to be helpful to you. This is a class on the history of American racism. We should be discussing how American history affects these areas:
>
> - How do we create a culture in our class that allows people to feel free to speak openly? Just restating the rules won’t do it. Caucasian students need to be able to speak openly without feeling they will be jumped on, and students of color need to make clear their frustrations with the lack of conversation instead of just throwing out provocative remarks. We have just begun the discussion of our class culture and probably will never really finish it.
> - Also, how does understanding the history of American racism inform us when we think of the excellent question raised last week: “What will you say when an angry Black client confronts you in an interview?” I think that’s an important question for the Caucasian students in the class, but it can be just as important for the students of color when they are confronted either by White or Black clients.

Creating a Culture for Discussing Controversial Issues: Religion, Sexual Orientation, and Abortion

This crucial work is introduced on the videos with a discussion of the class group as an “organism” with a group culture (norms, roles, rules, taboos, level of cohesion, etc.). This structure helps the instructor understand behavior in the class in a dynamic manner similar to the way we have learned to understand families and organizations. The instructor is urged to see the class as more than the sum of its parts. The focus of the discussion is on how to change the traditional culture to create new norms, lower the barriers of taboo, and increase the sense of class cohesion.

►VP Session Two: Understanding and Addressing the “Hidden Group in the Classroom”

Another example shared on the video relates to encouraging open discussion on the issue of abortion, first in a practice class and then in a policy class. The interesting contrast in the presentations is that the instructors in the examples have opposite opinions on the issues. A crucial task for both instructors is to create a culture for discussion of this controversial area. In spite of the professional norms on the subject, professed by our national organizations such as NASW, our students may bring different views on the conflict between “right to life” groups and those that advocate “choice.”

►VP Session Two: Abortion in a Practice Class

►VP Session Two: Abortion in a Policy Class

The instructor in the first class, a graduate from a religious program who had a clear position against abortion, described to her class her own experience working with a pregnant client in an agency in which the worker was expected to provide counseling that was designed to help the client make the right choice for herself. It becomes clear in the class discussion as presented by the workshop participant that the real issue was not the specific question of abortion but the deeper question of the effect of personal values on practice.

The second example, drawn from the presenter’s policy class, highlights a conflict between students, when one indicates she could never counsel a client to have an abortion and the second argues that as a social worker she has to believe in the client’s right to choice. The instructor remains silent but is busy thinking: “Is there a professional belief that we all are supposed to hold, or is there room for personal beliefs in our practice?” She later hears from the students that it was a great class and one of the few in the school where they felt free to express views they believed challenged the positions taken by national social work organizations.

The discussion on the teaching workshop tape reveals that the instructor held back from sharing her dilemmas in the class, although that action that would have enhanced the discussion. The focus then moves to the importance of instructor spontaneity and honesty in difficult discussions and the crucial importance of not losing the emotion by “thinking too much.”

Deepening the Work on the Authority Theme: Male Instructor and Female Students

Even as the class begins to tackle the intimacy theme, the authority theme remains active. This was brought home to me in a powerful way a number of years ago. Although the percentage of men in most schools of social work is low, it is unusual for me to find myself the only male in a classroom. When this happened, I commented on it during the first session. I pointed out that having a male faculty member and an all-female class could have some effect on the class dynamics. I suggested that we keep our eye on how things went. My comments were designed to acknowledge the reality of this situation and emphasize that the subject was open to discussion. There were no reactions in this first class, probably because the topic was in a taboo area. The class would have to begin testing me on less sensitive subjects before they would deal with this one.

A turning point came in the sixth class when Jane, a student working in the criminal justice system, was presenting her work with a client who had been convicted of sexual assaults. She related his story, in which he told her how he had assaulted and raped his wife. She experienced the manner in which he told the story as threatening to herself. It was as if he were trying to intimidate her. The class process follows:

> I asked Jane and the class to take a few minutes and explore what it felt like to work with clients who had done things that were very upsetting to the worker. In this case, it was rape of a woman; in another situation it might be an adult who sexually abused a child. We were discussing examples of male oppression of women and children. I wondered what Jane and the other students experienced as they heard this client's story. There was a brief silence, followed by Jane saying, "I was furious at him!" The class members began to tell stories of clients who had engendered similar feelings in them. Some indicated that their feelings were so strong that they did not think they could ever work with a client like this.
>
> After several minutes, I intervened and said, "I think this is going to be the hard part for you, trying to examine the feelings provoked by clients like this and deciding whether you can work with them as clients in their own right." There was a momentary silence, following which one student said to me, with great feeling and anger, "You could never understand what this means to us!" I was stunned by the force of her comment. The other students stared at me to see how I would respond. I remained silent for a moment and realized that while I was giving them my sage advice about examining their own feelings, I had not emotionally connected. I was not practicing what I was preaching.
>
> I broke the silence and said, "You are absolutely right! I gave an intellectual response just then. It was easy to do, because I have not experienced the kind of gender oppression you have. What you said just now hit me very hard. I guess on this issue, you are going to have to help each other."

Teaching Point: After I spoke, I could sense the tension lift. I remained silent as they began to talk with each other about how they have tried to handle these situations. One student with work experience in shelters for battered women said she had felt she could never work with batterers because of her strong identification with the women. She went on to describe how she had taken a risk and co-led a group for male batterers with a male colleague. She had been amazed to find that she could retain her anger at the men but still start to overcome the stereotype of them she had developed. She found she had been able to hold the men accountable for their actions and take steps needed to protect the women still in their lives. She was also able to see each man as a client in his own right. She said she felt she now did a better job with women after having worked with the men. Discussion continued along these lines, with some students feeling they would be able to do it and others sure they could not.

Teaching Point: It's important to keep the content of the course in mind. This course is about practice with clients. By returning to this core issue I was helping the class take the next step. This involves moving from thinking and feeling to action.

> As we neared the end of the class, I pointed out that Jane was going to be seeing this client again this week. I wondered if we could help her think through how she might handle the next interview. Last time she had sat on her feelings because she needed to be "professional." What advice did they have for her now? Jane indicated the discussion had helped already. She realized that she wanted to work with this client in spite of her feelings. If she did not reach him, he eventually would abuse other women. She felt she should confront him with his threatening behavior toward her the previous week. Others in the class supported this. I asked her what she might say. She tried to role-play how she could get back to the issue. Other students provided suggestions and feedback. I pointed out that she could also view his behavior toward her as demonstrating how he related to women—how he tried to exercise control through intimidation. Perhaps she could use the process in their work together and generalize to his relationship with other women. She agreed that it was worth a try and at least she now felt she had a next step with him.
>
> I credited Jane and the class with their fine work. I thanked the student who had confronted me. I asked them all to keep an eye on this issue, and if they ever felt in future classes that I did not really understand their struggle they should say so as soon as possible.

Vicarious Traumatization: Exploring the Emotional Effect of Content-Related Themes

The example in the previous section illustrated how the emotional effect of the work content must be explored if students are to master the learning. We are just beginning to understand the effect of vicarious traumatization when our students deal with powerful emotional content in the lives of their clients. There are many different examples of immediate and secondary trauma that our students may experience in their agencies. When these emerge in a class discussion—for instance, in a presentation of a case example—they can have a powerful effect on the class and the instructor. All too often the agency setting has not dealt with the event, such as by meeting with staff to discuss it, or our students have been left out of the intervention. In my book on supervision (Shulman, 2010) I identify a number of these examples of trauma:

> These can include the natural death, suicide, or murder of a client on a caseload; the death or serious illness of a staff member; a physical attack on a staff member by a client; the public revelation of issues related to questionable agency practices through a newspaper story, court action, or grand jury; a major community trauma (extreme event) such as 9/11 or the Katrina hurricane; or the stress associated with cutbacks in funding and the associated limitation of resources, a hiring freeze for new positions, employee

termination, and junior staff being bumped by those with seniority (p. 308).

In addition to recognizing the effect of immediate trauma, we are increasing our understanding of more long-term, persistent secondary traumatic stress (STS), also referred to as emotional exhaustion, that can affect workers in particularly difficult arenas of practice such as “childhood abuse, criminal victimization, natural disaster, and war and terrorism” (Bride, Jones, & MacMaster, 2007, p. 70). The authors, citing Figley (1995), described STS as follows:

> It has become increasingly apparent that the effects of traumatic events extend beyond those directly affected. The term secondary traumatic stress has been used to refer to the observation that those who come into continued close contact with trauma survivors, including human service professionals, may experience considerable emotional disruption and may become indirect victims of the trauma themselves. (p. 70)

Cunningham (2004), referring to the high rates of trauma experienced by social work clients, suggests that

> [g]iven these prevalence rates, it is likely that social workers in a variety of settings will provide services to traumatized clients. Therefore, social work educators need to adequately prepare social work students to assess and treat trauma survivors. (p. 305)

Cunningham provides a powerful example of the effect of secondary trauma that emerges, as it often does, in an example presented in the context of another topic.

> During a discussion of ethical dilemmas in clinical practice, John asked the other members of his clinical practice class if anyone had ever reported an abuse case to the State Central Registry. During the past week, he had reported a case of a 9-year-old boy who had been severely beaten by his mother, who suffered from a mental illness. He shared that he was upset about making the report and had since questioned his decision to do so. Members of the class asked what led to his decision to make the report and he proceeded to share horrific details of the boy's years of abuse at the hands of the mother. Tears streamed down his face as John told the story. The class supported his decision to make the report and validated him and his feelings. At this point, John took a deep breath and looked relieved. The class ended without time for further discussion. The following week, the instructor asked if there were any further reactions to the previous class. John reported that he had not realized until he talked in class how upset he was about the abuse the boy had endured. Previously, he believed he was upset because he had reported the mother, who he believed did not have control over her behavior because of her illness. He felt guilty that he was angry with the mother and did not feel he was empathic enough to her situation and was concerned that his feelings were unprofessional. (p. 306)

In this example one can see how the instructor skillfully allowed the class, and the student, to explore the effect of the secondary trauma. The mutual aid phenomenon of the relief that comes from the all-in-the-same-boat process is also evident. Cunningham suggests that new students who have not had experience in the field may be particularly vulnerable to secondary trauma and that the class can be a safe place to begin to “inoculate” them and reduce the risk of their being shocked by this material when they experience it in the field. The author also suggests that case examples, role plays, and so forth begin with less explicit descriptions of the trauma—more a summary than the details—to allow the students to adjust. Discussing cases covered in the media, to which students have already been exposed, and then integrating these cases with trauma theory and discussions of secondary trauma can also be helpful. An example of the use of a trauma video in the next section illustrates the powerful effect of this form of trauma presentation.

