REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Volume 9 | Spring 2003 | Number 2

Special Issue: Technology in Social Work

Cover and original artwork by Dan Jimenez

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Letter from the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

The meaning of the term *technology* has changed over time. At one point in human history, fire would have been considered a technological breakthrough, not to mention the wheel. More recently, the typewriter, invented in the early 20^{th} century, was considered too technologically advanced to be used by women; as a result, men were given all the new clerical jobs in the growing white collar economy. Many women since may have had occasion to regret the dawning comprehension that women could indeed type. The dramatic technological advance represented in the late 19th century by the telephone has been superceded by the cordless phone, then the cell phone, and now the digital phone, with its multi-task capacity.

After technological advances become commonplace their nature as boons to human productivity, knowledge and happiness becomes axiomatic. Yet the introduction of technological change has usually been met with resistance and sometimes downright terror. As with the Luddites in 19th century England who destroyed labor saving machines they feared would destroy their jobs, most of us can remember some anxiety and distaste at being shown something new that had to be mastered to accomplish more efficiently a task we had become used to doing in a more comfortable way. The computer comes to mind for many of us in the post World War II generation. While outright destruction of these and other technological innovations has been rare, the initial suspicion of new technology as introducing something difficult, unnecessary and suspiciously controlled by the arcane ability of experts seems to be hard wired, if you will, into many of us.

Technological change has clearly multiplied human knowledge and ultimately power (and this is nowhere more evident than in medicine, where technology has defeated previous interrupters of life in both miraculous and cruel ways); yet its welcome is not assured, even in the most technologically sophisticated environments. Resistance to use of technological advances has even been demonstrated by NASA's failure to utilize modern methods of testing the heat resistant panels that failed to protect the Columbia shuttle from the heat of reentry, causing the death of the seven shuttle astronauts. According to the government panel investigating the accident, NASA had relied on visual inspection and physical tapping by hand on the panels before space flights to determine whether these panels were firmly attached to the shuttle, in spite of the availability of lasers and high frequency sound devices to look inside the outer heat shields to inspect for damage.[1]

The suspicion of technology usually rests on the fear of our displacement by experts who will manage the new processes by means inaccessible to the rest of us. This anxiety is underlined by an often unspoken doubt about our ability to master the new lexicon. While technology has brought us ways of living that were previously unimagined, the edge of our

[1]John Schwartz and Matthew Wald, "Investigators Seek Changes Before Next Shuttle Flight," *New York Times,* April 18, 2003, p. A10.

imagination is apparently a frightening place to visit.

Those educators and practitioners in the helping professions who have embraced technology are pioneers not just in their adept use of new methods, but in the energy, self-confidence and optimism required to take the leap implicit in the technological embrace. This issue of Reflections tells the stories of some innovators in social work education and practice who have dwelt at edge of our imaginations and fashioned a safe place for the rest of us there.

Editor's Note

In the Winter 2003 issue ***Reflections*** published an interview with Brandeis professor David Gil. Many readers have written in inquire about his work. Gil, a professor at the Florence Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, has published extensively during his academic career. His most notable works include:

Violence Against Children: Physical Child Abuse in the United States. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970

The Challenge of Social Equality: Essays on Social Policy, Social Development and Political Practice: Cambridge: MA: Schenkman, 1976

Beyond the Jungle: Essays on Human Possibilities, Social Alternatives and Radical Practice. Cambridge: MA: Schenkman and Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1979;

Toward Social and Economic Justice, co-edited with Eva Gil. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1985.

The Future of Work, co-edited with Eva Gil. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1987

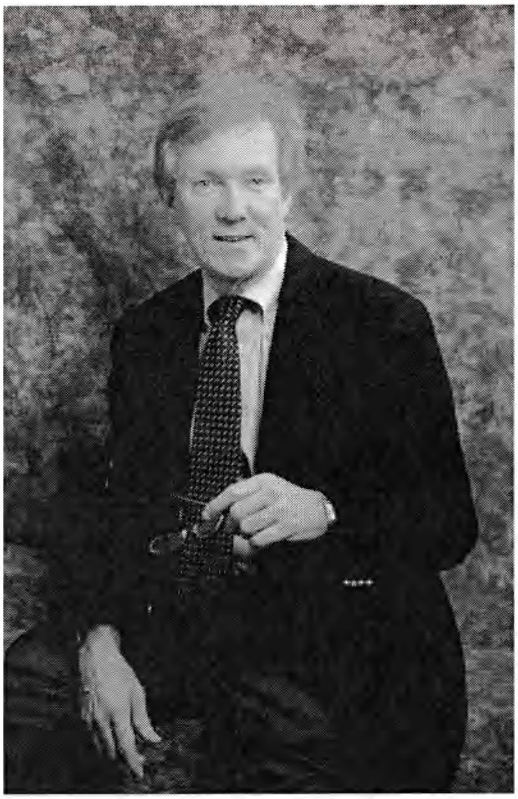
Unravelling Social Policy: Theory, Analysis and Political Action towards Social Equality. 5th rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1992

Confronting Injustice and Oppression: Concepts and Strategies for Social Workers. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

INTRODUCTION
SPECIAL ISSUE ON TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

By James J. Kelly, Ph.D., California State University, Hayward

My interest in Distance Education began in Hawaii. Hawaii is a likely spot for thoughts about using technology to communicate across vast spaces. A series of once isolated islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Hawaii is a place where communication with the outside world has been a key issue in development. I like to think that I was one of the people who helped Hawaii to overcome its educational isolation, and that I applied what I learned in Hawaii to the task of using technology to connect and help people all over the world.



**James J. Kelly, Ph.D.,
California State University, Hayward**

A Story About Distance Education and Technology

When I moved to Hawaii in 1975, the Hawaiian islands were isolated from the rest of the world in ways that would be hard to imagine today. For example, in Hawaii we received national television news reports at 6:00 AM the next morning. These reports were those broadcast on the mainland the previous day! Other television programming was even more delayed—by a week or longer. And library patrons ordering journal issues, could expect to receive them three to six months later than their colleagues in California and New York.

This is what it was like in 1975 when, freshly graduated from the Florence Heller Graduate School of Advanced Studies in Social Welfare at Brandeis University, I took my first faculty job at the University of Hawaii. Each summer during my graduate studies, I had returned to the University of Southern California Andrus Gerontology Center in Los Angeles to take seminars in my specialty: gerontology. These were wonderful and challenging summers. As a student in this program, I was able to learn from internationally renowned leaders in the field of aging. Each time I returned to Hawaii, I wondered how I might be able to bring this sort of educational experience in aging to Hawaii.

On the Hawaiian islands, the only three experts in aging were at the University in Oahu. But most of the aging population, and the social workers who served them, lived on the outer islands. There was little contact between the University and the outer islands. Determined to overcome this barrier, I began my first foray into Distance Education. In those days, Distance Education meant that educators were sent onto the traveling circuit for face-to-face classroom instruction and interaction with students. The program was a great success. For the first time, social workers on the islands were able to benefit from training on their home turf. But the requirements for travel limited our reach. (The only way to get from island to island was by air or sea.) Enter serendipity. I learned that the University had a long-standing contract with NASA to make use of a satellite communication system that was no longer needed by the space agency. It was called PEACESAT. It enabled us, for the first time, to offer faculty lectures by broadcasting from the main island to the outlying islands in the south pacific. The broadcasts—which were audio- but not video-interactive—helped us to extend the reach of our program. For me, they planted an idea that was to bear fruit in a place far from Hawaii.

A few years later I found myself teaching gerontology in Long Beach, California. When I came to California, I believed that I would be coming to a place that was rich in social work resources and free of the isolation of an island state. What I found was a bit different. California produced relatively few graduate-trained social workers. (At that time, the city of New York produced more MSW graduates each year than did the entire state of California.) Even worse, the geographical expanse of the state meant that many small towns and rural counties had no access to professional training in social work.

Working from my position as a faculty member, and later Director, of the Department of Social Work at California State University, Long Beach, I set about to do in California what I had done successfully in Hawaii. Traditionally, social workers who wanted to earn an MSW degree, and who lived in rural areas, had to leave their home communities for the two-year educational program. For many working professionals with family and job commitments, this was impossible. So, with the help of Ginger Wilson as Coordinator of Distance Education, and Jan Black, our Director of Field Instruction, we offered our first Distance Education programs on CSU Chico and CSU Humboldt campuses in 1995. This program allowed students to complete their courses in their home communities. In 1998 we graduated our first cohort of Chico and Humboldt students.

No Distance Education program can be successful without an effective local Site Coordinator. For this role, we were lucky to have the services of Gary Bess at the Chico site and Donna Wheeler at the Arcata site. In an article in this Special Issue, Bess ably describes the many challenges of site coordination in Distance Education. Chris Kleinpeter, in another paper in this Special Issue, provides an administrator's perspective on the organizational prerequisites for our Distance Education program.

Because Distance Education programs involve innovations and challenges, many faculty and administrators have been skeptical of the educational merits of this approach. We found many of these sentiments at Cal State Long Beach, among our own faculty as well as the administrators whose support was essential to us. So we were very careful to design a comprehensive evaluation of our new program. Marilyn Potts of our research faculty measured a wide range of variables by means of student surveys, teaching and field evaluations, and administrative data that included grades. All these measures were compared to our on-campus program. To our delight, the data showed that our Distance

Education program maintained the same high standards as our traditional program. We also discovered that the cost of maintaining a quality Distance Education program was greater than that of a traditional program. We had been fortunate to have the support of a Child Welfare Training Grant from the Harry Spect California Social Work Education Center, which made possible our initial efforts. But we were also alerted to the need for adequate funding for future Distance Education programs.

Just as we had used satellite technology in the Hawaii program, we were able to use technology to expand the reach of our instructors in California. But this time, the technology had advanced. We were able, for the first time, to use television broadcasts, transmitted over telephone lines using compressed video files. This allowed for two-way or interactive communication between students and instructors—each could speak directly to the other, facilitating faculty lectures and class discussions. Although this was initially awkward for both students and teachers, we were surprised by how quickly each adapted to the system, and how natural the interactive classroom experience became. And recently we began offering several of our core courses on-line at Cal State Hayward, extending educational opportunity to students who are not able to meet a regular class schedule, but who can meet all course requirements from the comfort of their homes via Internet access.

