

Introduction to the Special Issue on Field Education

Denice Goodrich-Liley and Martha V. K. Wilson, Co-Editors

This introduction to the Special Issue on Field Education focuses on the theme of transformation. Stressing that the path of transformation is never simple, the Special Issue Co-Editors begin by pointing out that this issue of the journal represents the transition from the journal being a print journal published at California State University Long Beach to being an online journal published at Cleveland State University School of Social Work. The editors trace how each of the contributions to this special issue reflects a transformation that takes place, whether in a person, a community, a faculty member, a field instructor, or a student.

This publication is finally here! This very long journey began two years ago, when we agreed to be guest editors for a *Reflections* Special Edition on Field Education with some apprehension and much excitement. As with all journeys, one expects some twists and turns, ups and downs. The path is never straight. As we were approaching the closing date of our call for manuscripts, the unfortunate news came that the publication of *Reflections* by California State University Long Beach would end. Good news came just as what was believed to be the last edition of the journal was published – another university was taking over *Reflections*.

It is an honor to be in the inaugural issue of *Reflections* from Cleveland State University. This Special Edition – Field Education is a testament to the role that narratives play in social work education. The articles in this edition provide the details of many stories that have shaped individuals and communities of learning, as well as physical communities of living, affecting the professional development of many people.

A theme in each of these articles is that of transformation. You will note the use of the word *transformation* in many of the narratives that follow. This theme seems only fitting as this journal has recently emerged from a transformation. Each of the narratives in this edition describes a transformation happening, maybe within an individual, a student, a faculty member, or a

community. Sometimes the individual knows and plays an active part in the transformation; other times it is by looking at the situation through another's eyes or through a rear view mirror that one sees a transformation has occurred. As you will see, each of these articles tells a tale of transformation.

This edition starts with a professional transformation – extending over twenty years – as Dr. Diane Calloway-Graham, of Utah State University, in “My Life as a Practicum Director,” details her years as a field director. Using the metaphor of a global positioning system as her guide to field education practice, Dr. Calloway describes the skill sets of scanning the environment, networking, knowing the community that builds the connections for fieldwork, and developing ongoing relationships with students that become colleagues.

A transformation that happens within the time frame of one practicum year for both faculty and students is shared by Dr. Desiree Stepteau-Watson, of University of Mississippi, in “Ready or Not, Here We Come: Field Education and Developing a Professional Identity.” This narrative provides a glimpse of field practicum – beginning to end – from the eyes of a faculty educator. She shares her story of reluctance at seeing for the first time the incoming social work field interns at their orientation. Her overarching perception is that of a lack of professionalization of the students. This narrative shares what can occur within one

practicum session that has lasting effects, resulting in changes in teaching approach.

Diane Michaelsen, of Southern Connecticut State University, chronicles the transformation that she professionally experienced in “From Direct Services to the Director of Field Education.” She accounts her personal journey from practitioner, to adjunct teacher to director of field education. She credits her social work skills and experiences within each prior position as complementing and enhancing each of the changes that she has experienced.

Have you ever considered the role of “opportunity”? Elizabeth Harbeck Voshel, of University of Michigan School of Social Work, in “Reflections of a Field Director: An Opportunity to Look into the Past and See the Future,” provides an account of opportunities within her life. Ms. Voshel remarks, “I began to realize that life isn’t always about what you make it, but sometimes it is about where you are when opportunities present themselves.” She keeps the question, “So what has the field program done to earn the ranking you have received?” as a constant reminder of her responsibility to her students and to the profession.

What happens when relatively privileged young students step out of their familiar comfort zones for a field practicum experience? Dr. Jerry Watson of University of Mississippi, in “‘Driving Ms. Jane Addams’: Students and Instructors Learn in Field Education,” gives an account of his own learning as the field instructor, from his students’ learning experiences. This narrative explores challenges of cultural competency. Dr. Watson acknowledges his students’ eyes provide him a fresh look and a reaffirmed conviction for social work practice.

On the other hand what happens when a student, very familiar with and a member of a minority community, does his practicum in the community? Imad A. Mohamed and Robin R. Wingo, of Minnesota State University, in “Finding Balance: Group Membership and Professional Development,” offer a narrative dialogue between a social work student and social work faculty/field instructor. This dialog explores the challenges and benefits of group membership for the student completing a field internship and practicing social work within his cultural community. As field liaison and seminar

instructor, Ms. Wingo provides strategies and insights for social work educators that address group membership and professional development within a cultural context.