Countertransference: When a Client’s Problem Hits Home

Another common example involves a student presenting an example with circumstances similar to those that the student or others in a class have experienced in their own lives. I have always believed that many of our students have chosen the profession, in part, because of their own life experiences. (It certainly was not for the money or the hours.) I believe this is true for many of us who teach, as well.

The technical task for the instructor is to accept and use such disclosures, when appropriate, by relating them to the work at hand. This has to be done without letting the class turn into a therapy group. Even if students want to use the class for this purpose, it inevitably turns out to be a mistake. When the instructor does not guard the educational contract of the class and his or her role as teacher, the modeling becomes the opposite of the core practice concepts we teach.

In addition, students who find they are not protected by the instructor and allowed to elaborate and share inappropriate material in a class may later resent it and experience acute embarrassment. The others in the class will get the message that it is dangerous to reveal personal content, because the class may turn into a therapeutic encounter. Rather than freeing the class to work more effectively, this lack of protective structure may immobilize it.

An illustration of responding to a student's personal disclosure comes from a class in which a student of mine presented a family interview. There were many indirect signals from the family that the father may have had an alcohol problem. The student ignored them and joined with the family in maintaining the “family secret.” When this became clear, I asked the student what she was feeling during the family session and how that affected her. She replied, "I was very upset. My father had an alcohol problem all his life." After revealing this, she began to cry. After a few moments of silence, I intervened:

> I know this client has hit you hard, and you may want to discuss this with me after class. If this is an issue you need some help with, I can refer you to the appropriate people on campus. I wonder if, right now, we can talk about how your own feelings from your life experience affected your ability to help this family. I think this is important for you and for the rest of the class, since we regularly confront our own feelings and problems as we work with clients. Are you up to it?

Teaching Point: This was a crucial point in the class, and my functional clarity was essential. As a social worker who practices group work, if I were leading a group dealing with family issues, my response would have been to open up the discussion relating to past experiences and current personal life stresses. This student was dealing with issues related to being an adult child of an alcoholic. As a teacher in a practice class, I responded to this self-disclosure by relating it to the work before us. It was my belief that it was raised because the student wanted help in respect to her practice. By generalizing to the larger issue of life experience and its effect on practice, I was able to explore issues of countertransference and the need for self-reflection for all students. This changed the focus from presenting the student's personal problem to an issue for all professionals.

> Other students joined in and shared how difficult it was when a client engendered feelings in yourself related to issues in your personal life. One student working with a family dealing with Alzheimer's disease in a parent was struggling with the effect of the early signs of the disease in her own mother. Another described working with a group around losses in their life when her own father died midway through the year. AIDS was another disease taking a toll on clients and students alike, as many people in class knew a friend, relative, or colleague who was affected by the disease. I asked the class to reflect on how these traumatic events or past experiences affected their current practice. From this analysis we were able to return to the presenting student's example with suggestions for how she could take care of herself, how to build in safeguards with her supervisor to monitor the issue, and how to intervene with the family.

In my view, not only would the educational contract have been subverted if I had lost my sense of purpose and turned the class into a therapeutic encounter, but also the significant work on an educationally related issue would not have been pursued.

BSW Student Reacting Emotionally to a Trauma Course Video

A common example raised by practitioner-teachers is teaching a course with traumatic material and having a student openly react emotionally in class or even after the class. Skilled practitioners who feel comfortable intervening when personal content emerges, such as in a counseling group, feel caught between “teaching” or “therapy,” not being clear on how to maintain the educational content without losing track of the emotional effect. In the example that follows, a PhD student is teaching a BSW elective for students who are majoring in social work and other students at the college. The following is from the instructor’s report of an incident.

> Students are often from psychology and sociology majors but can also be from business and other majors not connected to the human services. This can lead to interesting dynamics. The course is titled Trauma, Violence, and Resilience. In my class I use videotapes extensively for the sake of teaching theoretical concepts such as traumagenic, family, and treatment dynamics. In this particular class I used *Silence is Broken*, a powerful documentary on familial sexual abuse. The video portrays family

interviews with the mother and three sisters, two of whom were sexually abused. The third sister was not abused. The brother and father refused to be interviewed. There is no report on whether the brother was abused. The perpetrator was the father. In the last segment of the video the father is finally arrested, but only after he had sexually abused his grandson. The grandson had been left with him for babysitting by one of his daughters, even though she herself had been sexually abused by the father. This is what occurred after I turned the video off.

Instructor: (predicting and sensing the obvious heaviness in the room) So, I imagine this is pretty heavy and difficult to watch. Let's discuss what you observed.

Student 1: I can't believe it! I can't believe someone would leave her son with the father who sexually abused her. She's a fool. She should be arrested. And that mother! What kind of sick mother is that?

Student 2: I know…she was really sick. I hated that mother. How could she ignore this going on?

Instructor: How could she? That's a great question. Let's discuss what could go on in a family like this. Who has ideas about what could be going on that would result in the daughter leaving her son with the father and the mother not protecting her daughters.

Student 3: That's denial people! It's simply denial. This lady and this other women did not want to admit what was happening. That is just denial.

Teaching Point: The instructor wants to help the class move past their first emotional reaction and begin to understand the feelings and issues that could lead to this behavior. He is premature, because he has not explored with his students their own strong emotionally laden expression of feelings. They can talk about their anger but if, for example, the instructor inquired:

> What is it about this tape that you think would make you feel so angry. A tape like this often results in students and professionals also feeling a great deal of the pain the children must have experienced. Is it easier for you to deal with your anger rather than the sorrow and pain under that anger?

(I notice a student who in the past has been participatory but now is not sharing. I ask her what her thoughts are, knowing she has vast experience in working in residential settings with teenagers who have multiple behavioral difficulties, often related to trauma.)

Instructor: Sylvia you're quite. I wonder what your thoughts are about this dynamic.

Sylvia: I don't know. (She starts to sob; her sobbing gets more intense.)

Instructor: Sylvia? Okay. Take a deep breath. This can be upsetting material. (I know what might be going on, and I am panicked and not sure how to handle the situation). Sylvia…try to breath (I feel myself resorting to what I do most often—treat the issue…I am lost between the world of teaching and treating. The rest of the students are like a herd of deer in headlights. My eyes are darting from Sylvia to the other students worried about their reactions and thoughts. Do I intervene? Do I keep teaching? Do I resign?)

Instructor: Okay. Listen, everyone. Sometimes this opens up issues for people (my mouth is moving quicker than my mind). Sometimes it is just plain upsetting. Sylvia is obviously upset (maybe I should have become a brain surgeon instead of a teacher?). Let's take a break and get some air. This movie is difficult. Let's meet up in 10 minutes.

Teaching Point: At a moment such as this one, at the end of the tape, the instructor should probably let each class member control when or whether they wish to speak. Given the content, Sylvia's silence speaks loudly, and asking her directly to comment is inviting the emotional reaction that follows. The same question in another class with less traumatic content in an effort to involve a student who has been active and has experience in a particular area might be helpful, but at this moment it took control away from the student at a time she most needed control.

The group broke up and I went over to Sylvia who can hardly speak. I asked whether she wanted to speak, and she said no. I asked whether she wanted to speak with me after class, and she said "no, but can I leave." I agree but also encourage her to speak with me prior to the next class or with a school counselor if she thinks that will help. Students asked where she was, and I said she was upset and needed to go home. I explained that these videos can be upsetting for a variety of reasons. I was not sure how to handle it. Sylvia returned to the next class composed but did not want to discuss what happened. She completed the class but never disclosed what happened. No one mentioned it again. I asked her how she was, and she said, "Fine, it was just upsetting to see the video." I said, "I can imagine. These videos kick up a lot for many people. Please don't hesitate to let me know if you need anything else, I'd be happy to discuss what came up for you." She never raised the issue again. I always felt there was more to it.

Teaching Point: In a good example of learning from mistakes, the instructor uses his syllabus to make clear his understanding of the potential effect of the material and that the students must be in complete control of the process. He will still have to demonstrate this respect in the class, but clarifying it in the syllabus is a good start.

Following this experience I added the following disclaimer to my syllabus:

As you are likely aware, the study of trauma and abuse can be an emotional and sensitive one. It is vitally important that the group create and sustain a sense of respect and safety as we explore this topic together. As such, all participants are asked to be mindful of the potential effect of their communications both within the classroom and online. Occasionally the material of this course may touch people in unexpected, sometimes personal ways. In the event that you find yourself feeling uncomfortable or are struggling with some of the material, please feel free to see me. It is not unusual for people to be drawn to the study of trauma and resilience due to their own traumatic experiences. If this comes up for you, either spontaneously or through previously knowledge, please let me know, and we can ensure you get the proper care and attention to help with such a process. The college has an excellent Counseling Center whose services are free to its students.

Teaching Point: After a discussion of the incident above in my class on teaching for doctoral students, the instructor speculated on how he might have handled the outburst of emotion differently (assuming he had made the same mistake of asking the student for her thoughts as he did earlier). Here is how this incident might have gone if I handled it differently:

Instructor: Sylvia, you're quiet. I wonder what your thoughts are about this dynamic.

Sylvia: I don't know. (She starts to sob; her sobbing gets more intense.)

Instructor: (Just noting her tears) I get it. In fact, I imagine many of us are getting it right now. This material is so painful to witness. Let's breathe for a few minutes, take a break, and return to this conversation.

(During the break I would do as I did the first time—I would check in with Sylvia and let her know I would be available if she needed to speak following the class.)

When the class returned, I would do as follows.