Introduction to this Special Issue

This Special Issue on technology provides the reader with a rich collection of personal experiences. In it, the reader learns about the implementation of technology in social work education and practice. This Special Issue is an excellent resource for the techno-neophyte who wants to know about the challenges and possibilities of technology.

Having been confronted by the task of starting a new Distance Education program, Chris Kleinpeter recounts her experiences, good and bad. This paper gives the reader a flavor of the many challenges inherent in initiating such a program in rural areas. Among these are funding, collaboration among campuses, faculty workload issues, and ensuring that urban educators are sensitive to the requisites of rural practice. In the end, she reminds us that the use of technology must not distract educators from their primary goal: teaching students how to be change agents in their face-to-face work with clients and community members.

Care to learn about how a social worker used computerization to save himself from being overwhelmed? Moshe ben Asher's paper refutes the oft-repeated charge that computers "dehumanize." He describes the stress, inefficiency, and administrative chaos that resulted from a complex paper-based tracking system in use at a criminal justice diversion program. Over a period of several months, Moshe ben Asher transformed this antiquated process into a paperless data management system, using a popular relational data base software program. The result? A smoothly functioning process that freed caseworkers to do what they do best: form helping relationships with clients. A side benefit was improved relationships among staff, a development that transformed the agency, its workers, and clients.

Paul P. Freddolino describes the ups and downs of starting a Distance Education program to bring MSW training to rural areas. The challenges included faculty anxieties about videotaping class sessions, opposition by some groups at host campuses, maintaining personal contact with students, and last minute setup of communication facilities. Overcoming these challenges was justified in the face of intense interest among a large pool of rural applicants, eager for graduate education.

From computer novice to expert consultant, Janaki Santhiveeran describes how computers changed her life—most notably her communications with family members on the other side of the globe, and her strategies for teaching social work students. She describes the move to a paperless classroom, as well as the benefits and drawbacks to this approach. According to Janaki Santhiveeran, even students who are initially computer-anxious, can learn to make computers an integral part of their educational experience.

What happens when two social workers and a tech-savvy rocket scientist team up to solve one of Los Angeles County's most intractable social service problems? (the absence of an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive, and easy-to-use Information and Referral system). As Ruby Guillen, Joseph Powers, and Raymond Manning recount their experiences, the reader begins to understand the challenges: defining principles and purposes for the information system; neutralizing opposition from social service providers threatened by the novelty of a computer-based innovation; weeding out investors who are likely to exploit the system; and keeping the system up-to-date and easy to use. The end result is a web-based Information and Referral resource that is bringing coherence and accessibility to social services in Los Angeles County.

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is a daunting task. In a short period of time, and faced with a large group of students, the instructor is expected to bring her students to a level of English-language proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking. In this narrative, Lucia Buttaro opens up a new world for ESL teachers, showing them that computers in ESL courses enhance student learning. The teacher is able to rely on e-mail messaging, on-line chats, bulletin boards, and other devices to help students learn. This approach allows students to learn basic concepts and to apply them by interacting with authentic and challenging audiences.

According to Jo Ann Regan's review of the literature on the diffusion of innovation, in response to the introduction of any innovation, a few will embrace and a few will oppose it. In time, a majority will participate. She aptly describes this process as it applies to the use of computer technology by faculty in an urban school of social work.

Gary Bess describes the challenges of starting and running a rural Distance Education program sponsored by a large urban university. Can rural social workers relate to professors whose experience is urban-based? Will rural students want to receive their training via interactive TV and e-mail, with personal contact limited to an on-site faculty member? How will field instructors be integrated into the Distance Education model? How can a faculty Distance Coordinator bring all these elements together in a high-quality educational program? The author's personal account provides answers that will be of interest to social work educators.

In a switch to a more light-hearted topic, the uses of humor in social work, this Special Issue includes two intriguing narratives. Although authors John Kayser and Mark Lyon may not get their own television sit-com, it is not for lack of trying. In an imaginary pilot for a series of television programs modeled on the popular program "Survivor," Freud, Skinner, Rogers, and other human behavior gurus battle to see who stays and who leaves the island. This narrative is an irreverent plea to remain humble about what we know and teach, to care about intellectual honesty, and above all, to maintain a sense of humor.

Alex Gitterman's narrative certainly is of interest to the majority of social workers who are afraid to use humor with their clients. How can the worker know that the attempt won't backfire? That is always a possibility. But Alex Gitterman advises us that social workers' humor may also provide the warmth that melts an icy and otherwise impossible therapeutic relationship. He provides the reader with a better understanding of good and bad uses of humor, as well as clinical examples of the facilitative power of mirth.

Will a computer ever replace your psychotherapist? In a provocative paper, Paul Abels asks this and other questions about computers in social work. While many of us rush headlong into computer technologies, he asks us to consider the risks to clients and to the profession of social work. He argues that there are as yet unanswered questions of ethics, accountability, and efficacy, when new technologies are applied without careful consideration.

Looking Backward....and Forward

Today I look back at almost three decades of my involvement in using technology in Distance Education. I have to smile inwardly when I think of our humble beginnings. We began with a single traveling lecturer in Hawaii. Our first audio transmission capability was almost primitive by today's standards. Students attending class at a remote site were able to hear and speak with the instructor, but could not see her. Today of course, we have fully-interactive communication between class and lecturer, backed up by instant on-line access, by which students can be in constant touch with each other, with their instructor, and the local site coordinator.

When I began I was a novice junior faculty member, wondering if I would ever have a lasting impact on my students, I could not have predicted that, years later, I would direct Distance Education programs across the globe. Today, I am Associate Vice President of Extended and Continuing Education at California State University, Hayward. I am responsible for all international programs, including MBA programs in Hong Kong, Singapore, Moscow, Vienna, and Beijing. My responsibilities include a technology whose reach was not yet imagined when I began: on-line education. Currently, I direct all on-line education programs at Cal State Hayward. Among our offerings is a Masters degree in On-Line Education, a program that teaches educators how to establish and direct web-based on-line programs in their institutions.

At Cal State Hayward, we still send faculty to local sites for face-to-face teaching. But we augment our programs with a range of sophisticated communication technology. In addition to live interactive audio and video, we also use an on-line course management program called Blackboard. Using any Internet connection, students can download assigned readings as well as lecture notes that are available before class sessions. They can communicate in real-time or via messages with other students and with faculty. They even receive their grades on-line.

When we think of social workers, we think of "people skills," of human interactions that cannot be duplicated by machines. When we think of computers, we envision a world run by machines, a world dominated by numbers and computer code. In reality, there is no tension between the "people skills" of social work and computerization. As administrator of one of the leading institutions of Distance Education, I have been able to use my social work skills and my knowledge of technology, to create a menu of Distance Education programs that span the world. These disparate approaches—the one personal, the other impersonal—facilitate one another. Technology brings people together from across vast distances. And it diminishes the effort required to perform routine tasks, thereby freeing the social worker, administrator, and educator to form and enhance relationships.

CALL FOR NARRATIVES

Special Issue: Forthcoming In 2004

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

In celebration of 50th anniversary of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education,* which desegregated public schools, and the 40th anniversary of the landmark federal Civil Right Act of 1964, which desegregated higher education, ***Reflections*** will publish a special issue on past and contemporary accounts of the struggle to achieve social equality within the helping professions—including their educational and training programs, agencies and professional associations as well as within external communities and organizations, including host universities and colleges. Narratives should focus on the struggle to achieve desegregation, civil rights, racial equality, and nondiscriminatory practices within the helping professions. Original narrative articles and oral history interviews are welcome.

Manuscript submissions should be sent to special issue editor:
John Kayser, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Denver
2148 S. High Street
Denver, CO 80208

Deadline: September 2, 2003.

Swimming Up Stream: The Experiences of a Pioneer in Distance Education

By Christine Kleinpeter, Psy.D., California State University, Long Beach

Distance education raises many questions for social work educators. Among them are how to manage faculty workload, which teaching strategies are effective with each new technology, and how to reward faculty for their efforts? A faculty member's journey is shared including the most rewarding, as well as the most difficult aspects of teaching and administration of a distance education program.

Introduction

The youngest of seven children, I have always enjoyed working with people. Growing up in a large Catholic family, with a mother who chose nursing as her profession, I was attracted to professions that assisted those in need. In college, I worked as a lifeguard and swimming instructor and found the work very rewarding. I worked with very young children, and on one occasion had a mother tell me the story of how her toddler fell in their backyard swimming pool and was able to swim to the side of the family pool because of the swimming instruction that I had provided. It struck me how great it felt to know that the work I was doing was important to the well-being of others. Although I had not yet chosen social work as my profession, I knew that I wanted to engage in work that would focus on helping others.

As a Bachelor's degree student, I had a year-long internship working with special education students. My major was Social Ecology, and I was most attracted to the mental health courses. I found that although I was working in a school placement, most of my students had family, peer, and mental health problems. I provided many behavioral interventions in the classroom and crisis intervention counseling sessions, in addition to educational testing services and assisting students with homework assignments. This experience caused me to consider special education teaching or social work as a major in my Master's program. I received my Master's degree in 1982 from the University of Southern California.

With my MSW, my first job was in a private psychiatric hospital. I provided psychosocial evaluations, group and family counseling, and crisis intervention on an adolescent unit. I continued working at that hospital until 1992 and eventually worked all units, which included Alcohol Treatment, Eating Disorders, and Adult and locked units. I joined two different private practice groups during those years and learned many techniques for working with individuals and families who suffer from a variety of mental disorders. In that setting, I felt the need for additional clinical training to include psychological testing. I pursued my Doctoral degree at Pepperdine University in Clinical Psychology from 1986-1990. By 1992, I had obtained two clinical licenses, the LCSW and Licensed Psychologist. I was then working with a private practice housed on the campus of a Christian university. I was teaching in the MFT program, supervising students in practicum, and providing clinical services in both outpatient and inpatient settings.

Although many people say that they just know what profession they will go into, this was not the case for me. I had not formally decided to teach; rather, after obtaining my Doctorate I was enlisted by my then-supervisor, Curt Rouanzoin. He was a mentor and psychologist who felt that those who teach clinical skills should also be practicing and supervising students. I worked in a model of practice where several psychologists offered services to the community (i.e., a large group practice) at a low cost and supervised students who provided direct service. Students not only received formal supervision and classroom instruction by their faculty, they also had the opportunity to observe their faculty providing direct service to clients. It was truly a level of accountability that was impressive it kept faculty always abreast of new techniques and practice issues.

