The Resurgence of Moral Basis in Social Work Field Education: The Experience of Field Instructors in Hong Kong

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Abstract

A reflective paradigm, practice wisdom (a kind of moral engagement practice), represents a challenge to the dominant paradigm of technical rationality when dealing with human interactions in the context of social work practice. The author developed a theoretical framework of four features of practice wisdom, a practical moral knowledge, and explored how field instructors exercise this pedagogical practice wisdom in social work field instruction in Hong Kong. This article evaluates concerns about field instructors' role in reviving the moral basis in their teaching. Implications for field instructors are discussed.

Keywords: field instructors, moral engagement, practice wisdom

Social work education comprises the core component of the practicum, internship, or fieldwork, as revealed in curricula of social work degree programs all over the world. Field instructors work with students at the site of practice, which is filled with uncertainty and complicated human interactions. According to Tsang (2013), field instructors may face built-in tensions and multiple demands resulting from different roles and responsibilities.

Limitations of technical rationality for making sense of humanity in the context of social work practice have aroused extensive discussion over a reflective paradigm, referred to as practice wisdom. Practice wisdom is practical moral knowledge that gives particular attention to moral reasoning and may better accommodate the nature of social work practice. There is a limited amount of discussion in the literature about the exercise of practice wisdom specifically in field instruction. In order to discover how practice wisdom can be utilized in field, the author needed to properly define "practice wisdom" and how it can be recognized. Based on extensive scholarly reviews, the author conceptualized four features of practice wisdom: the dialectical interplay of moral reasoning and cognitive knowledge, the agential nature of knowledge, the interactive process of knowledge generation, and the fluid status of knowledge. These principles guided an investigation into how field instructors exercise them in teaching, hence, how they employ pedagogical practice wisdom. Here, the terms field instructor and field instruction are equivalent to practice teacher and practice teaching.

The Misplaced Technological Mode in Social Work Practice

Social work practice deals with the complexity of human conditions and moral affairs. It is a form of practical and moral engagement and not primarily a matter of technocratic practice for achieving certain ends (Chu & Tsui, 2008; Whan, 1986; Yuen, 2010; Zhu, 2000). The dominance of positivism, however, is found in the current social work education, which mismatches the practical moral and judgment-based nature of social work practice.

The Practical Moral and Judgment-Based Nature of Social Work Practice

Social work is concerned with personal meaning (Goldstein, 1990) and dealing with human relationships, social problems, and psychosocial issues (Taylor & White, 2006; Tsang, 2014). The majority of practice is characterized by indeterminacy (Kwong, 2004; Schön, 1987; Taylor & White, 2006; Tsang, 2014). Kwong (1996) denoted formal theories as "experience-distant" and "decontextualized," a classification that would not be immediately applicable in practice situations where practitioners have to deliberate on what to do in the immediate moment under the specific context. Polkinghorne (2004) noted that judgment-based social work practice involve unique, particular, and uncertain practice scenarios. Social workers do not only need theoretical knowledge or skills to handle day-to-day practice, but also the moral perspective for the good of clients.

The Misplaced Technical-Rational Oriented Approach in Social Work Education

Despite the judgment-based and moral engagement of social work practice, social work education tends to put more emphasis on formal theories and skills that are assumed to be sufficient for tackling the uncertain terrain of practice. For instance, a field practicum, under the supervision of field instructors, usually follows the teaching of "basic theories." According to Tsang (1999), this approach reflects a kind of positivist-designed curriculum, which assumes that a body of objective knowledge exists that can be applied deductively in handling individual and social behavior. This positivistic epistemology is found in social work fieldwork assessment and curriculum design in Hong Kong. According to W. T. Chui (2005), local institutes largely use externally determined and assessment-based field education and learning, which has denied other forms of knowledge. Lam, Wong and Leung (2007) showed that local social work students are unduly concerned with knowledge and skills application within the circumscribed knowledge framework of their placement. Lam et al. (2007) queried the dominant influence of scientism and competence-based practice in social work, in which learning outcomes and instrumental and technical reasoning are highly emphasized. In the author's experience, field instructors are suggested to grade students largely based upon a list of performance indicators with the support of evidence such as students' theoretical knowledge and its integration in practice, practice skills, and so forth. Students are usually less concerned about the centrality of human understanding and/or personal knowledge.

