

Into the Fire

CASWE 2010 (expanded presentation)

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What peer mentors told us...

- “Social workers need to get real and get personal. Lose the professional “better than” attitude”
- “Don’t promise something you can’t do”
- “Don’t let me walk all over you”
- “Keep coming back even when I’m not great to be with”
- “Listen to me- I have something important to say.”

Scheyett and Diehl (2004) suggest that “... involving consumers in the evaluation of social work students, the ideas of partnership and collaboration can be put into practice.(440)”.

Imagine.....



What students told us.....

We found ourselves continually questioning our assumptions and beliefs about the politics of homelessness; the driving forces of dominant cultural personalities; and the reality of poorly funded (or non-funded) community driven organizations. We were expected to be organized, consistent and reliable in the face of the lack of predictability that colors the world of homelessness and poverty. We worked with the “rhythm of the situation” and “showed up gently” in new environments. We recognized our own vulnerability as students living on the edge of poverty and expressed respect for how lives can be built on the edges of society that include warm supportive relationships and amazing ingenuity. We laughed at ourselves a lot. Our first efforts at being “virgin activists” were more than a “little bit hopeless” at times.

“This practicum was more than just meeting hours. We all remained ourselves- in agencies you can lose yourself”

“Social work educators, if we are to act in congruence with our values, must examine the extent to which we practice partnership, self-determination, and empowerment in our curriculum development and in the educational process itself.”

Sheyett & Diehl (2004)

Where did the social justice go?

- Have we lost our connection to grassroots social justice?
- Are we walking our talk about valuing different ways of knowing and being?
- Would students be interested in a practicum that required them to become deeply involved in some of the most challenging questions in our community?

Getting started over a cup of coffee

Start- two Uvic staff/faculty talking about how to encourage students to use their practicum as a time to explore social justice in action and ‘walk the anti-oppressive talk’.

Questioned whose knowledge are we giving the starring role in social work education? We say we value the lived experience of individuals who live on the margins of society yet what roles do users of social work services play in the education and evaluation of students? Ager, Dow and Gee (2005) reflections on Scottish initiatives challenged our thinking about possibilities.

Process of knowing social work service users is most often filtered through host agency mandates and supervision by an established social work practitioner. We wanted to find a way to use community mentors to provide support, guidance and evaluative feedback to students while meeting the requirements of our practicum courses and accreditation standards.

What is the logo on YOUR personal social justice tee shirt?

Meeting Accreditation Standards

SB 2.7 Links with networks of underrepresented individuals in program review and development	Partnered with existing peer support groups and community activists
SB 5.9 Social work values are represented: Dignity and potential of all people Analyze and eradicate oppressive conditions Develop self awareness about client-worker relationships Promote equal access to resources and accomplishment of life's tasks Promote alleviation of distress and realization of aspirations of self and others	Located these elements in Application and interview process (goodness of fit) Individual and group supervision sessions Written reflections and evaluations (standard and full circle) Integrative Practice Seminar design and content Projects and alliances
SB 6.2 direct and indirect social work that is educationally focussed , supervised and evaluated (performance and professional development)	Student designed action sheets reflected practicum goals, personal/professional interests and how objectives would be evaluated
SB 6.3 Opportunities for analysis of dynamics and consequences of oppression with populations at risk relevant to geographic location and competent practice	Non-agency driven; located in community centers and linked to individuals/groups experiencing multiple oppressions
SB 6.4 consistent with mission statement and reflect sw values and ethics	Consistent with our mission statement
SB 6.13.2 Field Instructor with social work qualifications	UVic faculty and/or staff member (MSW)
SB 6.13.3 Faculty liaison to consult and collaborate with instructor and student	Second UVic faculty and/or staff member (MSW)
SB 6.14.6 Field placement has adequate facilities, equipment and learning materials	Office space and equipment provided for both groups and individual conversations
SB 6.15.2 No social work degree – faculty member as field instructor	Community partners did not have sw degrees

Literature Review

- Community members are subjects of research, focus group members, advisory groups, service users- rarely as mentors
- Practica may focus on the agency mandate as central; not necessarily the needs of the individuals served- relationship given most attention is with supervisor, not service user
- Community members, peers and self evaluation rarely used in evaluating student performance

“While it is important that applied social justice work is based in theoretical frameworks, it is equally important that faculty offer students practical ways to implement social justice initiatives and also provide the space for students and faculty to discuss the very real challenges of this type of work.”

Ali, Lui, Mahmood, & Arguello (2008)

Who was involved?