I had not made a formal decision to pursue academia as a career, but rather found serendipitously that after having practiced for many years, I really enjoyed teaching clinical skills to students. I found pleasure in the thought that I could expand my opportunity to help others by teaching many students who can reach a much larger community than any individual practicing clinician. In 1994, I sent out resumes to both MFT and MSW programs in search of my first faculty position. It was Jim Kelly, the then-Director of the Department of Social Work, who responded to my resume and offered me a full-time lecturer position to teach clinical skills to MSW students.

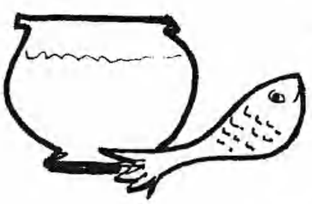
Background

In1995, I was asked by Jim Kelly, Director of the Department of Social Work, to teach a Human Behavior course in the newly established MSW Distance Education (DE) Program. The method of delivery was interactive television (ITV). The biggest concern that I had regarding teaching over ITV was the lack of face-to-face contact with the students. I wondered how this might impact my relationships with students. Making my first visits to each site reassured me that I could make relationships with students over the technology.

My fondest memory of teaching rural students was being so impressed that they would attend professional socialization functions on Friday evenings to discuss issues related to social work. They were hungry for knowledge, and the level of commitment and determination of these students who worked, raised families, and still found time for graduate education in social work impressed me.

By the next year, I was hooked on DE and began teaching practice methods courses to the same students. I most enjoyed hearing stories of rural service delivery and common social problems encountered in their agencies. My own practice had been in urban psychiatric hospitals and some outpatient mental health clinics. One of the best days in practice class was when my brother (an attorney) was a guest lecturer on family law. He covered the use of a restraining order to assist in the protection of victims of domestic violence. Some of my rural students corrected him regarding the use of the term "survivor" rather than "victim" and the procedure of "calling the local judge at home" rather than "filing paperwork with the court." Rural versus urban differences in the practice of social work and law stimulated a lively discussion. Having never practiced in a rural area, I really learned much from my students who had been given much responsibility for their level of education and few supervisors or mentors to assist them. I think of that first class of DE students as "pioneers." They had to endure the training process as each faculty member became familiar with the technology and the new teaching strategies necessary to be successful with this method of course delivery.

I continued to enjoy my teaching of DE students for the next five years, and began to write about teaching strategies and the evaluation of the student learning outcomes. In 2000, I was asked to coordinate the administration of the DE program by John Oliver, Director of the Social Work Department. This represented a change in administrative approach. Prior to that time, the DE program had been run by a full-time lecturer. At the time, I worried about not having enough time to publish, given the time demands of my new administrative role. By this time, the program had grown to include four DE sites and included 67 students. The job required supervision of four site coordinators and an administrative assistant. It was my first administrative post, and I worried if my education had prepared me for such a role. Most of my colleagues from Pepperdine were by now engaged in private psychology practices. At the time of my first Pepperdine reunion, I was the only graduate who had gone into full-time academia. It made me question, "Was I a fish out of water?"



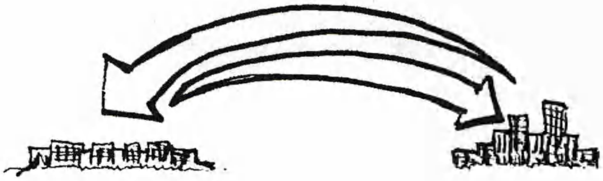
Barriers

As a Distance Education Coordinator, I encountered many barriers. The first was faculty workload. When the new DE program was established, teaching a DE course meant responsibility for the 63 students who were connected by ITV over three sites across the state. Additionally, it meant committing to four weekends away from home to visit the students and provide professional socialization activities in their communities. It also involved preparation of visual presentation of materials, usually PowerPoint presentations, for each lecture. It entailed early preparation of materials that needed to be mailed out for students to receive prior to class. At that time, some of our rural sites required five days for a mailing to arrive. This ruled out the opportunity for last minute changes. Unfortunately, the faculty did not foresee the added workload, so the first proposal did not include additional pay or time off. One colleague described teaching in DE as a "labor of love." Other colleagues were not as kind and described faculty who would teach with this workload for no additional pay as naïve or crazy. This problem was easily resolved by the second cycle when faculty voted to compensate a DE course at double the rate of an on-campus course. With the compensation issue resolved, many more faculty members were willing to teach in the DE program and learn the new teaching strategies required to be successful. This was an important barrier to overcome as our accreditation body, the Council on Social Work Education, requires that social work programs use the same faculty in the DE program as in the on-campus program, as well as equivalent textbooks and assignments.

Another barrier to overcome was the lack of integration of the DE program into the main campus. For example, DE students were required to take a writing proficiency exam on the main campus rather than at their local campus. This was not possible due to travel distances involved, so the DE Coordinator was sent to each DE site to administer a writing proficiency exam during our first two cohorts. By the third cohort (2001), this issue was resolved by having a new university policy, which allowed substitution of the GRE Writing Assessment test. This solution was a cost savings for the DE program, as well as time saving on the part of the DE Coordinator. It was gratifying to me to see a university policy change that acknowledged the DE program.

Collaboration

One of the most difficult aspects of the DE program was the collaboration with other campuses. Each campus is structured with budgets specific to that campus. Therefore, there was no way to share credit for student enrollment (i.e., FTES) with another campus. This would have benefited the rural campuses that were in need of FTES to increase their budget allocation. Additionally, faculty at the



rural campuses were needed by our program to teach specific courses in the DE program, such as Computers in Social Work, which is taught in a computer laboratory. Similarly, faculty workload is not shared across campuses; therefore, if we hired a faculty member from the rural campus to teach one of our courses, it was as an overload for that faculty member. This was challenging as many faculty members found that they were not able to manage the overload, although they verbalized that they would be happy to teach a DE course if it could have been counted as part of their regular workload. This was problematic as we had several courses (about 25% of the curriculum) that needed to be taught in a face-to-face format. The difficulty was twofold: the ability of faculty members to manage a part-time (3-unit) overload in addition to covering their full-time commitment at the rural university, as well as the fact that there were no other faculty members to replace them at their university, even if there had been a way to share the workload between campuses. I think that collaboration among campuses would be the easier issue to manage. The barrier was overcome primarily by offering DE courses on Saturdays and over the summers when some faculty members were able to manage the workload.

Quality

Faculty on the main campus had many reservations about the initial use of ITV for teaching social work courses, particularly for practice methods courses. During the planning phase, a consultant, Frank Raymer, was hired from the University of Southern California School of Social Work. He had experience with DE and answered questions that were raised by faculty about the quality of the education that students in DE programs receive. He was an excellent resource as his institution had been involved with DE for many years and had successfully navigated the accreditation process. His visit smoothed the way to a positive faculty vote in favor of adding the DE model to our large urban MSW program.

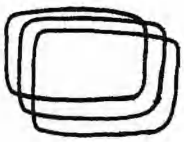
Many concerns focused on the quality of the DE program, but faculty also wondered if we could mange to maintain the quality of the on-campus program due to draining our faculty resources for the DE program. This concern was reiterated when a faculty vote for the second cohort was taken. Some faculty members felt that the drain to our on-campus program was a cost that was too high to pay. This was compounded by the faculty vote to count the DE courses as a double load, which indeed meant that when professors taught in the DE program, they were even less available to teach on-campus students.

These concerns were not unfounded. A program evaluation is required by our accreditation body (i.e., the Council on Social Work Education) to assure that the on-campus and DE students are equivalent. Each year we compare student grades, course evaluations, and fieldwork evaluations. Because we have a special emphasis on multicultural social work practice, we also give a survey related to the students' experience with diversity and cross-cultural sensitivity. The overall evaluations have been generally equivalent for the seven years of the program's existence. Small differences in student evaluations of individual courses vary depending on many issues, including the level of faculty members' experience with teaching that course and their comfort level with teaching over the technology.

In general, faculty members get the same evaluations on campus as they do in DE.

However, if it is a new course for a professor, it is not a good idea to also make it new over technology. The technology will enhance issues that are unclear to students and they have fewer in-person opportunities with the professor to resolve difficulties with the material or the teaching style. I have noticed that professors who use more linear techniques, such as outlining what is to be covered ahead of time and in some cases providing overheads to students in advance, are evaluated more highly by DE students. Also, if the professor's style is more abstract in presentation, students may have a difficult time following over ITV, and some have complained that they could not follow the course material nor understand what is expected of them.

At times, the issue of faculty drain from the main campus was evident in our evaluation materials, when DE students did better and were more satisfied with their course than the on-campus students. When program administrators saw this, we made greater efforts to mix experienced and inexperienced faculty over all of our program models. As the DE Coordinator, I am always tempted to pull our most experienced faculty into DE because I reason that students are at a disadvantage if they are unhappy with a course, as they have no opportunity to transfer



to another section. However, on-campus students experienced the same issue one semester, when all of the research methods course instructors were put into DE thesis committees, leaving no one who had taught this preliminary course to serve as thesis advisors to the on-campus students.

Accreditation

The idea of teaching over technology is an issue for CSWE. In 1995, the old standards for accreditation were in place and initiating a DE program required special permission. A detailed proposal had to be written to explain the method of delivery for each course with a justification as to why it would be effective. Additionally, how fieldwork would be set up and supervised from a distance had to be outlined. The proposal had to explain what evaluation plan would be used and yearly reports to CSWE were included in the plan. The proposal was written one year prior to students beginning courses.

The basis for the evaluation was to compare on campus with DE students and to show equivalence. This method was criticized as being a deficit model, seeking to show that DE students are as good as on-campus students, which supposes that on-campus teaching is superior. Little testing of whether traditional teaching was effective had been conducted. Many social work faculty and administrators questioned the staff at CSWE about why DE programs were held to higher standards than were on-campus programs. After seven years of evaluation, which generally demonstrated equivalence, I asked a staff member if I had to submit another proposal for an "experimental program." It seemed to me that the experiment is over and we now have a standard part of our program that includes a DE model. Many of the same questions are being now raised, such as whether Web delivery is as good as traditional models.