Instructor: The reactions following this video clip reminded me of how difficult it is to view this material. I am reminded of the horror I felt in my first viewing, as well as the difficulties I experienced with the first few clients who displayed such pain in their lives. Let's take some time to be reminded of and discuss vicarious traumatization. What does that mean, and how does it affect our work? Is it simply an occupational hazard, or are there possible upsides to the experience?

(I would be looking for an opportunity to say that the reactions in the room are not only about vicarious traumatization but also about empathic connection. I would note that we would have to be dead not to feel some reaction to what happened to the people shown in the video.)

Instructor: I want to thank people for the richness of their empathic connections. Clearly, everyone in this room is alive and well and having their feelings. Let's discuss what we would do with those feelings. How would we work with these folks?

(I would be looking to turn Sylvia's experience into a notation of the asset of empathy and how it can direct us to work with our clients.)

Instructor: I want to offer one other theoretical note about today's class. Trauma is difficult to be around. It kicks up many feelings related to our personal histories and the vulnerabilities we carry with us each and every day. This becomes an opportunity for me to plug something I hold close and dear: the need for us all to take care of ourselves! We have to acknowledge the fact that we didn't come to this work without a past. But to do the work, we have to ensure ourselves a future. The best way to do that while working in this field is to take care of ourselves as best we can. That can include support, supervision, treatment, and anything else you think of that would result in being soothed and comforted while you hear these stories and witness this pain.

Thank you all for sharing today. See you next week. Go home and take care of yourselves.

►VP Session Three: Personal Disclosures

Video Session 3 focuses on a number of issues including how to create a place for students to share their personal stress at school while setting limits, so that the conversation does not end up replacing the class content. The issue of having students post personal experiences on Blackboard and a discussion about students brought to a school committee for ethical violations is also part of this video. The federal legislation in respect to privacy rights is also discussed. It also explores the issue of the instructor's spontaneous sharing of feelings at the moment.

►VP Session Three: Faculty Use of Shock and Self-Disclosure in Sharing Personal Experiences

The issue of faculty members sharing personal life experiences (for example, sharing early childhood abuse) is discussed. The session includes an attempt to develop criteria for faculty to determine whether sharing personal information is necessary and enhances the teaching or appears to be more meeting the needs of the instructor.

Student Disclosing Personal Trauma as an Explanation for a Late Assignment

A variation on this theme occurs when a student shares a personal trauma or some other difficult personal experience and requests that the instructor provide extra time for completion of an assignment.

This is not to be confused with the situation in which a student discloses a learning disability or some other test-taking problem and asks for an accommodation, such as more time and a later date for submitting a paper. The Americans With Disabilities Act provides guidelines for accommodations, and most colleges and universities have departments and staff to work with students to assess these problems and provide suggested adaptations. As dean in my school of social work I periodically (every 2 or 3 years) invited the head of this department to meet with my faculty. We made clear at the beginning of a school year, to students and faculty, that requests for an accommodation should be made at the start of a course and not at a later point when an assignment was due. In addition, the request had to be formal and processed through the appropriate department. Accommodations were not granted on an ad hoc basis simply because a student requested one. This policy made it much simpler for faculty, who were often put under pressure by students.

Returning to the situation in which a student has a specific traumatic crisis, an example provided by a teaching workshop participant explores this issue. The instructor's report follows.

> The class was titled Helping Skills in Human Services and was a required undergraduate course for human services majors. There were 15 students in the class. Some of the students were completing a semester-long human services internship requirement; however, the majority of the students did not have any prior experience in the helping professions.
>
> Shortly before the first assignment was due, one of the students, Emily (pseudonym), asked whether she could speak with me after class. Emily disclosed that she was currently involved in a court case after having pressed charges of rape against a young man who attended a neighboring college. She disclosed that she had been raped at a party and had made a police report, including receiving a full medical examination, the following day. She was currently in counseling and was receiving support from administration at her school.

Teaching Point: It is easy to understand how an instructor would feel empathy for a student in this position. Note, however, that the student requests a 1-week extension but does not turn in the paper for 2 weeks, without requesting the additional extension. The instructor ignored this out of concern for the student; however, she astutely noted that her inquiry to the student was about her emotional state related to the trauma and not about how she was handling the assignment. The instructor later recognized that she was acting somewhat as the therapist rather than the instructor. Both of these actions send a message to the student that she will be allowed to continue not completing the assignment.

> Emily asked if she could have an extension of 1 week. Of course, I agreed. She eventually turned in her paper 2 weeks late. I did not address the matter of the lateness of her paper, which was ungraded, but did check in briefly after class to see how she was doing. It occurs to me as I write that I did not check in with her about how she was managing academically, only how she was doing emotionally. That’s the therapist in me. It was thoughtful to check. The conversation was brief, and I maintained my boundaries as her teacher. But in retrospect, it would have been appropriate for me to check in with her about her school work as well. I was aware of my efforts not to overstep the boundaries of the teacher–student relationship, while wanting to convey my compassion to her.
>
> A similar situation occurred with the second assignment. Emily told me that the court case was bringing the whole incident back to her and that she had been experiencing PTSD. She remained in counseling; however, she admitted having difficulty keeping her appointments. She suggested I contact the dean, with whom she had been meeting regularly, for an update. I contacted the dean, who stated that Emily was having difficulty keeping up with all of her coursework, and that they had discussed the possibility that Emily might take a leave of absence. Emily was adamant in her refusal to do so. It was her choice, but also her responsibility.

Teaching Point: The student is sending a message that she is unable, understandably, to handle the personal situation and her school responsibilities. The offer of a leave of absence is compassionate and probably the best alternative for the student. However, the student is left to decide how to proceed. It might have been more helpful if the dean had set limits on the accommodations that the school was prepared to make. This would have forced the student to decide what she really was able to handle at the time. In the long run, as described later in this report, it would have been more helpful for such limits to be set. This example suggests that the integration of support (accommodations) and demand (limits) is important. The final step of failing the student is a painful one for the instructor.

> Two weeks prior to the due date of the final assignment, Emily e-mailed to say that she would not be in class that week. The following week, she e-mailed to say that she would need to miss class again. She mentioned that she and her class partner had completed the videotaping portion of the assignment, but she did not mention the final assignment. I again spoke to the dean, who informed me that the case was not going well. The dean said Emily had essentially dropped out of the majority of her classes.
>
> Emily did not turn in her video or the written assignment. I e-mailed her, asking whether she could get the video to me at least, so I could pass her for the class. She did not respond. When I began receiving daily reminder -emails stating that my grades were overdue, I eventually gave her an I for the class. I made several more attempts to contact Emily. I spoke again with the dean, who informed me that though she had great compassion for her, Emily had not been doing what she was supposed to be doing to stay in good standing at the school. The dean stated that if I did not hear from Emily in the next several weeks that I would need to fail her for the course. After one last pleading attempt, in which I let Emily know that if I did not hear from her I would need to give her a failing grade, I changed her I to an F.

The Ending and Transition Phase

The ending and transition phase has its own unique dynamics and teaching skills. The stages of denial, anger, mourning, acceptance, and the “farewell party syndrome,” which we have observed in practice, can also be seen in the classroom. For example, many instructors incorporate a practice of using the last class for an informal celebration. Refreshments are brought to a shortened class. The modeling is one of avoidance of the ending and reflects a lack of appreciation of the importance of the last class.

If the course has gone well, and even if it has not, an honest evaluation of the instructor's and the students' part in the process is needed. A summing up of the important ideas learned and identification of issues for future work should be part of this session. In addition, discussion of the ways in which students can continue their learning through the use of the literature, supervisors, colleagues, and conferences is important. Finally, when intimacy has developed between the class and the instructor, and among the students, it is important to recognize the positive aspects of the relationship and to say goodbye.

The integration of process and content can be most effective in the ending phase. As students end the class, and particularly if they are getting ready to graduate, they experience a process that parallels their ending with their clients. Consider the many endings involved for second-year students. They are ending with their clients, field agencies, field instructors, and the school (faculty and peers). They are completing a stage of their lives as students and making the transition to professional status. By addressing the feelings and issues about their own academic endings, the instructor models the skills required in practice. An instructor who points out that a student is having difficulty raising the ending with a client may not have mentioned that the class also is ending. This is a common example in workshops I have provided for field instructors at the end of the school year. When they raise an example of their student having difficulty ending with clients, I inquire: “And have you pointed out to the student that the school year and your relationship is also coming to an end?” The answer is often “no.” After asking students to reflect on the class ending, the instructor can connect process with content by leading a discussion of the parallels with clients.

►VP Session Six: Bion’s Emotionality Theory, Fight-and-Flight, Student Endings and Transitions

This video session begins with a brief summary of the work of Bion (1961) exploring concepts such as fight-and-flight and the way one can observe this in a class group (for example, the student who changes the subject whenever an emotional issue is raised would be considered by Bion as the “flight” leader). One participant in the videotaped workshop offers an example from her class of students in their last semester who are about to graduate, and who indicate in the first class of the semester that they were told faculty would not make many demands on them in the last semester. This preliminary discussion on the tape lays the groundwork for a return to the issue and a discussion of the ending and transition phase of teaching and the issues students face as they complete their educational experience.

The video also suggests how the instructor can model the search for connections between the ending process for the class and student endings with their clients. For example, the discussion of endings with foster adolescent clients can be a medium for work on the issues of loss in their lives and the need for social support. By connecting the ending process in the class with the substantive content related to endings with clients, the instructor provides a powerful example of content and process integration.

Section Conclusion

This section of the teaching manual has provided a framework for viewing a practice class as paralleling the same phases of work evidenced in social work practice. It has focused on how the instructor uses process and his or her modeling behavior to deepen students' grasp of the course content.

Each instructor develops his or her own approach to teaching practice and unique ways of modeling a helping professional in action. I have suggested that certain principles (our science) for effective teaching can guide our work. However, the model was not meant to be so prescriptive that it will interfere with the unique artistry of each instructor.

