



Kudos: Illana Perlman, MSW

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At the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW), University of Toronto, we have had the good fortune to witness breakthroughs – innovations that occur when experience combines with passion. It has been my pleasure to work with a field instructor who demonstrates this combination. Illana Perlman holds the critical role of Educational Coordinator at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, a bustling teaching hospital in Toronto. Illana collaborated with FIFSW in developing a rotational practicum model, and has made impressive contributions to field education scholarship.

Throughout his career, Mike has demonstrated skill in educating students at all academic levels. His flexibility and willingness to learn from his students has made him a sought-after field instructor. He is well known and respected by his community, colleagues and students. Students often come looking for him in the field department and seem disappointed if he's not in. Mike skillfully infuses humor and humility into his practice and his work with students. His ability to break down the core competencies and practice behaviors so that students are able to comprehend them is outstanding. He uses practical "real world" examples with which students can identify, enabling them to connect the theory they are learning in the classroom to their practice experience with clients.

In a recent interview, Illana explained:

- how field education training was a part of her social work educational curriculum
- her operationalization of field education in a busy health care setting in Toronto
- her efforts to expand the definition of a practicum by introducing the rotational model in response to the realities of a health care setting



Field Education Integrated into Social Work Educational Curriculum

At FIFSW, Illana has a lengthy and rich history of demonstrating her exceptional commitment to clinical teaching. Illana explains that her four-year social work honours program at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, had a required course in social work education, comprised of both theory and practice in education and teaching. In this course, final-year students must demonstrate competency in providing field supervision by supervising a BSW student in his or her first practicum. In turn, the field instructors for these final-year students were required to critique their students' supervision skills. Graduating students had the theoretical and practical tools to supervise a social work student, and were socialized into the importance of educating and supervising students as an ongoing component of social work practice.

In schools of social work in Canada and the US, there is no current standardized and required training as a field educator. There is also a requirement in accreditation standards that social workers have two years of field experience before engaging in field education. This is truly a missed opportunity to recruit new graduates as qualified field instructors.

Operationalizing Field Education Expectations in a Health Care Setting

Illana has been a social worker at the trauma program at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, Ontario since 1992. In 1999, she became an Education Practice Leader at the Centre. In this position, Illana provides leadership in the planning, development and coordination of the student education program at the hospital; notably, Illana increased the available student placements from 6-8 to 15-20. Illana administers the weekly social work student seminars and participates on the hospital's Interprofessional Education Committee, and on the SEAC Committee on Education. As an Adjunct Lecturer at the faculty of the University of Toronto, she has taught a wide range of seminars and workshops for undergraduate and graduate social work students.

Illana was instrumental in the development and implementation of the Social Work Student Education Standard (SSES) in her hospital, believed to be the first of its kind in Canada. The SSES clearly articulates the minimum field placement expectations, as well as the variety of teaching opportunities for a social worker at her health care setting. Early indicators are that the SSES has enhanced commitment and participation in offering social work practica in a busy hospital environment. Illana is now project lead to evaluate the impact of the SSES and to explore its application across other professions.

Expanding the Definition of Practicum: The Rotational Model

Illana has helped to develop innovative models of field education. When the rotational model for placements was being explored, Illana offered her site as a pilot location. The rotational model is an alternative to one field instructor committing to a full practicum; instead, there could be two or even three shorter practicum opportunities offered by several field instructors that, when combined, could result in one field placement. In practical terms, it has resulted in an expanded view of the practicum,

with greater participation by social workers in the field.

Contribution to Field Education Scholarship

Presentations and Publications

A published article [\[1\]](#) describes the research collaboration between Illana and the University of Toronto faculty on this project. In addition to the article on the rotational model, Illana has presented and published several papers on social work education and on medical social work practice. Her presentation topics include: "Anti-oppressive Practice and Global Transformations," "Connecting Theory and Practice in Curriculum: Health and University Partnerships," "Addressing Diversity and Interpersonal Differences in Student and Supervisor Dyads," and "Innovative Approaches to Field Education for Changing Landscapes of Social Work." She will also have a chapter in *The Culture and Politics of Health Care Work*, to be published in 2014 by Cornell University Press.

Awards

Illana has received many awards for her contributions to social work education, including the 2006 University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work Award for teaching excellence in field instruction, the 2012 Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center Education Award for clinical supervision, and the 2012 University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work Award for long service in field education.

Conclusion

As Illana's colleague, I have had the opportunity to observe Illana's contributions to the profession and to the field. As a guest at a recognition event for the field instructors that she organized, I witnessed first-hand the support that Illana provides to the Sunnybrook MSW field educators. MSW students themselves have communicated to me the inspiration that they have received from Illana. With the education of MSW students can come challenges that demand dedicated attention from the FIFSW Practicum Office and Sunnybrook field instructors. Illana is involved in all of these challenges at Sunnybrook - she models objectivity and perseverance, balances staff and student need for support during challenging times, and upholds the values and integrity of the profession. Illana consistently and willingly extends her knowledge to her colleagues, is a model Education Coordinator and a tremendous ambassador for the social work profession, and brings her passion for field education into her work.

[1] Muskat, B., Bogo, M. & Perlman, I. (2013). Making rotational field placements work: Review of a successful pilot of rotational field placements in hospital settings. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 11 (1)5-18.