Many of these questions may be answered by the focus on outcome assessments beyond student grades and faculty course evaluations. When outcome measures are established to cover each course and the overall goals of the MSW curriculum, this should answer many of the questions about technology that are currently raised. If students can meet the standards set on the outcome assessment tool, then the method of course delivery should no longer be an important focus. It seems to me that too much emphasis has been placed on the technology rather than on teaching methods and strategies.

Funding

Funding for the DE program has been, for us, a combination of student tuition and grants. We are fortunate in California to have the hardware for compressed video equipment already installed at our state-supported campuses. Additionally, we have Federal IV-E funding though the California Social Work Educational Center (CalSWEC), grants to support students, and programs designed to educate the workforce in public child welfare. This means that students who work for the agency that houses the child welfare function in each county are eligible to receive reimbursement for tuition, books, and travel to allow them to complete an MSW degree. This grant pays for the costs of the program not covered by student tuition, including coordinators, administrators, travel expenses, equipment, and clerical assistance.

The CalSWEC funders then require that the university recruit at least 50% of the students from public child welfare employees. This is difficult when recruiting students from rural areas, as there may be a smaller workforce to recruit from than in urban areas. A complicating factor is that counties differ in how they support their employees in this process. Some counties allow students to work part time during years two and three of the program so that they may complete the required 16 hours of fieldwork. This makes it difficult for students, as they may need additional funding to cover living costs. Other counties pay their employees full-time salaries while they are completing their fieldwork requirements. Although this is not a decision that the university makes, it does mean that some students have been unable to complete the program due to financial reasons.

University Reward Structure

After serving as a full-time lecturer for five years, and as a tenure-track assistant professor for three years, I asked to be evaluated for early tenure and promotion in the fall of 2001. I had been involved with teaching in and administration of the DE program and had written extensively about both. At that time, no inclusion was made in the University's policies regarding tenure and promotion about the use of technology in the faculty evaluation process. My materials presented for tenure and promotion looked unusual in that most of my articles had focused on DE and most of my service contributions related to socialization of DE students, advising of DE students, and program development toward new social work programs at other campuses. I think one of the most difficult aspects of evaluation of the service contributions of individuals involved in DE is the lack of visibility on one's own campus or in one's own community. In my own case, I spend at least 20% of my work life out of town teaching or overseeing the DE program. Therefore, my RTP materials would reflect less on-campus and community service than would those of a traditional faculty member who is not involved in this amount of required travel.

Although my tenure and promotion were granted, I think that being a pioneer has its disadvantages. The lack of clear guidance from the University in this area left confusion on the part of the committee and certainly at times became confusing for me. I can say, thankfully, that at this time our University is aggressively working on developing policies that will reward faculty for their work in the area of technology. As more faculty members are using course software such as "Blackboard" and spending more time in preparing materials for visual presentation, they will want to know that they are protected when it comes to the RTP process. I think others in the future who go up for tenure and promotion with a focus on technology will not face the same questions that I faced. As for my experience, I think the preparation of RTP materials helped me find clarity about the contributions of DE to the profession and to the University.

Conclusions

For me, distance education is exciting because of the opportunities it provides to learn and develop new skills. Technology itself is not what drives me; rather, technology is a bridge to connect people who can work together on common goals. It was the development of a program that was able to meet important goals (i.e., increasing the number of MSWs in California, and assisting campuses in the development of new MSW programs) that drove me. I found excitement in planning and implementing new programs that meet the needs of a diverse group of communities. I most enjoyed the problem-solving process, which I first learned in my clinical work and now realize is at the heart of any administrative task. I realized that the ability to form relationships, which are so essential to clinical work and academic teaching, is also at the center of any administrative task. Reflecting back, I can see how the experiences in my family, clinical work, and academic teaching have all prepared me for the administrative work in which I am now engaged.

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Paper-Driven to Paperless: Technology Implementation Drives Program Innovation

By Moshe ben Asher, Ph.D., California State University Dominguez Hills

This narrative relates the author's unanticipated encounter with an administratively overwhelmed criminal justice diversion program. It describes his experience of learning to meet the technical and human relations demands of designing and developing comprehensive database management systems that not only improved administrative efficiency and staff morale, but also resulted in program innovation.

It was one of those times when, as we used to say, I was between gigs. My wife and I had recently left the interfaith federation of congregations we had organized in the San Francisco Bay Area. Our involvement with the project had culminated with a 700-person event that brought together members and clergy from 16 congregations. We had decided to take a "sabbatical" to write a manual that would translate the essentials of congregational community organizing for use by Jewish congregations. So we had moved to a small town north of San Francisco where the living was easy and the rent was cheap.

As luck, fate, or providence would have it, the money ran out just about the time the words did. I found myself scampering in a small-town labor market for virtually any job that would keep us from taking up residence under the freeway. My background included a stint many years earlier as an analyst, project director, and vice president for a national public-administration consulting firm, so I began calling all the social service agencies in the area to see if I could drum up some kind of temporary administrative work.

Getting My Feet Wet

Before long I was doing reception and record-keeping jobs at the front desk of a two-decades-old criminal justice diversion program that was part of a large, nonprofit, umbrella corporation. The corporation, founded some 25 years earlier to serve the needs of low-wage workers and their families throughout the state, operated a couple of dozen programs and services with a $15 million budget.

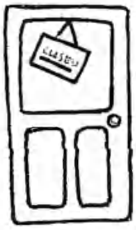
I recall the day I met with the director for the first interview. After we had talked for a half-hour or so, she introduced me around and then gave me a tour and an orientation to the program's operations. Since I was being considered for an administrative position, we spent some time in the reception and record-keeping area. I was impressed—*appalled* would be more accurate—at the pace and complexity of the work performed by the three employees who were staffing the public reception counter. I was then given the opportunity to work with them for an hour to get hands-on experience of the operation. By the end of the hour, my head was spinning from the blizzard of paper and my writing hand was aching from constant high-speed scribbling.

The reception and record-keeping activity of the diversion program's public reception counter became my work venue for the next several months. I quickly discovered that my two regular co-workers and I, working non-stop at top speed, would inevitably fall farther and farther behind in meeting the demands of the work. Completing intake forms for new clients, maintaining client files, producing and delivering daily correspondence to the courts, documenting fee collections, could only be managed with continuous bailouts volunteered by the most competent and committed of the casework staff. At that time the program was using about a hundred different forms. Caseworkers who were otherwise not occupied with clients or essential tasks of their own threw themselves into the breach—they were regular and familiar faces staffing the reception desk, searching for "disappeared" files, filling out intake forms, and writing court reports.

It quickly became clear to me that the system was on the verge of collapse. The program had grown from an average of 30 to 300 intakes a month in the previous six months, with an administrative system that was entirely paper driven. The intake process alone required manually filling out more than a half-dozen different forms, with more than a dozen overlapping data fields—so that the reception and record-keeping staff spent inordinate amounts of time redundantly writing the same information (e.g., name, address, date of birth, criminal charges, etc.) about every client who entered the program.

Needless to say, the three of us were exhausted and demoralized much of the time. On a daily basis numerous files were "lost" and, to answer questions from caseworkers, court officers, referring agencies, and the like, virtually all of the program's staff were engaged at one time or another in "panic pursuits" to locate the missing files. Records of staff performance, client progress, and financial payments were handled through three entirely separate hardcopy systems, so the program director was without easily cross-tabulated management information to make personnel and other managerial decisions. When such information was absolutely necessary, its collection and interpretation typically required assigning the assistant director, counseling supervisor, or one of the casework staff to invest long hours generating the needed reports.

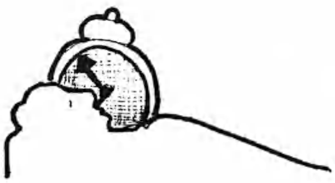
Student interns regularly complained that they couldn't find files for cases that were passed on to them—casework notes, records of fees paid, drug tests taken, etc. evaporated into the mists of myriad four-drawer filing cabinets. Clients occasionally rebuked us by telling us stories of court appearances in which, although having completed their diversion program obligations, they found themselves taken into custody because the program's notice of their successful completion never reached the court. The assistant director, a competent and committed manager, talked occasionally about the frustration of trying to control her eating habits and weight while working under the endless pressure of producing personnel productivity reports for which data were nearly impossible to collect and analyze.



My own nightmare occurred one day during our lunch hour when the program was closed and the double glass front doors locked. A client arrived a few minutes after noon. She knocked on the door and, after I pointed to the sign that said we were closed during the noon hour, she continued to knock insistently. Desperately needing the lunch break to recover my energy and spirit, and resentful for the interruption, I opened the door and rudely informed her that we were closed. When she showed me the court referral slip that indicated our hours were "8 to 5," additionally making the point that she only had time to come on her lunch hour, I told her sarcastically that she should settle that with the court clerk who designed the referral slip. That night as I related the story to my wife, ashamed and embarrassed by my thoughtless and unkind behavior, I was struck by how the pressures of the job had such a potent effect on my attitude and actions. Calm and contrite the next day, I wrote a letter of apology to the woman. Some time later I was relieved when, coming for her appointment with a caseworker, she approached me and said she was pleasantly surprised by my letter of apology and forgave my inexcusable behavior.

The circumstances of the job had immediate and pernicious effects on my personal life. I arrived home from work every afternoon at 5:30 invariably exhausted, drained to the point of wanting nothing but TV's narcotizing effects. In a dramatic change from my lifelong adult sleeping habits, I found myself climbing into bed *before eight o'clock every night*, sometimes as early as 6:30 or 7:00. Needless to say, in a wink my physical and emotional state became a source of domestic tension, for which no remedy or resolution appeared in sight.

My co-workers, two young Latina single parents, both of whom were from low-income



backgrounds, were living at home with their parents and siblings. They occasionally made brief allusions to their own family tensions and problems, which they associated with the pressures of the job.

Values and Principles

Thankfully, the diversion program director was acutely aware of the crisis and ready to take whatever steps would be necessary to resolve it. As I got to know all of the staff—managerial, casework, and administrative support people—we talked one-to-one about their hopes and frustrations on the job, the goals they had to help the program's clients turn their lives around, and the pressures and obstacles that were frustrating them.

