



FIELD EDUCATOR
SIMMONS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Volume 8.1 | Spring 2018 | Kudos | © May 2018 | fieldeducator.simmons.edu

Heart of Social Work Award Winner: Theresa Kelly McPartlin

Author(s)

Carey A. Winkler, MSW

St. Catherine University-University of St. Thomas

[Editor's Note: Theresa Kelly McPartlin was named winner of the 2017 Heart of Social Work Award at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting in Dallas, TX on October 21st, 2017. The award is presented annually by the North American Network of Field Educators and Directors in recognition of a field instructor that has made exemplary contributions to field education and the social work profession. What follows is taken from the remarks made by Carey Winkler, Director of BSW Field Education for the School of Social Work at St. Catherine University & the University of St. Thomas, at the award presentation and in her nomination submission in support of Ms. McPartlin as an excellent candidate for the award.]



Theresa Kelly McPartlin, MSW

It is an honor to tell you just a little bit about Theresa Kelly McPartlin, recipient of the 2017 Heart of Social Work Award. Theresa has been a social worker for 39 years and has served as a field instructor for 29 of those years inspiring and mentoring over 300 students. Currently, Theresa serves as a field instructor for both BSW and MSW students at the University of St. Thomas Interprofessional Center for Counseling and Legal Services. Her experience in interprofessional practice supports her work with social work students collaborating with psychology and law students to provide holistic services. She assists students in understanding and claiming their own roles as social workers on interprofessional teams while teaching them how to do good work with colleagues as well as clients.

Theresa emphasizes the unique perspective that social workers bring and empowers students to find their voice as professionals. The following are examples of Theresa's knowledge, values, skills, and dedication to her role throughout her career.

Skills in Field Instruction and Teaching

Theresa is a compassionate field instructor and teacher who approaches each student with a genuine desire to build a strong and individualized supervisory relationship. She intentionally uses the supervisory relationship as a vehicle for assessing knowledge and skills, modeling professional boundaries and use of self, building on strengths, and challenging judgments and biases. Theresa's kindness and care are evident in the supervisory relationship and are exhibited through warmth, smiles, and careful listening. She also embraces the opportunity to have crucial conversations in support of student growth and development. Theresa coined the phrase "needing to have a Listerine moment" in which transparent and forthright communication assist in clearing the air. This willingness to lean into discomfort in order to deepen the supervisory relationship and further develop practitioner skills is done with compassion and a sense of the ethical responsibility that she has as a field instructor to consider and protect future clients and colleagues of the student.

Perhaps one of the most telling aspects of Theresa's impact on students is the on-going relationship that they maintain with her. A colleague describes Theresa as, "someone whom students remember and continue to seek out years after they have graduated." Students reach out to Theresa for informal consultation, supervision towards licensure, agency trainings, and professional collaboration. These ongoing relationships illustrate Theresa's skill in supporting students as a field instructor and her skillful ability to transition to a collegial relationship that includes professional mentorship. A former student of Theresa's articulated this beautifully:

Theresa has not only been a professional inspiration to me but also a personal one. Her knowledge and compassion for the field of social work and her students are immeasurable. Theresa always has a way of making supervision as a learning experience fun, exciting and relatable. She truly is a teacher through and through and I feel blessed to have been able to learn from her. Even today, she still emails me and checks on me. I feel grateful to know her and have her in my life. Even though she's not my supervisor anymore, I know she's just an email away and is always willing to listen.

Service to the University/School/Program

Theresa's unique relationship with St. Catherine University, the St. Catherine University-University of St. Thomas School of Social Work, and both the BSW and MSW field education programs illustrates her dedication and devotion to this community. As an alumna of St. Catherine's, she has brought to life its values of service, intellectual leadership, and social justice. She has illustrated this

in her multiple roles within the School of Social Work including adjunct professor, assistant professor, director of BSW field education, and professor emerita. Theresa has come full circle in her role as field instructor having begun in this role and now returning to this role upon retirement. She truly brings a career-long wealth of knowledge and experience to students pursuing BSW and MSW degrees as a field instructor with the IPC. In addition, Theresa serves on the Field Practice Institute Advisory Council where she is able to synthesize her knowledge and skills in these multiple roles and arenas to offer creative and comprehensive consultation on matters related to field education.

Theresa's extensive experience in all roles related to field education informs a balanced and thoughtful perspective in field matters. Theresa remains available to her colleagues through consultation and support. When difficult situations arise, she is often one of the first calls many of us make to brainstorm, expand our thinking, and gain insight. Theresa has a unique ability to challenge with compassion and empathize with the process of making difficult decisions. When it comes to students, she keeps learning at the forefront, with an unwavering commitment to ethical practice. Theresa finds the balance between rigor and flexibility that brings out the very best in students.

Theresa has also maintained a high level of professional engagement through service and leadership in the community both on and off campus. She has served on multiple committees and boards, including the Minnesota chapter of the NASW, provided agency consultation and training, and continues to provide supervision for licensure to emerging social workers. She uses these experiences in her teaching to model a holistic and engaged professional identity.

Creativity and Innovation in Field Instruction

Theresa's knowledge, skills, and experience as a social worker serve her well as a field instructor. She draws on these talents to teach, model, and encourage students. She does so with a spirit of creativity that manifests in her open-mindedness and by keeping up-to-date on emerging practices. In particular, one of Theresa's greatest strengths as a field instructor is her storytelling. In sharing her practice wisdom she gives voice to clients, colleagues, family members, and communities in relaying various situations that highlight challenges, mistakes, successes, and memorable moments. This storytelling engages students in a world of vicarious learning during which time they can experience these various roles, situations, and emotions through the words, body language, emotion, and transparency that Theresa offers. She brings this world to life for students in a unique and genuine fashion that inspires and guides them in the moment and beyond.

As a field instructor, it can be difficult to be seen by students as the expert in all things. Theresa intentionally models the importance of "knowing what you don't know" by encouraging students to seek additional consultation. When something arises for a student, Theresa will provide all of the information and support that she can, will seek out additional information to support the student, and be forthright about any limitations that she might have in a particular area. She then takes this

opportunity to use her vast network to offer students connections to others who have a particular expertise. While this seems like a common sense way to approach such situations, it in fact illustrates Theresa's intentionality in teaching and modeling many important skills and values. In one moment she models humility, ethical practice, competence, the importance of consultation, self reflection and awareness, and on-going professional development. These moments illuminate Theresa's strengths and creativity as a field instructor and teacher.

As a former student, mentee, and colleague of Theresa's myself, it is a delight to help honor her with this award. She is truly a remarkable social work field educator who has made a tremendous impact on hundreds of social work students. The following comments were shared by another former student who poetically summarizes the sort of impact that Theresa has on others:

Theresa has a gift for transforming how students see themselves, the people they serve, and their confidence in their ability to do social work.

It is hard to describe someone so special in words, but anyone who knows Theresa knows she has great integrity, loyalty, respect, and deep personal interest in not only her students, but all people. Theresa has a passion for life and the opportunities it brings and she is passionate about helping students realize their potential. Her approach toward supervision is real, honest, and refreshing. She approaches teaching from a relational perspective that honors students' strengths while embracing their specific needs and challenges.

Theresa McPartlin is a gift to social work education and an inspiration. She is proof that the efforts of one person can truly make a difference.

I am grateful to have this opportunity to recognize Theresa McPartlin for her many contributions to field education and the professional development of social work students.