This positivist paradigm can also be exemplified through the mandated social work education curriculum proposed by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), the statutory body, established under the Social Worker Registration Ordinance in Hong Kong. According to the SWRB (2015), the mandated curriculum must include social work core subjects (e.g., social work theories and practice, social policies, human development, and social environment), non-social work core subjects (e.g., social sciences, communication skills, and research) and the core component of the field practicum. This curriculum implies that students are expected to acquire knowledge from various disciplines in classroom learning and to connect propositional knowledge and practice in field practicum under the supervision of field instructors. The scope of knowledge to be included in the curriculum is confined for training.

As referred to above, the underpinning presupposition is that social workers can attain the likely outcomes of good practice through the application of research based theories and skills, hence, a kind of deductive application. Social work education in Hong Kong indeed has been heavily reliant upon adaptation from the West (Kwong, 1996). For instance, in the 1970s, most social work educators with overseas social work training just transferred the practice theories such as behavior modification and client-centered approaches to the local population without modification. In the most recent two decades, similar to the situations in the United States and European countries, social work practice in Hong Kong is therapeutic and clinically oriented as exemplified from the "enthusiastic support" of social workers for the increase of family and/or individual therapy approaches. Under the

dominance of managerialism, cost effectiveness and efficiency are valued in the person-focused social welfare sector (Tsui & Cheung, 2004). Training institutes are expected to meet the market demand by training social workers inevitably in management skills, efficient and informed practice, and evaluative research about practice effectiveness desired by service agencies.

As characterized by the commonalities of evidence-based practice (EBP) in social services and social work training, the widespread influences of positivism are illuminated. According to Webb (2001), EBP is a variant of technical rationality in that only certain forms of action are considered legitimate, which excludes individual arbitrariness, and manages social work within a technocratic framework. However, Howard, McMillen, and Pollio (2003) supported EBP curriculum for enhancing professional and accountable practice and Gilgun (2005) noted that EBP is composed of more than the application of research evidence to practice and can promote reflective and mindful practice. Despite differing views over EBP, under the positivist paradigm of social work, students more likely are taught to develop a certainty and to apply practice in a deductive way in handling a humane, judgment-based practice (Taylor & White, 2006).

Tsang (2007) strongly criticized the inappropriateness of applying the technical-rational model to the largely "indeterminate" nature of social work practice, which involves feelings, values, and judgments in interpersonal interactions. Dissatisfaction with technical-rational approaches to professional practice and education was previously expressed by John Dewey (as cited in Taylor & White, 2006) and Schön (1983, 1987). The technical-rational perspective defines professional activity as "instrumental problem solving via rigorous, scientifically tested, and derived methods" (Gowdy, 1994, p. 363). However, the deductive application of knowledge is considered misplaced in the caring profession of social work (Tsang, 1998, 2006). Both social work educators and practitioners (or students) should not overly rely on technical expertise at the expense of authentic understanding of human beings (Prior, 2005). Otherwise, the caring profession of social work practice will shift from being people-oriented to technically-oriented.

Recent Discussions About Practice Wisdom in the Literature

For a better understanding of practice wisdom, one can look to Aristotle (350 BC/1980)'s idea of phronesis (Greek for wisdom or intelligence) in Nicomachean Ethics (Book VI) as characterized by thoughtful deliberation on how to secure good human life. Chu and Tsui (2008) said, "Practice wisdom is often used interchangeably with practice knowledge and practical wisdom" (p. 49). A critical examination of recent discussions about practice wisdom is warranted to deepen understanding of the concept.

Schön's (1983, 1987) idea of reflection illuminates a challenge to the applied science-model for understanding human professions. His notion of reflection involves the moral dimension, critical understanding of the agent, and reformulation of pre-occupied conception. The limitations of technical