The piles of paper were not only producing a series of administrative catastrophes, they were undermining the capacity of the dedicated casework staff to realize in practice the values for which they were investing their time, energy, and spirit. The overall effect was demoralization, despite managers who were otherwise not only efficient but kind and helpful too. The values of helping to uplift the lives of individual clients, protecting the public from further criminal acts, and training future social service caseworkers were all jeopardized and occasionally poisoned entirely by what could most charitably be called administrative malfeasance.

We began to formulate some of the principles that would necessarily govern the development of a new system if it were to serve those values.

• We would have to create a consensus and a constituency within the program for administrative modernization through computerization.

• We would have to create a management information system of relational databases that would ensure clients' interests were administratively supported in all respects.

• We would have to design and develop a system that would balance the casework needs of the clients with the task needs of the staff and the managerial needs of the corporation.

• We would have to actively engage program staff to share in system design and development responsibilities and to upgrade their own computer knowledge and skill.

• We would have to be non-defensive in analyzing and acknowledging our mistakes in the course of designing and developing the system and openly communicate them to the program's staff to solicit their corrective feedback.

• We would have to be proactive in reaching out to referral agencies with which we had active relationships, engaging them in the design and development process wherever it might have implications for our working together.

• We would have to guide design and development of the system in a way that would increase and strengthen program and staff capacity without additional personnel resources (although hardware and software costs could be amortized).

System Design Criteria

Once we had clarified the values and principles that would guide the design and development of the system, we formulated the design criteria:

• The system would have to be able to incorporate existing flat-file or spreadsheet databases.

• The system would have to allow the program to tailor its own records, forms, and reports to accommodate its unique requirements.

• The system would have to be easy to modify by the program's technical staff so that forms, reports, and databases could be modified or added as needed.

• The system would have to be easy to learn by program staff, both end-user line staff and the program's supporting technical staff that would have programming, maintenance, and backup responsibilities.

• The system would have to enable the program to freely aggregate its own data to produce needed reports and forms, both for day-to-day operations and reporting to corporate management, funding organizations, and regulators.

• The system would have to enable the program to generate payment and billing data that could be readily summarized and that, in the future, could be reported to the corporate level as individual transactions.

• The system would have to allow the program to aggregate its data beyond its own boundaries (say, for corporate purposes) without compromising client confidentiality.

Baby Steps & Bigger Visions

Once the decision was made by the program and corporate managers to computerize the program, the outlines of the decision were communicated to the full staff. Overwhelmed as they were by the massive inefficiency of the existing system, the initial reaction was one of euphoria. A kind of miraculous intervention was about to change the oppressive conditions of their day-to-day work.

Some of their enthusiasm was justified. But it was essential that we signpost the difficulties they would face, especially during the transition period while the old paper-driven system was being phased out. We suggested to them that they would be challenged by several unavoidable circumstances:

• Although they had already mastered a complex paper-driven system, they would have to learn a new and complex computerized system (notwithstanding that it would be much more efficient once learned).

•For some period of time they would have to use *both* systems, at least until all the clients admitted under the old system had finished or been terminated from the program.

• The new system would inevitably have bugs and not work properly for some time, which would decrease their efficiency.

• As the principal users, they would be expected to identify and document the bugs in the new system, and then help to work them out.

Once I had begun to know the individual members of the staff and their job-related hopes and pressures, my task was to master the entire administrative system: that is, to understand its functions and how the paper was both produced and used by the staff. Within a few weeks I was able to make a number of proposed "mechanical" changes to improve efficiency.

In several instances it was obvious that by reallocating tasks, simply parceling out the work so that particular individuals became "specialists" of a sort, efficiency was markedly improved. In some cases, modifying workflow by moving workstations made a job more bearable. Relocating and rearranging equipment—for example, moving a printer or scanner from one location to another—sometimes brought about meaningful changes in usability and thus lessened frustration.

The initial reaction to these changes by the support staff might fairly be characterized as "radical amazement." The day after all but one of these changes had been made, the spirit at the front desk was reminiscent of the first day of summer vacation from grammar school. My two Latina co-workers must have congratulated themselves and me a dozen times in the course of the day. They were shocked and pleased with how much less work they had to do for so little effort on my part.

The change that seemed to be the most mind boggling and unanticipated by the whole staff was the relocation of the large, horseshoe-shaped, public reception counter. Moving the counter back several feet made it possible to create an inviting public waiting room at the front entrance of the building, which was much more relaxing for clients when they had to wait for a caseworker. The new location also served, however, to eliminate excess space behind the counter, which had become a gathering place for otherwise unoccupied caseworkers to visit and occasionally engage in inappropriate conversation about their clients. This was the first instance in which a mechanical or technical change had the effect of driving a programmatic change. Many more were yet to come.

These changes produced noticeable improvements in efficiency and raised morale, particularly among the administrative support staff. But realistically, as we all knew, we had barely made a dent in the problem, and the crisis still loomed.

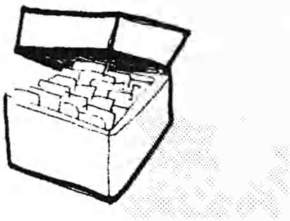
By this time the management staff and I had agreed that, if possible, we wanted to automate the system. The vision we had for the end result was one in which the program would be virtually "paperless." Moreover, we understood that once all the administrative processes were understood functionally, such as making pre-sentencing recommendations to the court, the numbers and types of forms would probably change, as would the methods of their delivery. For instance, we anticipated that no longer would reports be hand carried every afternoon to the court administrator's office; we could foresee that *intranet* e-mail would be more efficient, less costly, and less vulnerable to the vagaries of employee sick days, rush hour traffic, and inclement weather. This awareness prompted us to begin making plans to establish liaison with the court administrator's office and other organizations and agencies with which we had referral relationships.

In our meetings with the court administrator and her staff, we informed them, as we did with other referral organizations and agencies, that we were computerizing our administrative operations. We invited them to participate actively in the process to ensure that the results would meet their needs as well as ours, and throughout the development of the system we talked regularly with them and asked for their feedback and suggestions on proposed changes that might affect their operations. Not surprisingly, they were not only charmed by the idea that we would include them, but they were very helpful in working out a couple of sticky problems that required the involvement of the County's data processing department.

Software Adoption & System Introduction

The DBMS (database management system) that we had begun to develop was based on the use of an off-the-shelf relational database application. We chose Lotus Approach (instead of the more popular Microsoft Access) for a number of reasons. While both of these relational database applications offer a panoply of powerful features, Approach had what we regarded as the decisive advantage: virtually every reviewer gave it top marks for user friendliness. Our thinking was that we wanted to build a system for which we could train one or two of the regular administrative support staff to handle day-to-day maintenance, upgrading, and backup tasks.

My own experience with database applications had been limited to using flat-file



software, which allowed the creation of simple files composed of a number of data records. Imagine a recipe box with file cards and you've got the idea. In contrast, the relational database packages allowed for the creation and *linking* of multiple databases, which afforded the opportunity to develop more sophisticated paperless administrative systems. And so, as I began to document the details of the existing system—all the forms, reports, and letters—I could visualize how it would all come together as a total system. At the same time, I began designing and developing the individual databases that would be required.

In the beginning, not to exaggerate, it was somewhat terrifying. I was regularly overwhelmed, both intellectually and emotionally, by the complexities of relational database design and development. Every few days I would get stuck for hours, occasionally for a day or more, trying to figure out how one database should be related to another or trying to develop a formula for a calculated field. I would come home wired from eight or nine hours of intense concentration, craving relaxation, only to find myself sleeping fitfully, waking up repeatedly with a kind of droning anxiety, thinking that I had bitten off more than I could chew. I was in way over my head! Yet after several weeks of this enervating fear, I began to see that I didn't have to work out all the answers on my own. I discovered online resources where one could post a problem and in hours have one or more expert solutions offered. Then I found fax-back technical support through which one called a toll-free number, selected the relevant problem from an extensive menu, and within minutes received a faxed technical document with the needed answers. Finally, best of all, when the going really got tough, the Lotus technical support staff could always be relied on to explain the solution to any problem. As the weeks turned into months, my confidence and competence as a relational database designer and developer grew reciprocally with the system we were creating.

Much of my work at this time involved informally talking with staff as they did their regular work—asking questions about what they were doing, how they were doing it, what was working and not working, how they would improve the particular process in question, and so on. Invariably at the outset they would be somewhat chagrined to be asked for their opinions; seemingly it was entirely unexpected and outside of their experience. So initially they were somewhat self-conscious. I recall one intern, who later went on to get his MBA at an eastern university, repeatedly asking me, "You want *me* to help you design the system?"

Their experiences and ideas were invaluable in my design and development work. As my efforts began to result in preliminary designs, I invited members of the staff to sit with me informally and "try out" the data-entry sequence or the report-generating mechanism or whatever. Without fail, their reactions and suggestions were helpful and significantly improved the system.

Increasingly, their ideas took the form of rethinking some stage of the process, whether screening, intake, assessment, contracting. No longer would casework staff have to collect fees or write referral letters. Reception staff could now more easily collect the fees and a simple keyboard command produced the required referral letter. Caseworkers would be increasingly freed from the drudgery of paperwork to concentrate on their casework.

As this seemingly casual design and development progressed, we were consciously introducing the staff to the database software—piece by piece and step by step—so when the final system was fully developed, their introduction to it would be much less overwhelming.

By the time the system was ready to go online, the majority of staff members were familiar with it. Because of the regular turnover of student interns, however, a much smaller percentage of the staff was not familiar with it. So while overall there was a great deal of ownership of the system at the outset, with many eager to begin using it, a small number of interns had to be pulled into it. We had to work closely with those who were resistant to making the change—encouraging, challenging, and supporting them.

The interns who needed more support to navigate the transition went through several stages: first there was excitement and anticipation; that was followed by fear of learning the new system; the fear gave way to frustration in dealing with the practical challenges of learning the system while simultaneously delivering services; and finally, virtually everyone achieved a comfort level and satisfaction with the computerized efficiency. It was interesting to see, however, that once the new system was in place, all new interns and caseworkers, given three hours of training, adapted to it with alacrity.

Up & Running

Within 30 days of getting the new system up and running, it was virtually free of bugs and used by all of the staff. Although one or two pieces of paper were still being produced in cases where a client's signature was necessary, every other aspect of the administrative operations had been computerized—from intake and screening through recording case notes to termination interviews and court communications. The consensus was that the new system dramatically improved efficiency, effectiveness, and economy, usually with an elegance of input, use, and output.

