



Field Education Literature Review: Volume 1

Author(s)

Katharine Dill, PhD

Marist College

Introduction

This literature review is the first in a series that will be published in each issue of the Field Educator Journal on topics related to field instruction. The reviews will highlight key components of practice, including reflective models of supervision and creating safe learning opportunities for students. This first review provides a brief overview of field education. Future special-interest topics will include: Indigenous issues, anti-oppressive practice, reflective practice, critical thinking, evidence-informed practice, and the professional development needs of field instructors.

Each review will contain three discussion questions. Our hope is that field instructors will use these questions to enhance their professional development. We hope that you will take these brief reviews and use them in your daily practice, and begin to develop a library of resources.

Discussion Questions

1. What information in this review did you find surprising?
2. Thinking about the points you were already familiar with, what would you add to further the discussion?
3. What additional special-interest topics would you like to see covered in future reviews?

We welcome any feedback to be emailed to fieldeducator@simmons.edu

Emerging Evidence on Field Education

Best-Practice Considerations for Field Instruction

Emerging best-practice themes relating to field instruction include the following:

1. **Students need to be observed** in action and given feedback in real time in a constructive and supportive manner (Beddoe, Ackroyd, Chinnery, & Appleton, 2011; Dalton, Stevens, & Maas-Brady, 2011). The particular focus of UK field-education literature is on the role of field instructors in providing feedback after observing students engaging with service users. There is, however, a paucity of evidence about how field

educators engage with students and watch and observe their practice within the context of North American schools of social work. This is an area that deserves further attention and research.

2. Field education allows students to **link theory to practice** (Bogo, 2015; Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004; Wilson & Campbell, 2013; Wilson & Kelly, 2010). Bogo and Vayda (1998) famously developed the Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP) Loop Model, in which a “loop” metaphor is used to describe the iterative nature of applying knowledge to practice (Bogo, 2010; Bogo & Vayda, 1998). The loop focuses on the repeated activities of thinking, feeling, and then doing. The idea is to shift cognitive thinking to behavioral outcomes within the context of the practice setting. The literature suggests, however, that while students do learn in the classroom, navigating the “space between” the classroom and the practice setting can be challenging (Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004; Wilson & Campbell, 2013). While separate topics in and of themselves, considering how to apply theory to practice and reflective practice (see below) are essential elements of field instructor and overarching pedagogy.

3. Field instructors must promote a journey of reflective practice. Lee and Fortune (2013a; 2013b) have stressed the importance of field instructors in helping students to engage in reflective thinking in order to integrate classroom theory with field practice. This sometimes requires the field instructor to reflect on their own personal and professional journey in order to facilitate and model this process for students.

Field Instructor Role: Assessor and Gatekeeper

The role of the field instructor is complex. However, much of the literature explores the role of the field instructor as a “gatekeeper.” In a study by Sussman, Bailey, Richardson, and Granner (2014), the authors used focus groups of field instructors to examine the important role of these individuals in assessing students over time. Participants in this study indicated that they were assured of student competency when students were able to: analyze situations, engage in personal reflection, critically reflect on and evaluate situations, and acknowledge their own emotional reactions. Students who had all of these abilities were considered to demonstrate overarching competence, or, as Bogo (2010) termed it, meta-competencies. This study explores the underlying complexity of student learning and integration of ideas into practice.

Field Instructor Training Needs

An under-researched area of field-education practice is the training needs of field instructors. An already-dated study by Dettlaff and Dietz (2004) draws attention to the unique needs of field instructors. The researchers found distinct differences between newer and more experienced individuals, with newer field instructors asking for and feeling they could benefit from mentoring from more experienced colleagues. This highlights the importance of networking and collaboration in field instructor training. These spaces provide opportunities to share and reflect on ideas, challenges, and opportunities. This participant quote from the Dettlaff and Dietz (2004) study highlights the importance of networking within the context of training:

I'd want to talk to other instructors to see how they are doing things. I've seen some people be very

creative. I know we can learn from each other [...] and new instructors learning from experienced instructors. (p. 27)

Challenges and Opportunities for Contemporary Field Education

There are many challenges and opportunities for field educators going forward (Bogo, 2015; Panos, Panos, Cox, Roby, & Matheson, 2002). One main challenge for field education in North America is that we can no longer rely upon the goodwill of others to supervise students. Bogo (2015) has called for several structural changes, including:

- Making field education an important agenda item for social work educational departments;
- Focusing on innovation, such as virtual (online) book clubs, discussion forums, and training opportunities offering bite-size chunks of information (e.g. “lunch and learns”);
- Entrenching field education into organizational mission statements;
- Building communities of practice with field instructors so that individuals can grow, develop, and learn from each other.

Summary

This literature review has introduced the many emerging and complex issues related to field education. Topics such as student observation, linking theory to practice, and reflective practice are all stand-alone topics that will be given their own reviews in the future. We hope you will continue to add to the variety of topics we need to cover.

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