rationality in making sense of human encounters have aroused heated discussion in recent decades about the reflective paradigm practice wisdom (Chu & Tsui, 2008; DeRoos, 1990; Dybicz, 2004; Goldstein, 1990; Klein & Bloom, 1995; O'Sullivan, 2005; Roca, 2007; Scott, 1990; Sheppard, 1995; Thompson & West, 2013; Tsang, 2008). Goldstein (1990) depicted practice wisdom as a competency, which is a dynamic process with an accretion of knowledge, insights, skills, and values. Similar to Schön (1983, 1987), DeRoos (1990) understood practice wisdom as involving a sense of humility and self-reflection. Scott (1990) states that practice wisdom is a kind of tacit knowledge that is intuitive, personal and embodied. Sheppard (1995) proposed a wider perspective of knowledge, which includes professional and lived experience as suggested by DeRoos (1990) and Goldstein (1990), and formal knowledge. Klein and Bloom (1995) interpreted practice wisdom as a system of personal and value-driven knowledge emerging out of the transaction between the phenomenological experience of the client's situation and the use of scientific information. Kwong (1996) addressed the commonalities of context-sensitive experience in understanding practice wisdom.

The discussion of practice wisdom has continued during last decade. For Dybicz (2004), practice wisdom is "person and value-driven" (p. 200), which involves competency in the application of practice knowledge and the actualization of social work values throughout the engagement process with clients. Dybicz (2004) gave attention to social work values and practice knowledge. Polkinghorne (2004) understood practical wisdom as actions related to human beings and a good life. Prior (2005) and Tsang (2008) addressed the commonality of moral reasoning in bringing about something morally good in a given situation. Similar to Klein and Bloom (1995) and O'Sullivan (2005), Chu and Tsui (2008) acknowledged a wider range of knowledge, and further depicted the commonality of moral reasoning and context-dependent theories. Roca (2007) asserted that good character is a matter of doing the right thing with the right desires and emotions, and the involvement of the whole person in making sense of Aristotle's thought of practical wisdom. Going beyond conceptual discussion, O'Sullivan (2005) and Thompson and West (2013) proposed the development models of direct practice wisdom for practitioners and social work students respectively.

The scholars' broad views of practice wisdom reveal the essential commonalities of agential agent, reflection, experience, fluid knowledge, contextual knowledge, collaborative learning, personal and formal knowledge, and the morality of the agent. Practice wisdom is advocated as a counterpoint to the dominant influence of technical rationality in caring and human professions. It might be understood as taking the right action with the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right desire, and in the right way, under conditions of uncertainty and complexity (Birmingham, 2004; Chu & Tsui, 2008; Dunne, 1993; O'Sullivan, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2004; Tsang, 2008).

The Four-Dimension Theoretical Framework of Practice Wisdom

Based on the views of scholars on practice wisdom, the author developed a four-dimension theoretical framework of practice wisdom, as shown in Figure 1. The colored sectors of the figure represent

the four features of practice wisdom under investigation in this study. Opposing domains, such as moral reasoning and cognitive knowledge, illustrate the dialectical relationship.

Interactive vs. Isolated Process of Knowledge Generation

The first dimension captures the argument of whether knowledge is derived in the isolated mind of individuals or in the interaction within the learning experience. Practice wisdom puts emphasis on contextual and participative knowledge. Learning or acquisition of knowledge does not happen in an isolated situation or through scientific methods, but in the process of social participation. For instance, Goldstein (1990) noted that the interaction between the worker and client was essential to enrich the worker's perspective of understanding and the development of practice wisdom. Kwong (1996) understood practice wisdom as a context-relevant knowledge. O'Sullivan (2005) also recognized knowledge building through collaborative exchanges and contextual learning. Together, with the elements of collaborative learning and contextual knowledge, practice wisdom denotes the interactive process of knowledge generation.

Agential vs. Objective Nature of Knowledge

The second dimension captures the argument of whether or not knowledge is an "out there" object that the learner can derive via the linear application of knowledge. From the perspective of practice wisdom, the learner is proactive in understanding humanity, giving personal meaning to his or her experiences, and formulating or reformulating one's cognitive framework based upon generalized knowledge and personal knowing. There is no standard procedure to follow for the acquisition of intended knowledge as depicted in positivist view. Rather, the learner is agential in knowledge generation via action and reflection. This approach or connection can be inferred from scholars DeRoos (1990), Scott (1990), Dybiz (2004), Roca (2007) and Chu and Tsui (2008), whose work denotes the intuitive, tacit, personalized, and embodied nature of knowledge. Practice wisdom denotes the agential nature of knowledge.