There was yet another improvement, one which I failed entirely to anticipate. As pressure was lessened on the whole staff, opportunities and energy for deepening relationships began to expand. I began to get acquainted *personally* with several of the caseworkers and one of my Latina co-workers. I remember the first time the impact of this change dawned on me. I was talking casually with one of the caseworkers and somewhat surprised to find that she was telling me details about her recent vacation—where she and her boyfriend had gone in Mexico, a wild bar they had frequented, and even some of the public sexual exhibitionism going on there, which was mildly shocking to me. But I was very much aware that this was the first time I was hearing the details of a co-worker's personal life.

A more important instance of getting personally acquainted had to do with one of my Latina co-workers. I was on the hook to identify someone on the staff who could be trained to handle the day-to-day database maintenance, modification, and back-up chores. It was a job that would take a fair amount of programmatic and technical savvy. I hadn't even remotely considered this particular young woman as qualified, but as we got much better acquainted, I realized that in many ways she was the ideal candidate. As she shared more of herself—initially she had come into the corporation as a client but she had hopes and dreams of getting ahead in the world—she made it clear that she had not only the intellectual qualifications for the job but also the motivation and perseverance that would ensure her success. My confidence in her was well placed as it turned out. More than a year after I had left the program, I had a phone conversation with the director in which she described the outstanding "technical support" they were receiving from this young woman. I thought, what a difference a relationship makes! It was a blessing that we had the time to get acquainted, making it possible for her to show her stuff and move a step closer to fulfilling her dreams.

Notwithstanding the initial and short-lived resistance or reluctance of some staff to use the system, within weeks all of them had taken to it like ducks to water, which was not surprising since most of them had a hand in creating, testing, and debugging it. The staff training—beginning with an overview of the system, moving to hands-on learning about all of the relational databases, and concluding with a mock screening interview—paid handsome dividends.

The management-reporting capabilities built into the system included caseload analysis by demographic and economic factors, client-participation assessments, and a number of staff accountability measures. This was another area in which introduction and application of the technology had the effect of driving innovations in the program. Easily generated accountability reports brought about significant changes in the frequency and substance of staff evaluations conducted by the program's managers.

The program director's appraisal of the changes brought about by computerization sums up the impact of the changes for her.

We are no longer spending hours of staff time every day chasing files. We have eliminated numerous forms, some made superfluous because of the computerization, some combined with other computerized forms. Many time-consuming tasks have simply been phased out of our operations.

We are getting much more consistent and reliable input of data into the system because our staff members are learning the principle of GIGO (garbage in, garbage out); they are learning that our relational databases and the records and forms built into them only work when the necessary data are entered completely and accurately. Our communications to the courts are much more timely and accurate than they have ever been in the past.

My tools as a manager have been substantially upgraded and our ability to implement policies of staff accountability has gone from near the bottom of the scale to somewhere near the top.

The bottom line is that we are much better able to serve our clients than we have even been, and we are now ready for the challenge of the caseload and staff growth that we anticipate in the near future.

Blue Skies Brainstorming

The success of the initiative to computerize the administrative operations of this diversion program was a huge boost to morale and a shot in the arm for a tightly budgeted, nonprofit corporation that stretched every dollar as far as possible to serve the needs of low-wage workers and their families.

The question on everyone's mind at the

corporate level was, what next? And the answer was, let's computerize another of the corporation's programs, but one that directly serves the low-wage workers.

We had seen the extent to which the application of technology could drive program innovation. So instead of trying to retrofit a relational database system to an existing paper-driven system, the approach would be to engage the program's staff in a *program design process* that, in turn, would serve as the foundation for the computerization strategy.

The workshops that followed focused on the functional tasks the staff needed to accomplish to serve the program's clients. The agenda in the first in that series of workshops was as follows:

WORKSHOP AGENDA

I. What's the plan for this session?

II. What are our purposes and priorities in doing assessments?

III. How can we improve the assessment process?

IV. How can we improve the assessment form?

V. What kinds of follow-up do we need to do after this session?

The upshot of these blue skies brainstorming workshops was an unusual clarity of purpose and priority for casework services offered by the program. But they went further to define the ideal settings for assessments, their timing, and follow-up tasks. For every aspect of assessment, weighted measures were devised to facilitate communication between professional staff and for reporting purposes.

For example, assessment weightings in the area of children's education were: (5) excels in school, no behavioral problems, and English proficiency; (4) English proficiency and attends school regularly; (3) attends continuation school and bilingual classes; (2) drop-out risk, attendance irregular, may be frequently truant, possibly gang-involved, and lacks English proficiency; and (1) dropped out and gang member.

Assessment weightings were developed for income, health and safety, nutrition, community participation, employment, shelter, and adult education. Once developed, they served as the blueprint for the design and development of the database management system. And this was only the first step; several workshops were yet to follow that would examine other facets of the casework process.

But these outcomes don't really begin to describe the experience of the staff in the workshops. It was a strange combination of elation: being aware that they were doing something everyone had implicitly assumed was the private preserve of the program's managers, and wanting all the more to apply themselves fully and do an outstanding job with the opportunity they had been given. There was a comradeship and camaraderie I hadn't seen before, a spirit that seemed to animate the normally banal business of program design.

The improvements made by the criminal justice diversion program—especially the administrative transformation, staff morale turnaround, and enhanced referral relations—were deeply gratifying. But the initial experience of the low-wage workers' program produced an exciting awareness that implementation of digital technology could be an exceptionally powerful force to build the spirit and morale of a whole staff and simultaneously drive program innovation and progress far into the future.

Back to the Beginning: My First Year in Distance Education

By Paul P. Freddolino, Ph.D., Michigan State University

Michigan State University is approaching the tenth anniversary of its interactive video program, which now provides all required courses for the MSW to several locations around the state using ITV. The author reflects back on the early history, as well as on the programmatic and personal lessons learned in this decade of work.

Ten years ago, in February 1993, the Director of the School of Social Work at Michigan State University (MSU) called me into her office to talk about "a possible new opportunity" for the School. She had recently received a phone call from the director of the University's educational outreach office in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, 400 miles from campus. An unanticipated turn of events there had prompted his call to our School and set the stage for what would become our ten-year odyssey into the world of distance education.

In the phone call from Marquette, Marilyn Flynn, our director, learned that the plans of the BSW social work program at Northern Michigan University (NMU) to start an MSW program had been rejected at the last minute by the University's governing board. NMU had already begun advertising for the new program, and understandably many people were upset at this development. The call to Marilyn Flynn involved a simple question – "Is there anything MSU's School of Social Work can do?"

Professor Flynn knew that MSU had recently begun using a new (at the time) technology for delivering courses to locations around the state. In our meeting, she told me briefly about it, noting that it involved two-way interactive audio and video, similar to what we see on a television news interview. She then asked if I would be willing to chair a small faculty committee to explore the possibility of using this new technology to deliver our MSW program to Marquette.

Professor Flynn is a visionary with a willingness to take risks. This project sounded interesting, so I accepted the assignment and agreed to have our committee's report ready for the April faculty meeting. It seemed like an exciting subject to look into, especially because it would give me a chance to learn about some of the new technology around campus. Little did I know how much of an impact this decision would have on the School's development and on my professional life.

Let me digress from the story a bit to fill in some background details. It was not a random event that brought me into Marilyn Flynn's office that day. Since my arrival at MSU in 1979, I had been involved in most of the School's educational outreach efforts. Beginning in 1980, the School had offered the complete MSW program to cohorts of students in communities around the state through what we called the "portable MSW program" (Freddolino, Reed, & Ruhala, 1983).

Under this model, the School essentially brought the MSW program and many of our tenure-stream faculty to a distant community using the expensive and time-consuming technology I later came to call "car-net." My colleagues and I logged many miles of driving to distant communities in the lower peninsula of Michigan, and some of my colleagues used state-government-owned aircraft to commute to the far reaches of the Upper Peninsula (UP). Using this approach, between 1980 and 1991 we brought the entire MSW program to students in Traverse City (twice), Sault Saint Marie, Lapeer, and Alpena.

My roles in these efforts encompassed a range of activities. In the first Traverse City project I was the internal evaluator, charged with documenting what the program involved and assessing student and other stakeholder perspectives on the program, its quality, and its impact/value. I communicated regularly with the faculty who taught on site in Traverse City, and I maintained a regular dialogue with the external evaluator charged with assessing impact on and conformity with external standards. For the second Traverse City cohort and the Sault Saint Marie cohort, I continued as the internal evaluator, but I had less direct contact with the stakeholder groups. In large part this was because my own research agenda in mental health had taken off, consuming most of my time and energy.

For the Lapeer cohort my role changed again, and this time I was one of the faculty who commuted to teach on site. Driving two to three hours (one way) each week depending on the weather gave me a first-hand impression of what both students and faculty had been experiencing throughout these off-campus programs. Teaching research to this group of experienced practitioners in a classroom at a decommissioned state hospital 100 miles from MSU was challenging, exciting, and exhausting. By the time the Alpena cohort came around, my only involvement was to serve as a research consultant to the faculty conducting the internal evaluation.

Throughout the 1980s, however, describing and evaluating the School's distance education activities remained one of my priority research areas. The work formed the substance of numerous conference presentations and publications. Information and evaluation results concerning the School's "portable MSW program" model were widely disseminated through an effective writing collaboration with several colleagues – particularly Tom Ruhala and Celeste Sturdevant Reed. These efforts gave me my first 'visibility' in social work education.

Another impact of this early work is more difficult to quantify or even describe. The experiences of teaching and talking with students, field instructors, agency directors, and others in the communities around Michigan where we offered the MSW program gave me a profound understanding of the value placed on graduate social work education in underserved areas. These people were passionate about their desire to learn, to improve the services available to their clients, and to enhance their personal sense of self-worth and accomplishment. They were grateful for the opportunity brought by the portable program, and at the same time they demanded that the time and energy they invested go toward a program that was really of value to them and their work. Completing the degree program involved some great sacrifices on their part; they just wanted the sacrifices to be worth it. This dual perspective – gratitude for having the program accessible combined with a demand for a quality program worth their sacrifices – was to resurface in the context of the next distance education initiative.

All of this activity in distance education came at a great cost to the School's faculty, however, and after the Alpena cohort graduated in 1991, the faculty voted for a moratorium on further off-campus programs.