As a teacher, I often remind myself of the advice I give to my students. I suggest that learning the skills of the profession is a lifelong task. I encourage them to credit what they do well, as well as to recognize the difficult work ahead of them. I encourage them to feel free to make active mistakes from which they can learn. Most of all, I ask them to develop tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, so they will remain receptive to criticism and continued learning.

Research on Teaching

It is beyond the scope of this manual to review the research on teaching. Although a number of studies have been cited, such as the study on the use of structured conflict, the social work field does not have a strong body of knowledge related to the process of teaching as presented in this manual. There are examples of more general research, such as the discussion of organizational principles or curriculum content and structure cited earlier, but process research has been given less attention. In this section I provide one example of a study comparing lecturing with what is commonly referred to as a "cooperative learning" model. The structured conflict model described earlier would fit in this category. Because mutual aid and class discussion are central to the interactional approach in the framework presented in this manual, I have included one such example. This is followed by a section of the manual examining studies that have focused on integrating EBP into the practice course.

Dalton and Kuhn (1998) report on a "small scale" study of classroom teaching comparing a lecture model to a cooperative learning model. The two teaching models were used in two separate sections of a Foundations of Social Work Practice course in the first semester of an MSW program at a large public university. The authors define cooperative learning as "a teaching methodology which uses structured exercises whereby students are involved in teaching and learning from each other" (p. 170). The authors described the purpose of their study as follows:

> The purpose of this study is to compare cooperative learning and lecture/discussion methods of teaching and to demonstrate how educational research can be conducted both expeditiously and with limited resources in the classroom. This study was conducted in the first generalist practice social work course required of students enrolled in a large, public, graduate social work program, located in a southeastern university. In this study, the effects of cooperative learning on posttest and follow up scores on an original questionnaire on social work history and selected exam questions were examined. The research question guiding this study is: What is the difference in effectiveness of the two teaching methodologies, traditional lecture/discussion and cooperative learning? (p. 170).

The authors used a convenience sample of 39 incoming first-year MSW students, with one section (*N*=23) designated as the comparison group. This first section received lectures each week based on the assigned readings and encouraged questions and discussion. The second section (*N*=16), designated the “treatment” group, covered the same material in a cooperative learning format. This was described by the authors as follows:

> The readings for each week were divided into four sections. While each student was expected to read all the assigned readings, they were also expected to become expert in one of the four subsections. At the beginning of class students would meet for 20 minutes in their 'expert' groups, which were comprised of the other students in the class who had also been assigned to become expert in that section of the readings. There the students would discuss the article or chapter in depth to increase their understanding and to agree upon what they thought were the key concepts, principles, and information in the reading. The students would then return to their learning groups and each student would take a turn teaching the others about the reading they had become expert on, a process which would take between 20 and 30 minutes. The class would then regroup and the instructor would have the class report upon the key points from each reading, which would then be written on the board for the class to take notes from. During this part of the process any remaining questions about the material were addressed, often by calling on the students who had been the expert on that article. The instructor was often merely a facilitator of discussion as the class worked to understand the material. This does not mean that the instructor had no input into how the class determined what in a particular reading was relevant. While the class was meeting in their groups, and especially in their ‘expert’ groups, the instructor would visit from one group to the next to answer questions, and, just as importantly, to ask the students if they had considered particular aspects of the reading (p. 176)

The material presented in the first three classes related to social work history. A pretest on this content was administered in the first class, and a posttest in the third class. A follow-up questionnaire was administered at both 4 weeks and 90 days after the material was covered in class. A second area concerning the social work environment was delivered through the two methods, and an end of term exam included questions on this material 4 weeks after delivery. The authors reported that

> [o]verall, the results of this study demonstrate the efficacy of the cooperative learning model. The class section which utilized the cooperative learning model scored significantly better on the five items in the end term exam dealing with the social work environment when compared to the lecture discussion class section… That no such results were found between pretest and posttest on the 20-item questionnaire may be attributable to Type Two error. This means that while there was an observed differential in the rate of improvement between the two groups…it is a characteristic of the t-test statistic that with groups as small as this the effect must be quite large to also be statistically significant. Thus a real effect may have been missed by this study because of the relatively small sample (p. 182).

The authors pointed out that the significance of the findings in favor of the cooperative method increased when the measures focused on longer term retention (for example, comparing the results after 4 weeks and again after 90 days). The authors recognized the limitations of the small samples; they recognized another limitation when they discovered that some students in the cooperative group were meeting as a support group outside of class. In some ways, this might be considered a positive outcome of the cooperative approach. They also suggested modification of the design to attempt to remove the effects of the two different instructors. I believe this may be the more important confounding factor, because instructor interpersonal skill, relationship with students, and so forth was not operationalized in this study and examined as a possible intervening variable.

Integrating EBP Into the Practice Class

With so many models of practice available, every professional is faced with the need to evaluate these frameworks and strategies to modify practices in the best interest of the client.[7] The term *evidenced-based-practice* has been used to describe practices that have been determined to have some success, with some clients, at certain times, and with some outcomes.

Barker (2003) defined EBP as follows:

> The use of the best available scientific knowledge derived from randomized controlled outcome studies, and meta-analyses of existing outcome studies, as one basis for guiding professional interventions and effective therapies, combined with professional ethical standards, clinical judgment, and practice wisdom. (p. 149)

The elements of this definition that help to classify a model as an EBP include the following:

- The best available scientific knowledge derived from randomized controlled outcome studies
- Meta-analyses of existing outcome studies
- It is combined with professional ethical standards, clinical judgment, and practice wisdom

Randomized controlled outcome studies involve random assignment to treatment or no-treatment (or modified treatment) groups with efforts to control for other variables that may affect the outcomes.

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[7] Portions of this discussion are based on content included in my recent publication, *The Skills of Helping Individuals, Families, Groups and Communities* (Shulman, 2011b).

McNeece and Thyer (2004) suggest a hierarchy of scientific methodologies that should be considered, with some offering more credible support for EBP validation than others. In rough order from high to low they are as follows:

- Systematic Reviews/Meta-Analyses
- Randomized Controlled Trials
- Quasi-Experimental Studies
- Case-Control and Cohort Studies
- Pre-Experimental Group Studies
- Surveys
- Qualitative Studies (p. 10).

More recently, a survey of faculty members in MSW programs conducted in the fall off 2005 (Rubin & Parrish, 2007) identified a number of issues, including how social work educators defined EBP. In response to this survey, a National Symposium on Improving the Teaching of Evidence-Based Practice was held in 2006, and a special issue of the journal *Research on Social Work Practice* was published (Rubin, 2007) containing an introduction by the editor and a number of the presentations at the conference. Referring to the survey, the author pointed out that

> The findings of that study implied the need to improve the ways that social work educators are disparately defining EBP [evidence-based practice] and especially the way many of them seem to interpret various sources of evidence as sufficient bases for conveying to students that an intervention deserves special recognition as being evidence-based (p. 541).

Rubin (2007) pointed to a widespread disparity in the definition of EBP.

> Teaching EBP as a process emphasizes five phases in which practitioners formulate an EBP question, search for studies providing evidence about that question, critically appraise the evidence, select and implement an intervention that is supported by the best evidence, and then monitor client progress.
>
> In contrast, teaching EBPs puts less emphasis on finding and appraising evidence, and more emphasis on teaching how to provide interventions that have been deemed to be “evidence based” by experts who have already reviewed and appraised the evidence. (The EBPs approach is implicit in the way some government agencies and managed care companies define EBP.) (pp. 541–542)

Rubin notes that proponents of the process definition (and teaching based on that definition) assert the following disadvantages:

> 1. It ignores idiosyncratic client and practitioner factors, and thus makes EBP look too mechanistic.

2. It lacks transparency and uncertainty, makes inflated claims about the evidence base for the EBPs, and hides flaws in the research.

3. It is hard for social work practitioners to implement the EBPs in light of resource limitations regarding time, training, and supervision.

4. The fluid, ever-changing, and self-correcting landscape of scientific advances can make any list of EBPs outdated by the time it appears in print (p. 543).

In contrast, proponents of the EBP definition (and teaching based on that definition) argue that it has the following disadvantages:

1. It expects too much of busy practitioners with limited time and perhaps limited access to literature databases.

2. It fails to provide students with the skills they will need to deliver empirically supported interventions after graduation

Proponents of either approach to teaching EBP do agree on the “lack of support for EBP in agencies in which students experience their field work training and supervision. The inadequate support in agencies might be in the climate and culture of the agency, perhaps due to practitioner misconceptions about and resistance to EBP (p. 543).” Suggestions for addressing this problem, as described in the special issue, range from strengthening partnerships between the schools and the agencies to dropping agencies as field placements if they do not teach and use EBPs. Other suggestions argue for elimination of the “generalist” model of the curriculum in favor of teaching solely direct practice using an EBP framework.

My own observations at schools at which I have taught and other schools where I have presented faculty and field instructor workshops is that rather than dropping field placements that do not provide EBP training for students, most schools are finding it difficult to identify suitable field placements of any kind. Cutbacks in funding of public and private agencies have stressed services to such a degree that agency social workers are finding it harder to provide the time needed for proper supervision of students. Indirect evidence of this trend is, in my view, the ill-advised efforts to reduce or even eliminate field work in social work education as we know it. The growth of group supervision by faculty to supplement field education can be extremely helpful, but not if it is used to replace field supervision.

The second suggestion is to replace the generalist curriculum designed to provide students with a universal approach to social work practice with individuals, families, groups, and communities. The generalist approach is well-entrenched in the social work curriculum and not likely to be a candidate for significant change. When this is followed by advanced-year practice courses that allow students to focus more on specialized methods (for example, macro practice, family or group work) and concentrated courses on particular EBP approaches, the generalist approach is what defines social work as a unique profession when compared to other counseling degrees.

Shlonsky & Stern (2007) suggest an alternative for the field work issue that works within the current generalist approach.

> One of the objections to EBP is that the approach is untenable because of time constraints faced by most social workers once they are employed full-time. Our response is to agree in principle that this may be the case, but to then encourage students to pick one client facing a commonly seen problem at the agency. Over time and through many such clients, a knowledge base can be generated that serves a far greater number. Moreover, as students become invested and adept at the process, they can be helped to brainstorm ways to integrate EBP into their settings and professional lives. Enhancing links between the curriculum and community practice is, of course, a faculty responsibility (p. 610).