- Seven students
- Four faculty / staff members
- Community partner organizations
- Community mentors and social justice groups

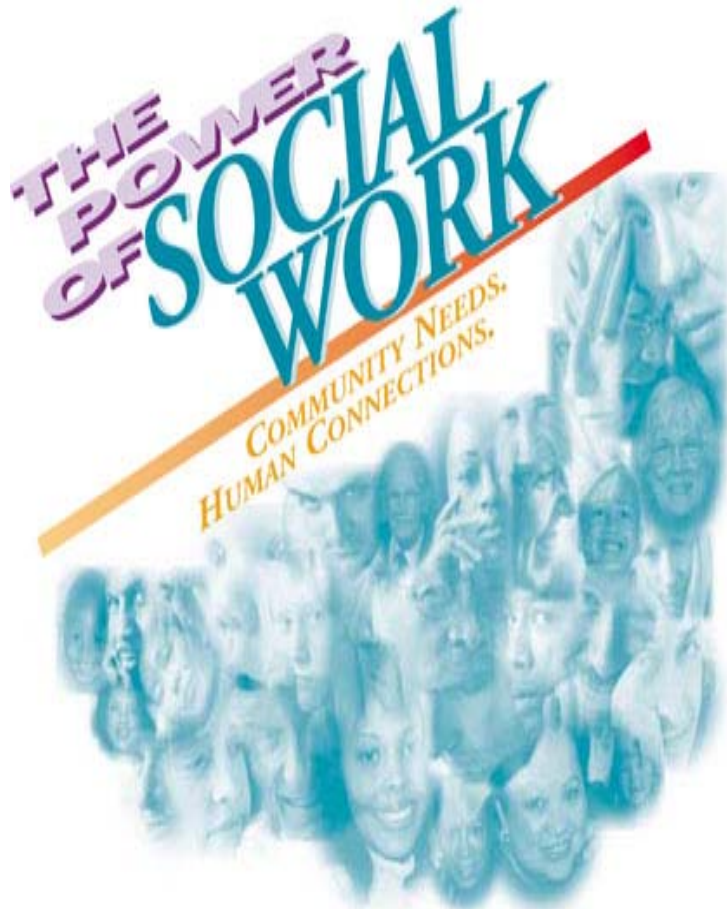
Safety

- Students were aware of personal risks involved with social justice street work and this was a topic during orientation (2 days week one)
- If a student didn't have a cell phone, I gave them mine for times they felt vulnerable in the first few weeks (1 student – 1 time)
- Use of a buddy system or check-ins if alone
- Practica are learning experiences and you can leave if you feel uncomfortable or afraid- no questions asked- heroics not required
- Ask mentors for pointers on staying safe

Ready, set , action !

Area of work -Activities	Network links and allies	Focus on individual relationships	Focus on group relationships	How will I know I learned something?	Who will evaluate me?
Learn about harm reduction- Is my academic knowledge accurate?	Peer networks; street agencies	Relationships with peers	Assist the groups to do their work	My ideas of harm reduction change over time	Joan (Peer) Lonnie (street worker)
Social Justice March- what does it mean to be an ally?	Native Student Union		Assist with details of march as needed	Critical reflection on the tensions of being a ally	Rachel (march organizer) Kim (co-worker)

Online Seminar Site



Integrative Practice Seminar Learning Objectives

When you have completed this seminar, you will be able to:

identify the specific role you play in supporting your peers and providing leadership in this collaborative online learning community

explore the influence and impact of the social, cultural, economic, and political context on various social work practice locations

articulate the socio-political and practice distinctions between the First Nations, Canadian, and feminist therapy codes of ethics