The perceived benefits from yet another off-campus program – making a contribution to the community, fulfilling our land grant mission, being visible in another region of the state – were seen by faculty as too small to compensate for the time and wear-and-tear factors involved. This is the context in which the faculty committee was conducting its inquiry into the possibilities of the new interactive television (ITV) technology for yet another off-campus program.

The next two months brought an extensive schedule of meetings, observations, demonstrations, and the like for me and the other members of the committee. By far the most important of these was our visit to the classroom on campus used for the ITV system. Here we had our first exposure to the new technology and our first tutorial on how it had been and could be used. Several things struck us at the time of that first demonstration.

First and foremost in my estimation was the overwhelming sense that this technology was 'personal.' Sitting in that classroom talking with an ITV staff member in another linked ITV room on campus, we did not 'feel' like we were talking to a machine or through a machine. He was real, up close, smiling, talking, interacting, laughing – he could have been right there next to us. In fact he seemed closer than he would have seemed if he were in the back of the classroom we were in. As the three of us talked about it later, we all had the sense that this was a technology that could work in the classroom.

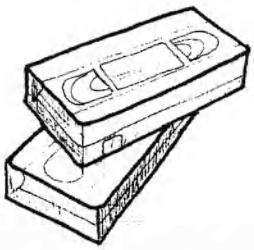
Second was the striking awareness that in this environment, it would be difficult to avoid completely the need to be 'performing' for the students. We could feel it in the conversation with the ITV staff member in the other room. Excited verbal exchanges produced an energy that was palpable, but as the conversation continued and eventually slowed, the brief silences became more noticeable. As the three of us considered this notion of 'performing' we realized that some of our colleagues would do better with the technology than others. For both good and ill, this meant that the ITV environment would be similar to the face-to-face environment in which we all worked. While this familiarity was comforting in some ways, the performance aspect made it scary.

The third reaction was not particularly logical. The best I can do is to put a feeling into words. "We really don't know a lot about this new technology, and there are a lot of unanswered questions about how we might be able to offer an entire off-campus program using it. In fact, it's a little overwhelming. But…..it's exciting to think about it!" After that demonstration we did lots of reading, talking with experts, and discussing, but looking back I believe our ultimate recommendation to the faculty drew its energy from our reactions at that first visit.

Our report was on the agenda for the April 1993 School meeting. All three of us participated in presenting the information we had gathered during our research, laying out the facts as we knew them, with advantages and disadvantages. We also mentioned the numerous aspects that we did not know about. Our report concluded with a recommendation that the faculty endorse the Distance Education Initiative, establishing a new MSW program in Marquette using this new ITV technology.

After our report and the motion, there was an extensive discussion that covered a wide range of issues. Was the picture clear enough to see? (Absolutely.) What was the sound quality like? (Pretty decent, although there was a noticeable lag between when we spoke and when the sound was heard in the other room.) Did it feel like you were on stage? (Yes in some ways for the first few minutes, but then you got used to it.)

Other questions were more complex, sensitive, and difficult to answer. One I distinctly remember concerned the videotapes made routinely by ITV staff of every class meeting on the ITV system. Raised by one of the members of the committee, the question generated an intense and wide-ranging discussion that centered on two issues: who owns the videotapes, and what will they be



used for? It was an issue we had not even considered, and so it was discussed in this important meeting for the first time. What evolved was the notion that the videotapes should belong to the School; that they would be available only to the instructor and the students in the course; and that they would be destroyed when each program ended. There was a clear sense that they would not be available for review by the director of the School or by other faculty unless specific permission was obtained from the individual faculty member on the tape.

More important than the specifics of the discussion was the fact that so many issues were raised, discussed, and resolved during that meeting. Some conclusions were rationally based on information, but others represented a shared leap of faith. Looking back on the meeting, it is almost shocking to realize that the faculty voted unanimously to leap into the dark, to take a risk, unsure of where it would lead. This was uncharted territory for social work, and we seemed willing to take a bigger risk than we had ever taken as a faculty.

Given the tone of my comments above it will probably not be a surprise to you that I accepted the offer to head the new Distance Education Initiative. The director met with me shortly after the faculty meeting, and asked if I would head up the implementation effort. It was a Friday, and I asked if I could think about it over the weekend. She agreed...but I knew almost immediately that I wanted to give this a try. It seemed exciting...and scary. Mainly, it would force me to learn about the new world of technology that clearly seemed to be the wave of the future. I was also at a point in my academic career where I was seeking a new area for investigation, and this seemed like the most promising star on the horizon. After confirming things with my family that weekend, I came in Monday morning and told the director that I would accept the challenge.

The next required activity involved intensive planning for a trip to Marquette. The faculty's decision was made in April, and we were hoping to have the first ITV course start in late August! Jo Ann McFall, Associate Director for Field Instruction, joined me in developing the plans, making the contacts, and eventually making the trip. We flew into Marquette and rented a car, and while driving into town a big black bear ran across the highway about 100 yards ahead of us. We both took that as an omen that some great things were going to happen here!

The meetings in Marquette involved the local MSU staff and several key NMU administrators – some of whom we learned were not thrilled that MSU was taking over "their" MSW program. A second essential group included agency practitioners from Marquette and throughout the Upper Peninsula, without whose support – as field instructors and agency directors – a full MSW program could not succeed. It was also time to find out exactly how big the market might be by holding a public information session to describe our plans for the program, and we scheduled one for the second evening.

Although we had some tentative numbers from phone calls to the MSU office, we had no way to predict how many people would actually appear for that first information session. Jo Ann McFall and I were pleased with how the administrative and practitioner meetings had gone. Although there were a few ruffled feathers, people realized that it was not MSU's fault that the program had been curtailed, and there was general support for MSU's effort to begin a program. The question on everyone's mind was whether or not we were really serious, and our answer was a consistent 'yes' – as long as we had sufficient interest. Advertisements about the information session had been placed in newspapers throughout the UP, and letters had gone to many of the agencies. Thus everyone was focused on the information session itself.

Let me spare you the suspense. We had over 130 (?????) people come to the meeting, with 25-30 more calling in to request information. Because the expected classroom capacity was 50 students, we told everyone that this was the limit for the first class planned for August. When I say 'expected' capacity, it's because the ITV classroom at NMU had not yet been constructed, and the equipment was not yet in place. It would be fair to say that we left Marquette excited about the positive show of interest–and anxious about whether we would be ready to deliver.

Some people filled out application forms for the class that very evening, while others mailed or faxed them in. Ultimately we had 95 applicants for the first 50 spots, and we devised a standardized scoring procedure to select the top applicants. The rest were told that they could apply again for the Spring 2004 section of the course. This process reflected our decision to allow interested potential students to 'sample' a course or two before actually submitting a formal application to the MSW program.

The timetable developed for recruitment was intended to provide three advantages. First, it would give people an opportunity to 'try on' the student role again and to see if their already busy lifestyles could accommodate the stress of academic courses and homework. Second, it gave us a chance to get to know the students, thus providing an additional piece of information potentially useful in the application review process. Finally, it extended the time during which additional people might learn about the MSW program and submit an application. Given the financial consequences to the program of each student who dropped out after being accepted, this seemed to offer a viable sequence to improve the pool of applicants and their ultimate retention.

While my focus was on recruitment efforts that summer, colleagues in the University's Broadcast Services department were busy getting us a room in Marquette for the new ITV technology. MSU offered to pay for the room remodeling and the equipment needed in the ITV classroom, but NMU ultimately decided to pay for everything themselves so they would maintain complete control over the room, its use, and its scheduling. With the first class set to begin on the last Monday evening in August, by the first of August I was making frantic phone calls to MSU and NMU broadcast staff on an almost daily basis. Ultimately the classroom was finished…the Friday before the first class, with no time for a practice session with the actual instructor. It was a nerve-wracking weekend.

As for that first instructor for that very first ITV course, the Director made it very clear that for several reasons she wanted to be the one. First, having the Director teach the first course would send a loud and clear message to many constituencies that the School considered distance education to be an important component of our work. Second, because we had decided that every full-time faculty member would teach at least one course on ITV to cement a broad sense of ownership and burden, she thought the best approach would be for her to model and experience the role. Third, she enjoyed working with new technologies, and this provided an excellent opportunity.

During the spring and early summer we had considered several different approaches to maintaining a quality-learning environment in the Marquette classroom. The ultimate decision favored the model we still employ in our distance education programs. For each course, a local knowledge expert is hired on a contractual basis to serve as a 'faculty associate.' Responsibilities include being present in the classroom for all sessions; assisting with local activities such as group discussions and assignments; grading papers; and facilitating communication between the primary campus-based instructor and the students at the distance site. Depending on the course, instructor, and faculty associate, the latter might be asked to contribute a lecture, assignment, or other resource.

During the past ten years there has been a considerable range in the relative contributions of the faculty associate, but that first summer the desire to have the first course be a great success led us to emphasize the partnership. The Director met with the faculty associate in East Lansing to work on the course together, and by the first evening of the class everything was ready. Four months of very active work on the part of many people in East Lansing and Marquette finally came to fruition, and we were off and running. It was not exactly "one great step for mankind," but it was the beginning of a decade-long effort to use technology to help provide access to the School's programs and resources.

As for the rest of the story of that first cohort in Marquette, the pent-up demand for an MSW program meant that high interest continued. We had many more applicants than we could handle and ultimately admitted as many students as the ITV classroom could handle – fifty people. For a variety of reasons (according to our exit interviews), thirteen people dropped out of the program, most in the first year. Field education was arranged in agencies throughout the UP and coordinated by a local field coordinator who reported directly to Jo Ann McFall, following the same policies and procedures as the field program in East Lansing. Ultimately, 37 people completed all requirements for the MSW degree in the UP, graduating in May 1998. Every full-time faculty member taught one course.

While that first course was in progress, we discovered that the technology would permit us to add a second fully interactive distance site simultaneously. This meant that we could identify and bring on line a second underserved rural area, and the decision was made to determine if there was sufficient demand to do so. Conversations with the University's educational outreach staff (and of course the ITV staff) led to the selection of Gaylord in northeast lower Michigan as the targeted site. Once that decision was made, Jo Ann McFall and I began the same series of conversations, information sessions, and meetings in and around this new community. Ultimately 37 students graduated in 1998 from the program in Gaylord, with most of their courses taken using ITV, linked with the Marquette cohort and various groups of students in East Lansing.