Fluid vs. Static Status of Knowledge

The third dimension represents the fluid status of knowledge, instead of the static, objective, or external status depicted in the positivist view. The fluid status of knowledge is closely related to the agential agent in knowledge generation. The learner critically reflects on what is already known, and the experience gained in the act of doing, and then constantly constructs new personal knowing. Knowledge is therefore not static, but fluid, resulting from the agent's instant generation of knowledge or new understanding via ongoing action and reflection. This understanding of knowledge is similar to the view of provisional status of knowledge (Sheppard, 1995). Practice wisdom denotes the fluid status of knowledge accordingly.

The Dialectical Interplay of Moral Reasoning and Cognitive Knowledge

This fourth dimension concerns the dialectical relationship between moral reasoning and cognitive

knowledge. Cognitive knowledge embraces positivist empirical knowledge, theories, and theoretical concepts, which are given a privileged position in the technical-rationality perspective. However, the use of cognitive knowledge with moral concerns is grounded in practice wisdom. Moral reasoning means that the agent embraces two facets of reason and emotion in making sense of the situation in order to derive a moral judgment. Practice wisdom denotes the interplay of moral reasoning and cognitive knowledge.

Research Methods

This alternative epistemology of practice wisdom is deemed more suitable for catering to the nature of social work. The author conducted an empirical study exploring how practice teachers exercise these four features in practice teaching, or pedagogical practice wisdom, in bringing about favorable results of student learning in Hong Kong.

Research Approaches, Methods, and Participants

Qualitative and interpretative approaches were adopted for exploring how field instructors make sense of their lived experiences (i.e., their own practice wisdom) from their perspective and capture their moment-to-moment flow of thinking, judging, and acting. Zimmer (2006) regarded truth as a result of constructed and intersubjective meanings. Qualitative research allows for rich descriptions of social life, detailed explanations of social processes, and generation of theory (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

Five pairs of one field instructor and one student were successfully recruited from five local institutions (of the six offering a bachelor's degree in social work in the area) and participated in the 2010-2011 concurrent placement. The instructors were experienced in field instruction (i.e., two with 16 years and one with 6 years) and/or frontline practice (i.e., two with more than 10 years). Each instructor provided two videotaped records of teaching scenarios that best represented their practice wisdom, according to the aforesaid tentative understanding of practice wisdom, and they attended four rounds of co-reflection with the author. Additionally, a focus group session was conducted for each of the instructors and students.

Data Analysis and Its Trustworthiness

Thematic analysis was used to discover themes that emerged as being important to the description of the phenomenon. This process included the analysis of their meaning in context (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Data triangulation was adopted here for extending understanding and enhancing research validity. Therefore, each field instructor provided two videotaped teaching scenarios and attended four rounds of co-reflection at different phases of the placement for identifying similarities, differences, or changes of views. Students' views were also referred to for enriching the understanding of the field instructors' teaching. In addition, stakeholder checks were built into the research design. A draft analysis was prepared for review by the field instructors in a follow-up meeting for clarifica-

tion of their epistemology, after each co-reflection, utilizing a videotaped review. The interpretation of the findings was drawn up based upon the principle of consistency, the repetition of occurrence or absence of a specific way and/or content of teaching, by referring to the two videotaped scenarios and the respective instructor's views throughout the four co-reflections and focus group session. Furthermore, an academic with research interest in field instruction performed the coding consistency checks.

Findings

Findings revealed that field instructors have different moral concerns in perceiving various salient features in mentoring students, including:

- Upholding the moral principle of integrity for scrutinizing one's teaching
- Prioritizing clients' best interest by teaching students the vigorous process of assessment and deliberation
- Prioritizing clients' best interest with discernment in students' vulnerability to learning
- Striving for the genuine practice with trustworthy evaluation of one's own practice
- Upholding ethical responsibility to the social work profession by rendering competent practice to clients
- Insights into their commonalities in mentoring students included:
- Embracing dual or multiple foci of moral consideration such as integrity, students' vulnerability to learning, ethical responsibility to clients, placement agencies, and professional practice
- Informing by practice wisdom in making pedagogical decisions
- Embracing moral courage in taking risks

Differing Salient Features Perceived in Mentoring Students

The salient features perceived by the instructors are largely moral concerns about clients' interest, moral principles, moral sensitivity to students' vulnerability to learning, and ethical responsibility to professional social work practice. Relevant examples from each instructor are cited for discussion.