Springer (2007), in response to presentations at a symposium on teaching EBP by Shlonsky and Stern (2007) and Soydan (2007) identified five critical issues and themes that cut across the presentations. The common threads were as follows.

- [R]ecognizing the somewhat urgent need for the field to reach consensus on a definition of EBP that respects the evidentiary research hierarchy and, at the same time, embraces the sophisticated and complex nature of the EBP process. (p. 620)
- The effective teaching of EBP certainly warrants further examination by social work educators. In the meantime, questions that remain uppermost in my mind include the following: What are the most effective pedagogical methods for teaching EBP? Are we nearly as good as we think we are at teaching EBP? Based on what evidence? Would it be useful to provide in-service trainings through “centers for teaching effectiveness” for faculty on the art and science of effective teaching? (p. 620)
- Soydan asserts that social work curricula have to be reformulated and adapted to embrace the culture of EBP and emphasizes the need for course materials and tutorials that support more efficient teaching. Shlonsky and Stern also make reference to this when they suggest using a basic EBP assignment template to facilitate linkage between classes. (p. 621)
- The fourth common thread that I wish to amplify is nicely articulated by Soydan, who reminds us that maintaining old organizational patterns or myths, such as teaching interventions that lack high standards of evidence, is natural and commonplace in the academic guild (and in agency settings). Accordingly, Soydan proposes that we strategically exert the forces of extrainstitutional sources to move educational institutions and professional agencies beyond opinion-based social work. (p. 622)
- Finally, my colleagues are equally strong in their assertion that a culture shift is needed, and I have alluded to this repeatedly in earlier sections of the article. (p. 623)

This is of course a truncated description of the problems and potential solutions in teaching EBP as advocated by those who support changing the way we think about, teach, and practice with clients. Many of the concepts and suggestions are helpful whether you are an ardent supporter of this movement or a faculty member who recognizes that elements of the science need to be incorporated into our teaching. At times, in this brief review of the literature, I wonder whether there are other explanations for the continued resistance and difficulty in sustainability of EBP in our schools and in the field. One such explanation follows.

Resistance to EBP and Sustainability Issues

I want to address the issue of resistance by students (particularly those who come to school with practice experience), field instructors, and agencies to implementing EBP. Or the related problem of sustaining EBP practices after initial training and enthusiasm. My observation in my own classroom and in agencies where I have provided training in practice or supervision is related to the earlier discussion emphasizing that more is caught than taught. I have observed efforts by university researchers to train agency personnel in the use of an EBP such as motivational interviewing (MI). In one example the trainer was addressing a large staff group at an agency providing alcohol and drug treatment. The training was requested by the agency administrator. In this case, half the staff was professionally trained and the other half was not but had been in recovery themselves. They had “walked the walk” and “talked the talk.”

The trainer began with a presentation of the stages of change model central to MI to a group that had their arms folded and expressions on their face that spoke loudly of their resistance to the presentation. At the end of the PowerPoint presentation the trainer was immediately attacked as not really understanding the problems of recovery and challenged to describe his own practice experience in this area. Having none, he resorted to citing research findings in support of his position, and I witnessed a painful “battle of wills” that lasted to the end of the session. In a brief conversation following the session the trainer indicated to me that the session had failed because the staff was “too resistant.”

I suggested to the trainer that perhaps the staff was actually in the “precontemplation” mode and that, in contrast to the model of change he was presenting, he was working with them as if they were in the “action” mode. Thus, he was modeling the opposite of what he was teaching. I also pointed out that they might have been demonstrating the resistance they experience when working with clients in early recovery, and that in effect they were asking to be shown how to address the problem. I wondered whether, if he had started by asking them to describe the difficulty they experienced in trying to reach their clients, he might have been more successful in moving with them from precontemplation to at least the contemplation stage. The still-flustered trainer was unable to understand my point; then I realized he was in precontemplation and I was making the same mistake he had made in my conversation with him.

Potential Problems with Protocols and Manualization of EBP

Although I have found the problems described above in implementing and sustaining EBP in practice in agencies are well-founded, I suspect there may be other issues as well. I believe a note of caution has to be given on the issue of the implementation of manualized practices associated with EBP. For both research and practice purposes it is common to develop a manual that provides a structure for the practitioner and guides the implementation of the particular EDP model. In multisite research projects manuals are used to ensure "dosage integrity," which means that the delivery of the model will be the same across sites. (The term *dosage* is borrowed from pharmaceutical research and refers to the way in which a particular drug is administered.) However, if the model and the manual are strictly observed in practice it may, in some situations, prevent the use of innovative interventions or responses to unexpected events in the group. In effect, the restrictive "science" minimizes the practitioner's use of the "art" of practice.

In one example I observed parenting groups that were part of a national 16 site federally funded project designed to use groups to prevent the intergenerational transmission of substance abuse. Group leaders were instructed to deliver parenting information at fixed times in a group session and for a required amount of presentation time. The leaders' presentations were videotaped and the tapes analyzed to see whether dosage integrity was maintained when compared to the other 15 sites. The rigidity of this manualized approach led the group leaders in this example to ignore parenting issues emerging from the group members as well as clear signals of reluctance to participate on the part of some mandated parents. This group would have benefited had the manual been adapted to the particular needs of the population or the group leaders free to directly respond to the resistance.

In my own practice classes I prefer to introduce students to the criteria for determining EBPs, followed by discussion of the key elements of the commonly referenced models (solution focused; cognitive-behavioral treatment; and MI). I point out that it is not necessary to adopt an entire model or protocol, and that many of the helpful ideas can be integrated into a more general approach to practice. Students can explore models in more detail in an advanced practice elective, if available, or through readings and workshops in the community. I also stress the importance of keeping clear the unique social work role that involves working with the system (agency, host setting, etc.) as central to the "two client" concept of social work practice. Concepts drawn from EDPs, such as the stages of change in MI, can be just as easily applied to other professionals and whole agencies when considering how to be skillful in efforts to effect change. My focus is on how to reject the false dichotomy between science and art and, instead, how to integrate the two so that the science frees the artistry.

Professional Ethics, Clinical Judgments, and Practice Wisdom

In addition, professional ethics, clinical judgments, and practice wisdom are integrated into the most effective EBP models. Many of the advocates for strengthening the teaching of EBP in social work schools recognize the need to respect the years of developed practice wisdom and knowledge. For example, Zayas, Gonzalez, and Hanson (2003), while making a strong argument for the need to integrate EBP into the social work practice class, point out:

> The complexity of human experience, therefore, requires consideration of multiple therapeutic approaches, not all of which are empirically derived. Likewise, because there is no "typical" crisis situation, we cannot locate a tidy set of practice guidelines for effective treatments. These situations call for blending our practice wisdom and tacit knowledge with evidence-based interventions. Our emphasis on teaching evidence-based practice should not be understood to imply reducing the importance of practice wisdom and judgment. Nor should it suggest a mechanical, research-based cookbook approach to clinical decision-making. Rather, we urge judicious joining of these powerful sources of knowledge, and we propose that more attention is needed to devote to this in our graduate practice courses. (p. 59)

It would be hard, for example, to imagine an accepted EBP model that violated some of the basic ethical premises of the helping professions—such as informed consent. In another example, some early models of treatment for addictive behavior involved extreme forms of confrontation designed to break down barriers and force acceptance of a problem. Miller and Rollnick (1991) addressed this issue. The authors point out that some therapy groups, particularly those organized around a Synanon therapeutic community model, have employed what is called "attack therapy," "the hot seat," or the "emotional haircut." After illustrating this with a particularly harsh and attacking example—the therapist says, "Now, Buster, I'm going to tell you what to do. And I'll show you. You either do it or you'll get the hell off Synanon property!"—the therapist in the example continues with a personally attacking and insulting verbal assault.

Miller and Rollnick (1991), referring to the illustration above, comment:

> Approaches such as these would be regarded as ludicrous and unprofessional treatment for the vast majority of psychological or medical problems from which people suffer. Imagine these same words being used as therapy for someone suffering from depression, anxiety, marital problems, sexual dysfunction, schizophrenia, cancer, hypertension, heart disease, or diabetes. (p. 6)

This would be an example of an approach that violates ethical standards, clinical judgment, and practice wisdom. Most professionals in this field would agree that denial of the existence of a problem is a reality, and that the client needs to face and accept a problem before it can be dealt with. Miller and Rollnick (1991) point out that confrontation is a goal, a purpose, and an aim. They continue, "The question, then, is this: What are the most effective ways of helping people to examine and accept reality, particularly uncomfortable reality?" (p. 13).

Whereas facilitative confrontation is an important element in any helping relationship, the emphasis is on the word *facilitative*. As described earlier in this manual, confrontation that is integrated with genuine empathy and comes from caring is a crucial skill in a helping relationship. This concept emerges from both empirical research and practice wisdom.

As faculty members consider integrating EBPs and other emerging models, it is important that they consider these crucial criteria: randomization, replication, professional ethics, effective assessment, and concepts that fit our established practice wisdom. Although our assessments and practice wisdom need to be challenged at times, our ethical standards are crucial to professional practice.

A resource for identifying EBPs in the substance abuse and mental health fields, the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP), has been developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). This registry is available online at http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov. The registry is described as follows:

> NREPP is a searchable database of interventions for the prevention and treatment of mental and substance abuse disorders. SAMHSA has developed this resource to help people, agencies, and organizations implement programs and practices in their communities. (p.1)

False Dichotomies and Phony Dualisms

In a number of places in this manual I have referred to the concepts of false dichotomies and phony dualisms. This is when we believe we are faced with a choice and often faced with a dilemma. In the following section I review and explain these false dichotomies.[8]

Structure Versus Freedom

The key concept is that structure, at least the right structure, creates freedom, and without structure there is no freedom. In practice this means that effective contracting with the client (individual, family, group or community) will free both the social worker and the client to carry out their work. Students have described to me being in a class in which the instructor begins by asking them what they would like to learn without even a syllabus or expanded course content description. The students indicate they usually would like to learn whether there was another class offered at the same time. On the other hand, if a class is so tightly structured that there is no room for student input or flexibility in addressing content, this can also impede effective learning.