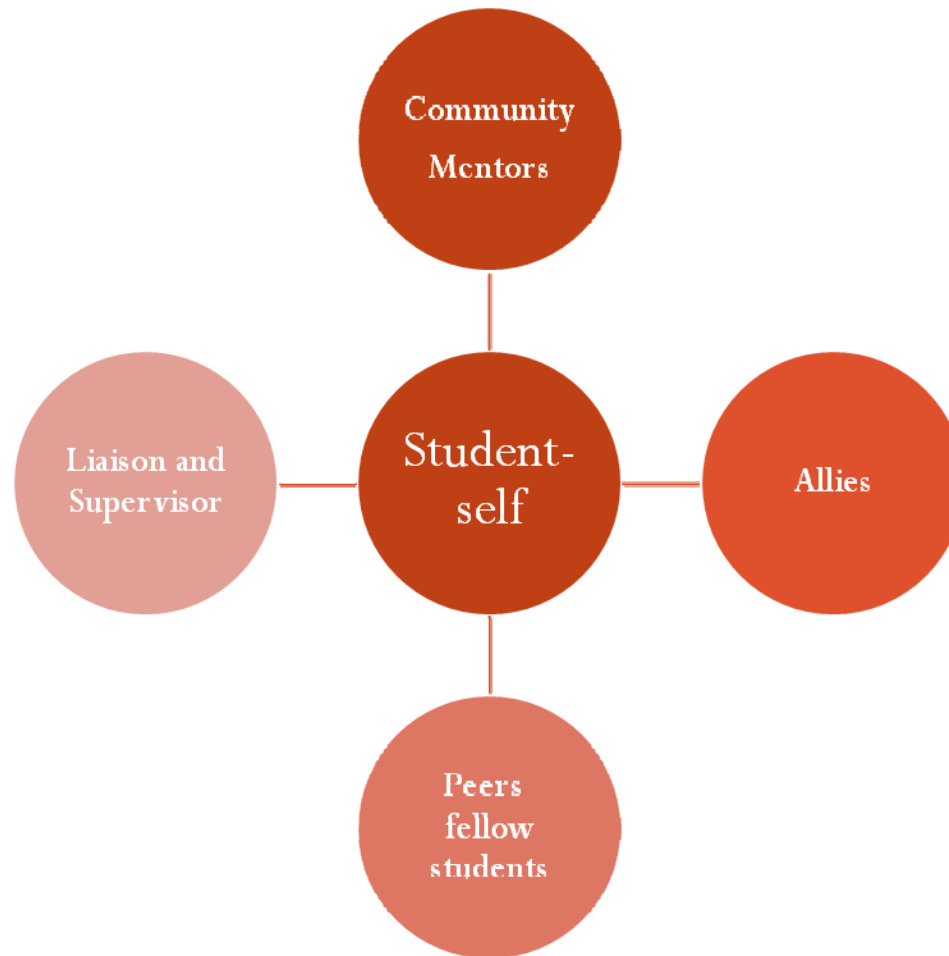
explore ethical tensions, contradictions, and possibilities within social work practice

recognize and explain the fit and incompatibility between anti-oppressive theory and social work practice in your agency (e.g., power differences in practice)

utilize and critique various models of reflective social work practice

acknowledge your evolving theory of practice and how the way in which you assume a position of leadership in your social work practice reflects this.

Feedback and evaluation



New evaluation design

- Based on 360 degree evaluation used in business and medical schools, we combined the indigenous concept of talking circles and feasting for the mid-point and final mentor feedback lunches (Food was provided by Uvic)
- Students identified and invited their mentors as part of the process. If someone couldn't attend we invited email, written or alternate visit time to talk about student growth in practice
- We based our conversations on appreciative inquiry principles
- Liaisons were present at the full circle and regular evaluations were also held using traditional UVic forms.

New evaluation cont'd...

- Use of peer feedback (students in same practicum) was particularly effective. Mirrored clinical supervision model and provided students an opportunity to move beyond superficial examination of their experiences through deep questioning by supervisor.
- Included much more affective reflection in this model
- Encouraged conversations about how to respond to the sights, smells and moral distress of social justice street work-mentors gave us great advice.

So what?

Evidence of Learning

- The students produced documents, letters to the editor, a book and two marches. They held individual and group meetings; shadowed community workers; volunteered for community based activist groups and sought out social justice activities. These outputs are empirical and could be further analyzed for comparison to learning objectives to give validity to this type of practicum.
- Double loop feedback (feedback from mentor reflected on with supervisor) created deeper understanding of critical self reflection and links to theories (eg. Examining the experience of being an ally and “wearing” the complexity)

Student and Community Partner Feedback

- Closer link to UVic – University embedded in the community as a working partner on day to day social concerns (real)
- UVic referred to as “good social workers” by mentors (able to hear about their experiences with not so good social workers and realized they grouped many resource workers into the “social work” category)
- Feeling of being able to do things together- stronger for our relationships through understanding our collective power
- Energizing!

Next Steps

- Offer the practicum again (Nancy to act as downtown resource from UVic for 2010-11 winter semester)
- Capture the process in more detail and build on the strengths of past experience
- Work with previous students who wish to do a second placement in this setting
- Present findings widely and encourage other communities and schools of social work to explore some of the ideas implemented

References

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