At Adelphi University, Dr. Laura Quiros, Lorin Kay, and Ann Marie Montijo, in “Creating Emotional Safety in the Classroom and in the Field,” address emotional safety from the perspectives of professor, student and field educator. This piece discusses elements of emotional safety between classroom and field, drawing on the authors’ personal experiences. Illustrations of the parallel processes of professor and student, student and field instructor, and student and client are used to highlight ways of experiencing emotional safety that support both learning and growth.

Dr. Misty Wall, of Boise State University, in “A Lesson Brought Home From Seminar,” describes a unique challenge from the perspective of a social work educator. This narrative describes the unavoidable dual relationships of client, parent, and social work educator with a child needing mental health treatment in a small community. Regular confrontation with students – current, past and future – and an overall loss of a personal world of privacy make it difficult to maintain faith within the profession. Remembering that “fruits of our labor” are often outside of our time limits is applicable even more as a parent, educator, and social worker.

Transformation of teaching is described by Sarah LaRocque, of the University of Calgary, in “The Social Work Student as a Participant Observer in Group Training.” This narrative explores the challenge of assisting students to move from a focus on learning evidence based theories and translating these into practice to developing skills and understanding group process. Through modifications in teaching and group process, students are able to learn value of group process for themselves as witnessed in supervision.

Dr. Katie Johnston-Goodstar of the University of Minnesota, in “A Funny Thing Happened at Internship Today: A Reflection on Ethical Dilemmas, Decision-making and Consequences of a Questionable Field Work Situation,” describes an ethical dilemma that “happened upon” her. Responding to the “dilemma” could have an impact

on a project that was running smoothly; not responding would challenge her professional and ethical obligations. Dr. Johnston-Goodstar details her experiences, highs and lows, and the strategies of discussion, consultation, and negotiation as avenues to get to ethical practice.

Dr. Dorie Gilbert, Tim Bailey, and Peter Dwumah, in “A Village, an Intern, Two Professors and a Chief: Developing a Field Practicum within the Traditional Chieftaincy Structure of a Rural Village in Ghana,” provide insights on establishing a community development practicum internationally. Resolving the challenges of preparing students, establishing a viable placement, field instruction, language, and placement oversight are key to making a student’s learning experience successful.

Amy Fulton, of the University of Calgary, in “Dealing with Client Death and Dying: A Letter to Social Work Practicum Students,” provides an open letter to social work practicum students about dealing with client death and dying in field education experiences and their future practice. The author chronicles her personal experiences as a faculty liaison working with students who experienced a client death. She stresses professional competency and asks, “What kind of death do you want to help facilitate for your clients?”

Dr. Merydawilda Colón and Dr. Sharon Hines Smith, of Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, in “Challenges to Leadership in a Transitional Environment,” discuss their leadership challenges in the process of implementing a new field education structure relevant to the 2008 EPAS, as well as how contingency theories of leadership facilitated the process. They offer a “how to” on implementing changes that do not lose the support of stakeholders, have a focus and vision for change that is intentional, and include all parties affected by the change.

At the University of New England, Wanda Anderson, Nancy Ayer, Amy Cocha, Betsey Gray, Ellen Rondina, and Mary Bragdon White, in “Virtual Field Education: Global Connection,” highlight the challenges and rewards encountered in designing and implementing a fully online field education program. The authors discuss questions

they asked of themselves as they were designing the program, including: Is this possible in a profession that identifies itself as grounded in relationship building? Is it possible to teach social work skills in a virtual classroom? Can we develop and monitor field sites in countries around the world?

We conclude this issue with Dr. Julie Drolet, of University of Calgary, “Reflecting on Field Education Partnerships on Migration and Immigration: A Canadian Perspective.” This narrative explores migration and immigration in social work education. She argues that social work education must consider how to improve knowledge of immigration policy and practice through coursework, community involvement, and field education placements to prepare social workers for the evolving needs in this era of globalization.

We hope that you enjoy this broad array of articles and share in the transformation of possibilities that field education present to all of us.

About the Co-Editors: Denice Goodrich Liley, M.S.W., Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Social Work, Boise State University School of Social Work (208-426-4395; dliley@boisestate.edu). Martha V. K. Wilson, M.S.W., D.S.W., Ph.D. is Professor, School of Social Work, and Associate Provost for Online Worldwide Learning, University of New England (207-221-4985; mwilson13@une.edu).