I still remember vividly a class I took as part of my doctorate in educational psychology. It was an evening class titled Actively Involving the Adult Learner. The reason I remember it is because the instructor lectured, without interruption, for 14 straight 2-hour classes, which, of course, left no freedom for student involvement and modeled the opposite of the course title and content. It was perhaps one of the most ironic class experiences in the program.

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[8] For a more complete discussion of these dichotomies and the need to develop integrated interventions see Shulman, 2011, and the video sessions on teaching cited in this manual.

In the earlier example of the student revealing she was an adult child of an alcoholic, the clear educational purpose of the class directed me to focus not on her personal history and problems but rather on the effect of these on her practice. Although dealing with countertransference was not on the class agenda that week, flexibility allowed me to ask the class whether they wanted to use this example to work on this issue, which was part of a later class in the syllabus.

Support Versus Confrontation

The key concept is that even when involved in confrontation of a client or while teaching in a class, the confrontation needs to be imbued with support. In the earlier example, when I pointed out that the student was not supportive of a client, I also asked the student what she was feeling at the moment in the interview. This empathy with her struggles allowed her to hear the gentle confrontation about her practice.

In turn, social workers, for example in child welfare, feel that they need to be confrontational and set limits on parents to get them to either obtain treatment for addictions or lose their children. If handled well, with empathy, this confrontation can be the most supportive intervention possible for the client. As one of my clients in an AIDS substance abuse recovery group I led, a young women recently out of prison, said one night: “I had stopped drinking and drugging often but the day child welfare took away my 3-year-old and said I could not get her back unless I cleaned up, was the day I really started recovery.” She revealed she was now 1-year clean and—what she called the year of the “feelings”—and looked forward to getting her child back. In this case and many others, confrontation handled well is supportive. Any parent of a teenager will attest to that truth.

It is just as true in the teaching and learning process. I have had very bright and competent students submit superficial but adequate assignments on a level of work that had earned them good grades without much effort. They are always surprised when I confront them and point out that I know they are capable of A+ work and that they are obviously “coasting.” It is often this confrontation that helps them to produce the work they are capable of rather than simply gliding through the program.

Process Versus Content

I have shared a number of examples in which an instructor can use the class process to model the content being taught. The example of coming back after a mistake was a good one demonstrating how social workers also have to come back to a client the next week or at a later session and admit missing the point, not been empathic, or whatever. Imagine how important this is when working with parents who have to do the same thing with their children.

The unmarried worker without children, who responds defensively when asked "And how many kids do you have?" in the first session with a mother of six, might then come back and say

> Last week you asked me how may children I had, and I felt defensive, I said "We are here to talk about you not me," I was missing what you were really asking me. You wondered, I think, whether I could really understand what you were going through; whether I could help you; and was I judging you. I should have simply said that I didn't have children and let you know that you were going to have to let me know what it was like for you if I were going to help. Let's start again.

In this example, exploring the process not only begins to develop the working relationship (therapeutic alliance), but also begins to address the content of the work. The same is true when an instructor catches his or her mistake.

Professional Versus Personal

This is one of the most powerful false dichotomies and can have a profound effect on work with clients and students if we fall into the trap of separating the two. In my practice and research into practice, group work, supervision, management, teaching, and doctor–patient relationships I have consistently found that the real task is to integrate the personal with the professional. I am aware of the need to avoid countertransference and the inappropriate disclosure of personal information. A married pair coming to my couples group and trying to deal with a difficult mother-in-law did not want me to say, "You think you have trouble with your mother-in-law? Let me tell you about mine."

However, some life experiences can be appropriate to share when relevant to the work of the client. All my research studies (Shulman, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1993a, 1993b) have indicated that clients and students are looking closely for the real person in that professional social worker and appreciate when that part of us is displayed. This can include our humanity, our caring, our frustration, and so forth that are at the core of our personhood. A client commented in one of my child welfare studies, "I like my social worker; she is not like a social worker, she is more like a real person."

The variable of sharing personal thoughts and feelings in my studies turned out consistently to be the most highly correlated with developing a positive relationship (rapport, trust, and caring), even though my own social work education instructed me to separate my personal from my professional self when I went to work in the morning. I am arguing that we are most professional when we can skillfully integrate the two as social workers and as teachers.

Individual Versus the Group

A number of the teaching examples in this manual illustrated how trying to understand the behavior of a member of a dynamic system such as a class (or family, group, or even a community) without understanding the behavior as interactive with the dynamics of the group was impossible. Classes develop a culture that includes assignment of informal roles to members of the class such as scapegoat, gatekeeper, and deviant member. In examples in this manual, the person experienced as a deviant member by the instructor often turned out to be an informal leader raising issues for the class as a whole. The example of my early first class with a student challenging the tuning-in idea, a challenge which I first responded to defensively, was really raising an authority theme issue for the class.

If this student (or client) drops out, the group informally selects someone else to take his or her place. The student (or client) who changes the subject whenever a difficult or taboo subject is raised, often described as a gatekeeper, may be doing so to protect themselves but also the group members. Unless we understand that behavior dynamically, we miss the point that is being raised.

Science Versus Art

Finally, the issue of science versus art is my way of drawing attention to my belief that science (our research) should free our individual artistry rather than take it away. Rigid imposition of protocols in a practice model can create workers who are more concerned with "dosage" integrity than hearing and responding to what the client is working on. Also, mechanical responses that are included in some skill training programs, and suggested as responses in some EBP models, I believe take away our personal selves and substitute what clients often perceive as mechanistic responses. Social workers who listen to a client but are not actually feeling or even coming close to feeling what the client is describing, and then say, "What I hear you saying is…" are good examples. The science tells us that genuine empathy is important; however, how we empathize, what we say, how we look, and how we say it is very personal indeed and reflects who we are. When I confront a client (or student), one can hear my Brooklyn upbringing comes through. The same confrontation, from someone raised in the Midwest may sound very different; however, we are both using the science while integrating our art.

Creating a Supportive Culture for New and Experienced Faculty

In an early national survey of 50 social work doctoral programs (Valentine et al., 1998), the researchers found that "although the majority of doctoral programs include preparation for teaching as a program objective, they offer limited formal course work and few opportunities for supervised teaching experiences" (p. 273). Although more attention to preparing PhD students to teach would be found in most graduate social work programs today, such efforts often are limited to topics such as use of Blackboard, PowerPoint presentations, syllabus construction, assignments, and so forth and are provided by university teaching and learning centers. In my experience, they rarely address the issues discussed thus far in this manual.

I have often asked new and experienced faculty members who have participated in my CSWE Faculty Development Institutes or other workshops I have presented over the past 25 years what would be helpful to them in developing their teaching skills. Here are some of the responses that I believe should be considered by senior faculty as well as deans and directors in considering how to create a supportive culture for strengthening teaching.

- At the top of the list is usually the need for the administration and senior faculty to make clear that teaching is valued and not sacrificed in the effort to focus on research and obtaining of grants.
- Administrators, tenure and promotion committees, and senior faculty must communicate that they believe excellence in teaching, developed over time, is weighted at least as much as excellence in scholarship and research.
- A strong evaluation system should be put into place that allows faculty to get timely student feedback. Most helpful is a two-stage process in which midterm feedback is provided confidentially to the instructor to allow him or her to address any ongoing issues with the class. The second, end-of-term evaluation is the one that goes into the faculty member’s record.
- A formal mentorship program should be established. In their first year each new faculty member should be assigned a more senior faculty member who teaches in their area (for example, practice, research, policy) and who offers to meet on a regularly. If the relationship model is formalized, new faculty members will not feel they are imposing on senior faculty mentors. In the second year the mentorship can continue informally, or the faculty member may have found other more suitable mentors.
- When faculty sequence or concentration committees meet to discuss a particular course (or courses), an opportunity to include discussion of teaching issues should be created. This creates a de-facto support group consisting of all faculty members teaching similar courses.
- Colloquia or workshops should be established where presentations are made on particular topics by different faculty members or others at the university/college who have some expertise in teaching.
- Senior faculty with a strong teaching record should offer to sit in on a class and provide confidential feedback to the instructor.
- New faculty should be offered the opportunity to attend formal conferences in their regions or nationally that focus on improving teaching. These may or may not be social work oriented.
- The dean and the relevant promotion and tenure committees should provide feedback at the end of the first appointment, most often a 2-year commitment, that

specifically identifies areas of teaching improvement. In this way, evaluations at the end of the second appointment (4 years) demonstrate improvement in the level of teaching is high enough to satisfy tenure and promotion requirements of the department, school, and institution.

- Most important, the faculty member should be assured that risks may be taken safely, so that a mistake in teaching that may lead to student negative feedback can be seen as an opportunity to grow. It is crucial for the dean or director to convey to the new faculty member that there is a learning curve and as long as the faculty member continues to learn from mistakes and grow as an instructor he or she will receive the support of the administration.

It is my hope that this manual will provide some assistance to new and experienced faculty members in their efforts to continue to learn from mistakes and to make more sophisticated mistakes. If we don't create this kind of safe and supportive atmosphere in schools of social work how will faculty do the same for our students? In turn, how will our students do the same for their clients?

Appendix A

Related DVD on Classroom Teaching

The University at Buffalo School of Social Work has published a DVD that focuses on classroom teaching and some of the common problems faced by social work instructors. It is titled *The Skills and Dynamics of Teaching: Addressing the Hidden Group in the Classroom*. This DVD includes seven 1-hour sessions of an ongoing workshop on teaching led by this author during the 2005–2006 school years. Participants in the taped workshops include PhD students, full-time faculty, and adjuncts. Some are new to teaching, others are experienced; some teach in BSW programs, others in MSW programs. The material is available without charge for online viewing or downloading and saving onto a DVD at

www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/facstaff/skills_dynamics.asp

The underlying assumption of the workshop was that the participants' class groups could serve to either enhance learning or create obstacles to learning. Examples discussed were drawn from practice, policy, research, program evaluation courses, and advanced electives. The DVD has an interactive index that allows the viewer to quickly search for session content or search by the specific concept or issue of interest.