Uphold the moral principle of integrity for scrutinizing one's teaching.

Instructor A shared an experience of advocating for the rights of an adult student who had an attached placement, in which she worked on non-placement days and the agency supervisor was also her work supervisor. Instructor A found the need to protect the student because of the agency supervisor's ungrounded and harsh comments on the student's capability. Instructor A stated:

> It is not an offence to the agency supervisor to make a counter argument on the student's per
> formance, but just the right action to tell the truth I know. I performed consistently in accor
> dance with my beliefs, that is, with integrity, and I continue to teach students to behave in this
> way.

Instructor A upholds the moral principle of integrity and scrutinizes the degree to which her performance is consistent with her beliefs. In addition, she showed discernment in the student's vulnerability to the asymmetrical power relation with the agency supervisor, and she shouldered the moral responsibility to build up the student's sense of confidence. Some students told Instructor A that they learned to give compliments to clients from the way she gives compliments to them. For students' learning, she enacted the role of a moral responsible agent with humane attitude. This approach also helps to induce enthusiasm in the student to respect integrity, as modeled by the instructor.

Prioritize clients' best interest by teaching students the vigorous process of assessment and deliberation. During an initial child welfare investigation, Instructor B held a view different from the student in assessing the child's mother, who had newly arrived in Hong Kong from Mainland China. She coached the student to reexamine the grounds for the stated judgment that no service need existed, encouraging the student to provide details of the mother's improvements in parental practice or establishing social support networks. Instructor B noted: *The student shall make a well-grounded assessment before acting on a judgment of no service need for the mother due to the nature of child protection.*

Instructor B prioritized the client's welfare in teaching the student to make vigorous and deliberative assessments and judgments. For example, the participating student noted that she had to consider thoroughly and present the skills or theoretical knowledge needed for intervention in advance. This helps explain why the participating student feels stressed to accommodate Instructor B's teaching of requiring theoretically grounded assessment or intervention. This instructor emphasized that the placement agency, the student, and the instructor herself are ethically responsible for making an effort to work for the best outcome for the children.

Prioritize clients' best interest with discernment in students' vulnerability to learning. Instructor C diagnosed a teenager with a complicated family relationship, particularly with the mother. He decided to schedule a home visit to capture the crisis and prepare for a family intervention, whereas the student hesitated to take that step. Instructor C did not address the student's hesitation, but asked the student to complete the administrative procedure for arranging the home visit. Next, the instructor conducted a role-play with the student to prepare for the home visit. Instructor C stated:

> *I understand that the student is inexperienced in working with parents. But what I am concerned with is the whole family, in particular the teenager's mother, and their suffering. In addition, it will be a breakthrough for the student if she can make the home visit.*

The student may help inform our understanding. The student noted her poor learning experience with her former field instructor, who always put great emphasis on teaching theories. Rather, Instructor C discussed theoretical concepts or theories when they came across the relevant practice situations, in order to clarify values and attitudes. This reveals Instructor C's concern about the understanding of humanity and discernment in students. He was moved by the family's suffering and

started from his good intention of helping the student make a breakthrough. He demonstrated moral sensitivity to the student's vulnerability in facing challenges by generating a sense of competence and safety for the student in undertaking the home visit.

Strive for the genuine practice with trustworthy evaluation of one's own practice. The student consulted with Instructor D regarding the way to complete a program evaluation, referring to the agency's evaluation form. Instructor D explained that the form certainly would bring favorable results because of its design and discussed two other types of evaluation methods for student learning. The student was instructed to perform the outcome evaluation with precision, despite the practical difficulties. Instructor D stated: *A compassionate or devoted worker should not strive for favorable results without giving ethical consideration to the intervention. I teach students to solicit clients' feedback in a genuine way.*

The participating student treasured learning from Instructor D's rich work experience, examples of genuine attitudes of a social worker, and directive teaching style, as the student was inexperienced and lacked confidence. Instructor D advocated passing down the moral principle of genuineness in teaching the student to be honest and diligent in soliciting client feedback. For him, teaching vigorous procedures of completing an evaluation is a means to teach the student a genuine attitude toward clients.