Issues discussed include the following:

- creating a class culture in which "hot button" issues, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, abortion, religion, and so on can be discussed in a mutually respectful manner, freeing students to say what they think and feel rather than what they think they are expected to say;

- understanding the meaning of negative student behavior and being able to appropriately intervene with disruptive students or negative student cliques;
- addressing the authority theme when students directly or indirectly challenge the instructor’s competence;
- dealing with unreasonable complaints about assignments and grading;
- dealing with intercultural issues (i.e., White teacher with students of color) and intracultural issues (i.e., a Lesbian teacher receiving negative reactions from a Lesbian student);
- addressing the class process without losing sight of substantive content and avoiding turning the class into an encounter group;
- dealing with personal disclosures by students or faculty, and how to understand and enforce appropriate boundaries;
- addressing poor midterm evaluations of the class.

In this DVD I use a combination of presentation of learning and group theory, case example analysis, and mutual aid to model the role of the instructor and to demonstrate the power of the class group to enhance learning. Discussion includes the strong sense of vulnerability experienced by new and experienced instructors who are concerned about taking risks and the potential for negative student feedback that could affect their ability to teach again (PhD students and adjuncts) or to achieve tenure.

This DVD, combined with the process recording examples of classroom teaching in this manual, will assist the instructor in modeling in the classroom many of the same skills required by students in their work with clients. For example, contracting in the first classes, challenging the illusion of work, reaching for the meaning of indirect cues and dealing with the difficult student in the class are all examples in which more is “caught” than “taught.” Creating safety to discuss difficult and often taboo subjects in the class parallels the need to create that same safety in individual, family, group, and community practice.

Appendix B

Sample Assignments That Can Be Selectively Shared in Class

In most cases a student will have some form of field work experience, or sometimes prior practice experience, that allows the student to test or try out the ideas learned in a practice class in real interaction with clients. When client practice opportunities are not available constructed classroom simulations can be useful. The general approach in this section on assignments is that the focus remains on method and that a premium is placed on self-analysis and self-criticism of one’s work. The assignment, in my view, should allow the student to use class content and the literature and research to better understand and strengthen practice interventions. In the first example that follows, the critical incident analysis, the focus is on an intense analysis of a specific interaction with clients. In the second, the record of service, the analysis is of practice over time that allows a student to analyze and modify interventions so that the concept of learning from “mistakes” and then making “more sophisticated mistakes” becomes integrated into the student’s approach to learning. In both assignments the student is asked to draw on the assigned literature, as well as self-selected literature, to sharpen the analysis.

In the teaching process sections of this manual I have addressed how some of the assignments can be used in class and the importance of the instructor establishing a safe and supportive atmosphere for reflection and discussion. The use of the assignments in class brings the theory and the day-to-day practice of the students together. Students learn how to use the literature, the research, experts, and colleagues as they begin the lifelong process of learning. The next section includes the assignment as handed out to the students early in the semester.

I have used one example of the analysis of a group session with two co-leaders to illustrate how students can write about their own reactions, thoughts, and feelings and comment on their co-leaders by putting themselves in the co-leaders shoes to reflect on what the co-leaders might have been thinking and feeling. The beginning literature in this class used my textbook (Shulman, 2011) and explored some of the classic group theorists such as Bion (1961) and Bennis and Sheppard (1956). Students were required to end the assignment with a reference list using American Psychological Association style. The following was included in the class syllabus.

The Critical Incident Analysis Assignment [As Distributed to Students]

The purpose of this assignment is to develop skill in evaluating your practice with an individual, family, group, or community. The exercise involves identifying, analyzing, and generalizing the actions of the social worker in a brief, specific helping interaction. Make sure all client information is disguised according to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) rules, as discussed in class. The assignment is weighted 30% in the computation of your final grade. The assignment is due on the date of the fifth class and must be submitted by e-mail as a Word file attachment. We are using this exercise early in the term, so you will probably be addressing a critical incident related to the beginning phase of practice.

Use the following format for your heading:

Student name ____

Setting ____

Session #_________

Purpose ____

Gender of client(s) ______________________________ Age(s) _________

Cultural, racial, sexual orientation, language or ethnic identification of client(s)

____

____

1. Present an excerpt from a process recording from your field practice in which you have tried to provide specific help to your client, family, group, or community group. The excerpt should be only one or two paragraphs long. Underline what you said and did. When silence was your response, use the margin to call attention to this as an action. (Do not use a paragraph in which all of your activities were remaining silent.) Number all of your actions, including those noted in the margin. This should be a critical analysis in which you identify what you think you did well and what you would love to be able to do differently if given another chance. The grade will be based on the quality of the analysis, not the quality of the practice.

2. On attached pages, analyze each numbered intervention (including the active silences), using the following format:

1. *Worker Intervention* (a quote of what you actually said or did). The number of each worker intervention should correspond to the number from the process recording excerpt.

a. *Stimulus* (what happened immediately before you made this intervention). You can acknowledge as stimuli what the client did as well as your reaction to it. For example, a client's angry comment might provoke in you a feeling of defensiveness, with your intervention resulting from both the comment and your feelings.

b. *Interpretation of Stimulus*. In retrospect, how do you think you interpreted the meaning of the behavior at the time of the interaction? With the benefit of hindsight, would you interpret the stimulus differently now?

c. *Valued Outcome*. In retrospect, what immediate result did you hope might come from this intervention? For example, one valued outcome of remaining silent in the face of silence might be, "I wanted the client to be able to experience and deepen the emotion he was expressing."

d. *Underlying Propositions*. What propositions about human behavior and practice theory support your analysis? Because the critical incident will be drawn from the beginning sessions, reference to appropriate citations from Area 2 readings in the syllabus is expected. A proposition can be a brief statement and citation such as “1. A worker's empathic responses help to develop the client's perception of a worker's caring in the engagement phase (Shulman, 2011).” There can be more than one proposition underlying each worker intervention.

3. End the assignment with a brief (one paragraph) summary of your thoughts about the analysis. For example, you might want to comment on whether you would do things the same way again. Did you find worker interventions for which there were no group member stimuli? What do you think this means?

Sample Critical Incident Analysis Assignment

The following is a sample of a student's critical incident analysis of her work, and the interventions of her co-leader (Tom) with a group. The student has given permission for this to be used as an illustration of how one carries out this type of analysis. Selected assignments from our class may be used, with your permission, to illustrate practice issues.

Critical Incident Analysis

Name: Jane Doe; co-leaders: Tom and Sue

Agency type: Day treatment center for people living with chronic mental illness

Meeting number: Ongoing group (my third session)

Purpose: "Medication Group"—to help the group members support each other in their experience of being on medication and receive education about the specific drugs

Gender of members: Men and women

Age range: 24–63 years old

Cultural, racial, or ethnic identification of members: Heterogeneous

Preface: The day treatment center is part of a community mental health clinic. The clinic is grappling with major budget cuts that have already resulted in layoffs and changes in staff. Anxiety is understandably high among the clients as to the reliability of service. We have been discussing this with the clients in the day treatment community at large, assuring them as much as we can.

Unrelated to the budget cuts, co-leader Fran will be taking a 1-month leave from the clinic in November because she is adopting a child. She had to let the group know about her leave. Most of the clients had heard this last week, but some were hearing it for the first time. Various responses by the group were made, genuinely wishing her well and agreeing that she would make "a good mother." The "critical incident" analyzed here followed these remarks. (Numbers in parentheses refer to interventions, discussed below.)

Critical Incident

Linda said to co-leader, psychiatrist Tom, that she was worried about him. Tom asked her why she felt that way. (l) Linda said that she thought he looked tired and that he was quieter in the group lately. She wondered whether he was depressed and was worried that she had hurt him somehow. Tom asked whether there were others in the group who felt similarly. (2) Lou Ann said that she thought Dr. Rowe looked very handsome, in fact, he could be a model. Adrian added, "He could be a model, but then he wouldn't be here." Beth said, "Well, he's got a 2-year-old who takes up a lot of energy; it's very difficult." Peggy said, "Yeah, he's got his own life, too." Co-leader Sue said, "How does this relate to medication?" (3) Several group members were speaking all at once; the energy in the room was agitated. I said to the group, "I think what may be happening here is some questioning of how available staff is, wondering whether they can still be there for you, because this is coming right after Fran's announcement of her leave. Is this the concern? (4) The group got very quiet. Then Linda said, "I just feel bad that we're always getting the support and forget that you have lives, too." Beth said, "Yeah, you always seem so confident." These statements were not addressed. (5)

Lou Ann said she felt as though her head were burning up. She said, "I think it's the medication; sometimes I just feel like tearing up the ‘scripts’ [prescriptions for psychiatric drugs that Tom writes up after the group]. I don't need these meds." There was a brief silence. (6) Mary asked about the difference between medication and street drugs. Sarah felt that people could become psychologically addicted to their meds, and that it could be just as bad as narcotics. Allen said he thought the difference was that narcotics are bad for you but that the meds were supposed to "make us more comfortable so that we can help ourselves better." Peggy then mentioned that she heard that some people with mental illness were now calling themselves "survivors." Lou Ann said, "Yeah, I am a survivor, because I have had so much abuse in my life. I've been through a lot, and I've gotten myself through all this to be where I am now." Tom said, "I'm wondering whether there might be a connection from this discussion to what we talked about earlier in the group? (7)

Analysis

Intervention (1): Tom asked Linda why she felt that way.

Stimulus: Tom was responding to Linda when she said she was worried about him.

Interpretation: (I can't speak for my co-leaders, so I will try to put myself in their shoes for this analysis.) Linda may have been trying to say she was worried about the stability of the clinic. It was a role reversal though, and it may have made Tom slightly uncomfortable.

Valued outcome: Linda's comment could have been interpreted in so many ways that Tom had to ask her to clarify. He also hoped to put the focus back on her.

Propositions:

- Dependency can be a major theme for group members (Bennis & Shepard, 1956; Bion, 1961).
- Clients often share their concerns indirectly, needing the worker's help to elaborate them (Shulman, 2011).

Intervention (2): Tom asked whether others in the group felt similarly.

Stimulus: Linda had explained that she thought Tom looked depressed and added that she was worried she had hurt him.

Interpretation: The comment could have been interpreted as indicating that Linda was having a false sense of responsibility for Tom's feelings.

Valued outcome: Tom hoped to discover whether these sentiments were being expressed for the group as a whole and whether Linda was perhaps addressing a larger concern for the group. He also wanted to invite others to join in the discussion.

Propositions:

- Linda's sentiments are a reflection of what Garland, Jones, and Kolodny (1965) called the "Power and Control Stage" in group development. She was both sounding independent and testing the worker.
- The worker needs to teach clients that it is acceptable to confront the worker (Shulman, 2011).

Intervention (3): Co-leader Sue asked how the discussion related to medication.

Stimulus: Group members were commenting that "Dr. Rowe" (Tom) looked handsome, he could be a model, and that he's tired because he's parenting a 2-year-old child, which takes up a lot of energy and is difficult.

Interpretation: I think co-leader Sue thought the remarks were inappropriate. She may have been uncomfortable with how they were putting Tom on the spot and thought the group was getting off track.

Valued outcome: Sue hoped to get the group "off" Tom and back to the purpose of the group.

Propositions:

- The group often works indirectly on the authority theme—coming to terms with the worker's limitations (Shulman, 2011).
- When group members appear to be "off track," it is important for the worker to tune in to what the underlying issue may be (Bion, 1961; Shulman, 2011).

Intervention (4): I said, "I think what may be happening here is some questioning of how available staff are, wondering whether they can still be there for you, because this is coming right after Fran's announcement. Is this the concern?

Stimulus: Group members did not respond to my question. Many group members were talking all at once.

Interpretation: I felt that the group was getting anxious. I thought they felt badly about putting Tom on the spot and were now trying to protect him. It was the comment about Tom being tired because he is raising a 2-year-old that made me connect this with Fran's earlier announcement.

Valued Outcome: I hoped my comment would be a clarification and validation of what was trying to be communicated by the group indirectly.

Propositions:

- When group members experience anxiety, they may act it out in a "fight-flight" reaction (Bion, 1961).
- When communications are indirect, the worker needs to articulate what he or she believes may be the underlying feelings (Bion, 1961; Shulman, 2011).

Intervention (5): The co-leaders did not respond to the comments Linda and Beth made.

Stimulus: Linda said, "I feel bad that we're always getting the support and forget that you have lives, too." Beth said, "You always seem so confident."

Interpretation: I automatically assumed Beth was referring to Sue and Tom (obviously not me) and thought Tom or Sue should respond. I also heard their ambivalence; wanting staff to be perfect, yet needing us to be human. Can we still be there for them if we also have concerns and struggles? Can they be there for each other?

Valued outcome: Maybe unconsciously we wanted to skip over this comment, lest we lose that semblance of confidence.

Propositions:

- Group members may have two sets of feelings, on the one hand fearing the worker's authority, and on the other wanting to worker to be in control (Bennis & Sheppard’s [1956] "dependent" and "counter-dependent" members; Bion's [1961] "dependent group").
- The group leader is an "outsider" to the group, and members may be comforted by the belief that the workers are healthier and more stable than they are (Shulman, 2011).

Intervention (6): There was a brief silence.

Stimulus: Lou Ann said that she felt as though her head were burning up, and that she thought it was the medication. She said sometimes she felt like tearing up the "scripts," and that she did not need the medication.

Interpretation: Lou Ann saying that she felt as though her head were “burning up” made me think she was angry and also describing her difficulty with these issues. She voiced the group’s frustration with having to be on medications and the need to question authority.

Valued Outcome: To remain silent would hopefully leave the ultimate responsibility for the choice to stop taking meds on Lou Ann, and leave room for the other group members to respond.

Propositions:

- A group may shift phases into a "counter-dependent" or a "disenchantment" stage (Bennis & Shepard, 1956).

Intervention (7): Tom said he was wondering whether there might be a connection from this discussion to what was talked about earlier in the group.

Stimulus: Peggy said she had heard that people with mental illness were now calling themselves "survivors." Lou Ann said she was a survivor because of all that she had been through, and that she got herself through to where she is now.

Interpretation: I wondered whether the group was trying to stake out their independence. They seemed to be grappling with a sense of their own power in all this, perhaps as a reaction to the question of stability of the group leaders (and of the clinic).

Valued Outcome: Tom was hoping that the group members would make their own sense of the connection without his interpreting it fully for them.

Propositions:

- The interplay of external authority and mutual group member interdependence (the "authority" and "intimacy" themes) provides the driving force for the group experience (Schwartz, 1961).

Summary

This analysis made it clear to me that there were several missed opportunities to encourage the mutual aid process in this group. I have to admit I had my own ambivalence. As a new co-leader to the group, and as a student, sometimes I hesitate to speak up. Mostly, it is unclear to me where the agency service and member needs overlap in this group. I feel that, ultimately, allowing for mutual aid will be the most growth-enhancing for the members, but I also sense a vulnerability that makes it difficult at times for them to rely on each other. I want to respect this need. Hopefully, a balance can be reached.

References (APA format):

Record of Service (ROS) Assignment

A sample description and face sheet for an ROS assignment, which can be used for analysis of individual, couple, family, group, or community practice follows.

Record of Service Assignment [as Distributed to Students]

The purpose of this assignment is the development of skill in the analysis of your work with an individual, family, group, or community over a period of time. *The final due date for the assignment is the class during the 9th week of the term.* Assignments can be handed in earlier and will be given extra credit if used in class. If you chose to do an early ROS, then you can do the critical incident analysis later in the term.

The weight of this assignment is 60% of the total class grade. Students should use the attached form as the cover page for the assignment. The paper should be typed single-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides. The paper should be e-mailed to me as a Word attachment. As you will see in the page breakdown that follows, the entire paper is about 10 single-spaced pages.

After completing the covering information, taking care to disguise any client or agency identification information (HIPAA rules as discussed in class), you can complete the first response (Problem) on the same page. Each section that follows should be clearly identified with a heading. I will be using Word’s track changes for comments when I return the assignment. The following discussion explains how each section of the assignment should be completed.

1. Problem: This should be a brief statement (one paragraph) of your assessment of the client, family, group, or community problem you are analyzing in the assignment. The problem should be stated in specific terms. For example, if you were working with a group of survivors of sexual abuse and you were finding resistance to any open discussion of painful issues, this would be an example of a problem related to helping a group develop a culture for work. In another example, you might perceive a problem in the relationship between a child and his or her family. For example, a child who plays the scapegoat role in a family would fit. Another example might be an individual client with AIDS who is having trouble reaching out for help to friends and family members. Finally, another type of problem might come from an institutional setting in which the setting itself and the relationship to a client, family, or group becomes part of the work. For example, trying to help a resident in a treatment center; a patient's family dealing with a hospital; a group of long-term patients with mental illnesses distressed about hospital rules or their relationships to the staff; and organizing a tenants group in a housing project would all be illustrations of problems for a record of service.

2. How the Problem Came to My Attention: This should be a brief statement (one paragraph) describing the events you observed that led you to make this assessment. For example, in the sexual abuse survivors’ group, a pattern of silence or acting-out behavior when taboo subjects are raised might be identified.

3. Constructs From the Literature for That Area of Investigation: Use the literature listed in the syllabus to develop a rationale for your assessment and your general intervention strategies. For example, using the example of the survivors’ group, you might want to apply ideas from theories of group development to deepen your grasp of the struggle facing group members as they attempt to develop their ability to face painful issues. Feel free to include theorists and research in other areas that speak to your paper. Make sure to include some of those readings identified in the syllabus with your specific problem area. This section should run about four single-spaced pages for a total of five pages up to this point.

4. Summary of the Work With Process Excerpts: The next five pages (approximate) should summarize your efforts to work with your client(s) over time. Each entry should be set off separately with underlined text that briefly states what you were attempting to do. Using the survivors' group as an example, the descriptive line might be I tried to reach for the underlying feelings of pain. A paragraph might follow in which you describe what you did, including some verbatim examples of group process in quotes. Remember to properly disguise the names of clients and to remove any specific identifying material.

Another example of a rubric in this illustration might be I confronted the group with its pattern of avoidance. It is crucial for you to understand that you are not being graded on your level of skill with interventions, but rather on how well you analyze your work. Thus, a rubric of I copped out and went along with the illusion of work can represent an excellent analysis of your work. Your discussion can also include what you would have preferred to have said or done, given a second chance.

This is an assignment that can be worked on over time, so one would expect early examples in which you missed the boat and later examples in which your analysis helped you to deal with the problem more effectively. In fact, that is what professional practice is all about—learning from one's mistakes, changing one's practice, and then making more sophisticated mistakes. The grading of the paper is based on your investment of work, your understanding and application of the literature, your ability to apply constructs to help you learn new ways to see things, and your ability to learn from reflecting on your practice.

5. Where "it" (the Problem) Stands Now: This should be a half-page assessment of progress or lack of progress on the task. You can see how important it is that you state the problem, back at the beginning of the paper, in a way that allows you to assess change. Change never involves having "solved" the problem. In the example of the survivors’ group, change may mean that the group members are handling some issues better while still avoiding those that may wait until the ending stage of work, when the sense of urgency is greater. Change may mean more open discussion of a number of issues at a level the group members, given their age and stage of development, are ready to deal with. Change may mean that the family members are facing their real issues rather than using the child-scapegoat to avoid difficult confrontations. Change may mean that the hospital patients and the staff of the psychiatry unit are starting to talk to each other about mutual concerns.

6. Specific Next Steps: The final section (last half of the final page) should list your strategies for continuing the work. For example, "I'm going to remind the group that we have only four more sessions, and if there are things we need to talk about, we better get at them now."

The last page of the paper should have a proper bibliography. All citations to the literature should be in proper format (use APA standards).

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