Uphold ethical responsibility to social work profession by rendering competent practice to clients. As observed from the video, Instructor E repeatedly taught the student to strive for consistency among the goal(s), intervention, and the outcome-based evaluation, based on his understanding of the professional standard. Instructor E stated: *My life is "practice with knowledge." The intended goal of teaching the student is to achieve the professional standard.*

Instructor E upheld the moral responsibility of the profession and is enthusiastic in instilling moral responsibility in students through advancing their professional standards for the delivery of competent practice to clients. He showed great tolerance and moral sensitivity to the student's vulnerability to learning. As informed by the participating student, when the students was having difficulty articulating her placement experience, Instructor E used an improvised exercise of drawing a triangle and adding labels to each side: attitude, skill, and knowledge. The student was inspired to articulate the details of each side, and to understand an overall picture of her experience in this placement as a result. Through his enactment of compassion for social work and coaching, the student is assured of developing the capabilities and feeling secure in striving for professional practice.

Commonalities Embraced in Mentoring Students

Insights into field instructors' commonalities in mentoring students included: embracing dual or

multiple foci of moral consideration, being informed by practice wisdom in making pedagogical decisions, and embracing moral courage in taking risks. Relevant examples from each instructor are cited for discussion.

Embrace dual or multiple foci of moral consideration. The field instructors embrace multiple moral considerations in their teaching. For instance, Instructor A upheld the moral principle of integrity and moral consideration of a student's vulnerability to the unsymmetrical power relation with the agency supervisor. Instructor B embraced moral considerations of the client's interest, ethical responsibility to the placement agency, and student's learning. Similarly, Instructor C took into account the client's welfare as the paramount consideration but also responded to the student's vulnerability in working with parents by giving specific guidance on how to act. Instructors D and E were compassionate about genuine practice and professional practice accordingly. They referred to the moral consideration of genuine and competent practice by supplying cognitive knowledge and providing step-by-step guidance.

The field instructors do not only show moral concern about the best outcomes for clients, but also for the students' vulnerability during training and ethical responsibility to the placement agency. Furthermore, they take care of multiple moral elements simultaneously in teaching, which is demanding.

Informed by practice wisdom in making pedagogical decisions. The field instructors made use of their practice wisdom in making pedagogical decisions. For example, Instructors B and C possibly were informed by their practice wisdom, which may have developed from their professional experience and cognitive knowledge base in coaching students in the way of handling cases that could be at risk. Instructor B was likely informed by her practice wisdom in working with child protection cases or families and thus taught the student to collect data in areas of parental capability and risks to the child, thus making sense of the child protection case. Instructor C regarded the family intervention desirable in crisis and coached the student in a practical way. His practice wisdom likely shows an accumulation of practice experience, the particularities of knowledge specific to this type of a teenager's crisis, and his moral concern for the human good. Instructor E was informed by his conception of professional social work practice, in which the intended goals were well defined and consistent with the intervention and outcome evaluation. His conceptualization of good social work practice was probably affected by his values, predisposition, practice experience, and cognitive knowledge. In the case of Instructor D, guided by both his cognitive knowledge about evaluation methods and moral concern of genuineness, encouraged the student to observe the ethical principle of genuineness in practice.

Embrace moral courage in taking risks. Some of the field instructors embraced moral courage with an element of risk in decision-making when making sense of the salient features of a practical situation. For instance, Instructor A was uncertain of the consequence of bringing up views that are

contrary to those of the agency supervisor. Similarly, Instructor D embraced his moral courage by pointing out the underlying problems of the agency evaluation form for the benefit of a student's learning of genuine practice. Possible conflicts may result, which in turn could negatively influence the working relationship between the instructors and the agencies. However, Instructors A and D exercised moral courage in protecting the students' rights and teaching genuine practice respectively. Instructor C took the risk of overestimating the student's capability or underestimating the stress induced in rendering the home visit. However, for the good of the client and the family, he gave a lower priority to the student's interest at that particular moment, but offered practical support.

The field instructors upheld their commitment and passion to teaching with moral consideration and courage. Bringing about the moral basis in teaching depends on the interaction between the respective field instructor, his or her perception of the salient features and the particular practical situation, and the individual student.

Discussion

The findings demonstrated that field instructors represented the commonality of the moral basis of social work practice and instilled in students the moral responsibility for the good life of human beings via personal enactment. As a result, there are several implications for field instructors.

Field Instructors: The Soul Reviving Moral Goodness

Social workers are affected by social work education, in particular, the intensive and individual basis of fieldwork instruction and learning. Inspired by the instructors' effort in reviving the moral basis, one may draw insights from Aristotle's notion of character based on his idea of practical wisdom:

> And this eye of the soul acquires its formed state not without the aid of excellence as he has been said and is plain; for inferences which deal with acts to be done are things which involve a starting-point, viz. since the end, i.e. what is best, is of such and such a nature. […] Therefore, it is evident that it is impossible to be practically wise without being good. (Nicomachean Ethics, 1144a29-37)

Roca (2007) depicted good character as a matter of doing the right thing with the right desires and emotions in Aristotle's thought. Virtuous action has to do with the character of the agent who performs that act. Field instructors have a role in reviving value, morality, and humanity in social work training by nurturing students' moral claims of goodness.

It is not plausible to expect field instructors to guide students in moral responsibility if they do not embrace moral character or value, which is the commonality of the moral basis of social work practice. Field instructors are thus suggested to have competence in including social work values, personal attributes, and social work skills in shouldering this obligation of instructing students in moral responsibility (Zhao, 2008). More focus is needed into the current competency development of

field instructors.

Teaching Competence of Field Instructors
The distinctive nature of social work practice demands competent teaching by field instructors in coaching students to work in real life situations. Field instruction and classroom teaching are expected to develop students' moral reasoning, learning what is good in defending moral decisions, especially under the competency based and bureaucratic managerial-oriented social welfare field. Teaching technocratic practice solely or training technically competent practitioners shall not be done in social work education (Lam et al., 2007).

Other than handling the complex nature of practice, the capability of knowing how to teach should be given attention. Rogers and McDonald (1992) and Tsang (2000) challenged the myth that practitioners with a number of years of working experience could be a field instructor without specialized training in field instruction. Hong Kong social work training institutes indeed hold this prevailing myth as inferred from the requirements for becoming a qualified field instructor. Other than possessing at least five years post-degree practice experience as set by the SWRB, there is no requirement to take formal training in field instruction. In my experience, fulfilling the qualifications as set by the SWRB does not mean that a field instructor knows how to inspire students to learn, assess student learning needs, or exercise compatible pedagogy. W. T. Chui (2005) queried the teaching competence of untrained practice teachers in carrying out their teaching, supervisory, and assessment duties. For example, in the study Instructor B stated: I did not know how to perform practice teaching when I joined the field of field instruction, but explored students' needs and the role of a field instructor on my own. This instructor's story of her teaching journey challenges the myth that a practitioner can be a field instructor automatically without training. Field instructors play a fundamental role in reviving the commonality of the moral basis of social work practice and mentoring students. It is therefore desirable to nurture the competency of field instruction in practitioners and classroom teachers.

Training for field instructors. According to Rogers and McDonald (1992), practitioners need to be prepared to become field instructors by having specialized training with the goal of making the transition from practitioner to educator. Practice teachers have become more reflective after attending specialized training in practice teaching (Tsang, 2000). Trained field instructors are able to modify their supervisory approach according to students' developmental needs (Deal & Clements, 2006).

Wales's experience in preparing practitioners to become field instructors deems useful for promoting their teaching competence in field instruction. The Care Council of Wales, the regulatory body for social work in Wales, recognizes that there are certain courses required for certain jobs. Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL), a new initiative introduced in 2014, is to facilitate social workers developing their career pathway and includes courses on becoming a practice educator (Care Council for Wales, 2016). For examples, there are enabling practice courses on how to assess and

supervise students. It is unlikely that practitioners would be allowed to carry out this role without training in supervising and assessing qualifications of students. In addition, over the past several years, Wales has had several Practice Teaching Awards that encourage field instructors to develop their professional skills.

Field instructors are unlikely to instill in students moral responsibility via personal enactment if they do not embrace the moral basis, which is given less attention under the positivistic conception of social work. As evident from this study, field instructors were able to enhance self-awareness of their teaching practice, and even their blind spots, via reflective dialogue in co-reflection meetings. For instance, Instructor B became aware of her blind spot, in this case inadequate containment in working with less capable students, as a result of her experience in the study. Both potential and current field instructors are likely to appreciate and embrace the moral perspective in rending reflective teaching by having more training opportunities. In agreement with W. H. Chui (2008), ongoing training for updating field instructors is recommended.

Acknowledgement of the Status and Contribution of Field Educators

In addition to needed training, it is also important to acknowledge and appreciate the status and contributions of field instructors. Two field instructors in the study stated that they were devalued and even underpaid compared with classroom teachers. Field instructors are expected to perform multiple tasks in an environment that is more uncertain and complicated compared to classroom teaching. Tsang (2013) addressed the worry of decreasing passion and commitment of field instructors, grounded in the problem of mechanical production of social work students, and he encouraged field instructors' poetic appreciation of field instruction. He further noted the problem of placing field instructors as "second class citizens" (N. M. Tsang, personal communication, May 21, 2015). Rogers (1996) believes that accreditation of practice teachers has bolstered the status of practice teachers in the United Kingdom. Tsang (2000) shows that accredited specialized training grants afford practice teachers not only educational accountability, but also a sense of learning community with connectedness and personal meaning of their teaching practice. According to Tsang (2000), field instruction is often lonely and private in nature. Thus, connectedness among field instructors is vital. This is particularly true in Hong Kong as local institutions increasingly utilize college-based part-time field instructors who are largely disengaged with the employing institutions.

Conclusion

Within the limited scope of this paper, the way field instructors revive the moral basis when rendering field instruction, the differing salient features, and the commonality in mentoring students are discussed. The field instructors coach students to return to the basic nature of social work and revive moral concerns via personal enactment. Using this approach, social work educators could draw once again attention to the moral commitment of social work training under current commodification of higher education.

Note

The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) was established in 1998 under the Social Worker Registration Ordinance of 1997 in Hong Kong. Functions of the board include:

- Setting and reviewing the qualification standards for registration as a registered social worker and related registration matters
- Dealing with matters in relation to registration and renewal of registration
- Dealing with matters in relation to disciplinary offences of registered social workers
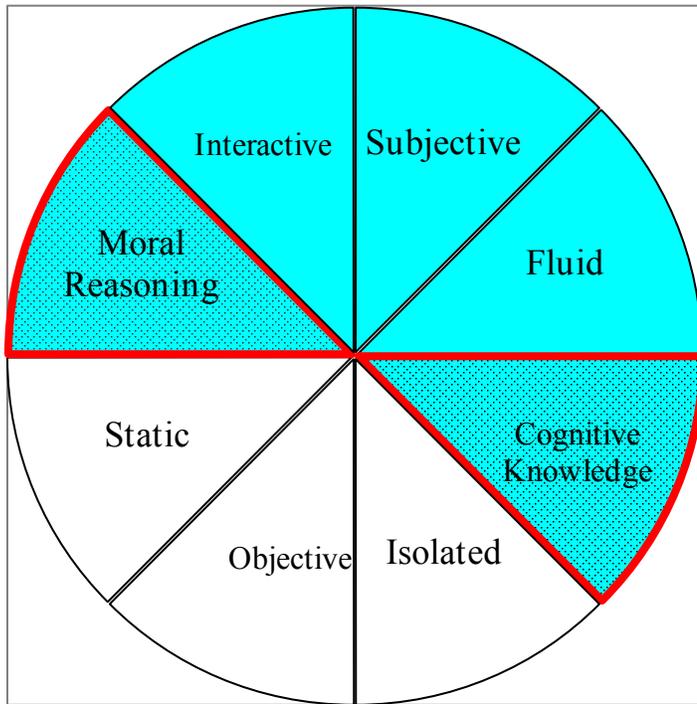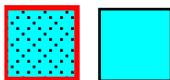- Establishing and maintaining a register of registered social workers.

Figure 1. The four-dimension framework theoretical framework of practice wisdom

= The feature with the dialectical interplay of Cognitive Knowledge and Moral Reasoning

= The features of practice wisdom for investigation in this study

Subjective	-----------------------------	Objective
Fluid	-----------------------------	Static
Interactive	-----------------------------	Isolated
Moral Reasoning	-----------------------------	Cognitive Knowledge

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