During the subsequent five-year period, from 1998 to 2003, MSU has completed an Advanced Standing program in Saginaw, about 100 miles northeast of campus, and a second cohort is about to graduate this semester in Marquette. The latter program has benefited considerably from what we learned during the first five years, and from new instructional technologies. While still primarily ITV-based for course work, there have been several courses offered in person, and several courses offered completely on the Internet. Finally, this summer we will offer our first ITV courses in Flint as part of a primarily in-person branch campus program, and we are recruiting for new cohorts in Gaylord and Saginaw.

So what have we learned from all of this experience during the past decade? Some of the answers to this question relate to the general operation of off-campus programs using various communication and information technologies (or ICTs, the new buzz word). These lessons include:

•Regardless of the technologies involved, people are people and they vary tremendously in their capacity and willingness to be flexible, and to learn new things. No matter how fantastic the technology and how much support is provided to help people use the new technology, some people – both faculty and students – will not be happy. This is not a particularly brilliant insight, but remembering it can save you a lot of grief if you are the one trying to make things work perfectly.

• No matter how much technology you have supporting the program, general student satisfaction seems driven more by the human interface (the people and their personalities) with whom they have to deal either in person at the local site, or by phone or e-mail from main campus. The name of the game is customer service.

• In each cohort there will emerge leaders and free riders, saints and sinners. In this respect, each cohort is just like its on-campus peers.

• Personal contact between the faculty teaching on campus and the students learning at a distant site is essential. We have seen great benefits from having faculty visiting the distant site and then teaching their courses from the distant sites back to East Lansing, and we encourage this as early in each term as possible.

• Most social work educators know that it takes a lot of people to educate a social worker. At distant sites, it often takes even more people – because a smaller portion of them work full-time for the university – and they tend to be spread out over greater geographic distances. Building and nurturing these relationships – for instruction, advising, and field education – is extremely important and tremendously time-consuming.

• There are some tensions that are more likely to occur in a distant site than they do on campus. For example, some students may wind up with their supervisors as classmates and peers. Students may see one member of a family in the agency where they are employed, and another member of that family in the agency where they are doing field education. There are no definitive guidelines for handling these and similar situations, but certainly sensitivity to the complex personal, ethical, legal, and moral issues is essential.

•Finally, regardless of how much and what type of ICTs are available to support distance education efforts, ultimately it is the human side that determines success and satisfaction. Bad technology can obviously sink a program, but good technology, even the best technology, cannot make a program on its own.

The other set of answers to the question about what has been learned is very much on the personal side. These include:

• Making a program like this work well requires a tremendous amount of time and energy for tasks not generally valued by the academic setting – networking with a wide range of constituencies, spending time at meetings and on phone calls, and so forth. Without the strong support of the director of the school, spending the time to take on these tasks would have been risky for my academic career. Even with that support, and despite the endorsement of the university for outreach efforts, taking time to do this work could have been disastrous if I had not already had tenure.

• My involvement with the distance education initiative helped me to see that I really do like keeping up with the latest developments in technology, and that I value being able to understand them well enough to consider how they might be applied in social work education and practice. A side benefit has been to keep me conversant enough with my kids to avoid the "dinosaur" label.

• There have been enormous benefits to me in terms of personal feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment from the work we have done on our distance education projects. Over the years I have had numerous conversations with students and their family members; with agency directors and field liaisons; and with people in broader constituencies in communities around the state. These conversations have brought home the impact of having an expanded *local* capacity to help people in areas which previously were dependent on whomever they could attract from outside. This is a form of empowering communities, a goal to which I had made a personal and professional commitment long ago. What I would never have predicted is that technology has been the tool through which I have been able to implement that commitment!

• Finally, looking back on the past ten years I now know that there is nothing magical about the process. It takes hard work, but developing effective distance education programs is not a Herculean task. Others can undertake it or be supervised in doing it, and I see more delegation and supervision in my future as we develop additional programs.

With the routinization of this process comes the search for new projects and initiatives for myself, something that is both exciting and scary. Come to think of it, that's what I said about distance education a decade ago.

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CALL FOR NARRATIVES

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THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

In celebration of 50th anniversary of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education,* which desegregated public schools, and the 40th anniversary of the landmark federal Civil Right Act of 1964, which desegregated higher education, ***Reflections*** will publish a special issue on past and contemporary accounts of the struggle to achieve social equality within the helping professions—including their educational and training programs, agencies and professional associations as well as within external communities and organizations, including host universities and colleges. Narratives should focus on the struggle to achieve desegregation, civil rights, racial equality, and nondiscriminatory practices within the helping professions. Original narrative articles and oral history interviews are welcome.

Manuscript submissions should be sent to special issue editor:
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My Journey: Reflections and Cross Cultural Experience with Technology

By Janaki Santhiveeran, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

This narrative describes the author's experiences with technology: from learning how to use email, to becoming proficient in programming, and eventually moving to a paperless classroom. She describes how social work students are making computers part of their educational experience.

My personal interaction with computer technology was "none" when I graduated with an M.A. in Social Work in India in 1989. Computers did not invade mainstream society in India until the early part of the 1990s. At the time, computer centers that offered personal tutoring in computer software and programming languages were beginning. Students from computer disciplines had access to computer labs, but students from other disciplines had no exposure to computers until they completed their higher education. In 1992, I used computers for the first time at the U.S. Consulate Library at Chennai, which was several hundred miles away from my hometown.

My journey in technology began later in 1992 when I came to the United States of America. I was excited about the use of computers for searching library materials and retrieving journal abstracts. The ability to find materials quickly using computers increased my enthusiasm and energy level.

When I used the computers as a graduate student at Barry University in Florida, the lab policy was that prior experience in computers was needed. I took the policy very seriously and enrolled in a computer course for beginners, which introduced me to the use of word processing software. I marveled at the speed at which the instructor taught the word processing software. Even though I do not remember what I learned in that class, I did learn something. I felt that the course was introduced as aversion therapy for someone who had no prior knowledge in computers.

I did not develop a passion for computers when I first began graduate school and I primarily used computers to type my term papers and to search library materials. On the day I was about to submit my first term paper for a research method course in my Ph.D. program, I lost more than half of the paper because of a corrupted disk. It was a disaster. Luckily, I had a printout of my paper, so I was able to type the pages within a couple of hours, make final changes and submit my paper on time. My frustration with computer technology had begun.

Due to our increasing phone bills, my brothers dragged me into using email by sending email messages to me from India and from the Northeast part of the U.S. Becoming proficient with the use of email, I had received more than a two hundred messages from my brothers by the end of my Ph.D. program in 1994. I thrived in this new land, partly due to text-based support consistently offered by my brothers. Although almost all of

my family members have access to email, email has not replaced our family's need for face-to-face meetings or telephone calls, so actually our phone bills have not been reduced. These days we communicate less frequently via email than ever before due to affordable telephone costs.

As a foreign student, I spent several long weekends without conversing with real people. Therefore, I participated in some email list serves as a means to connect with real people and discuss several issues related to the profession. Computer technology in this new land offered opportunities to stave off boredom, to increase my ability to accomplish tasks easily, and to connect with others. Electronic mail opened up new means of communicating with my brothers instantly using text based phone capabilities.

In 1993, I was introduced to SPSS (mainframe) in one of my research classes. I was comfortable in making and rectifying errors, so I wanted to master SPSS. I volunteered to do data entry for my colleagues and to work with other doctoral students on their dissertations. Working as a research assistant for a homeless enumeration project helped me to sharpen my skills in creating data files and data entry. Due to my comfort level with mainframe, I elected to use SPSS to enter my dissertation data. One of my mentors hired me as a research/teaching assistant for four projects. He was generous in lending me his laptop on several occasions.

During my student years I used SPSS for Windows to assist two Ph.D. students with data management, data entry and statistical analysis. During our exit group interviews, several of my Ph.D. colleagues suggested adding computer literacy as a pre-requisite to enter the program. I disagreed. Due to my computer illiteracy level at the time of entry, I was challenged on several occasions during my first semester. However, I was comfortable from my second semester and was even able to help my colleagues with computers and SPSS.

Computer use eventually emerged as a hobby for me as, I became more adventurous and comfortable in experimenting with several software programs whenever I wanted to take a break from my routine activities. Computers have now become an important part of my life, as I always found something amazing to explore or learn. Even if I do not make a conscious effort to try new applications on my own for a month or two, I get questions from colleagues and students that make me want to learn new software programs to help them.

As a part of my regular exploration, I learned Harvard Graphics and Power Point. When my dissertation chair challenged me, I used these programs to organize my presentation and present my results using the concept-mapping technique. Since I did not have access to a projector, I made colorful transparencies by printing Power Point slides and developed several concept maps to explain my regression results.

In 1995, I went back to India. By this time, computers had permeated the mainstream society. My seven-year-old niece talked about computers and demonstrated her ability to use them on my brother's laptop. I was happy that computers had entered schools in India. Still, because email access had not entered mainstream society, postal offices acted as the central place for the public to send and receive email messages. Companies offered email access to their employees, which is how my brothers were able to email me.

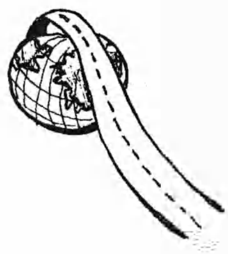
I introduced PowerPoint presentations into my classrooms in 1996 at Northeastern Illinois when I first taught in a computerized "smart" classroom/lab. Although students were impressed with Power Point presentations, a problem arose when they became more involved in taking notes from the slides than participating in classroom discussions. In other words, my intent to use Power Point in order to engage students actively in the classroom was defeated. I found the Internet to be a valuable media tool in order to come up with a plan to disseminate my handouts without making hardcopies. I posted Power Point slides "as is" by converting them to HTML documents. I used File Transfer Protocol (FTP) to transfer files from my computers to the university server. This was my first introduction to using the Internet in my classrooms. Not wanting to merely place the HTML documents on to the web, I ventured into building my own course websites for the courses I taught from 1996 to 1999, until I found Blackboard in 1999.

In 1996, I finally bought my own personal computer. Although telephone bills were high when I sought technical support from three siblings that have computer science/ engineering degrees, their assistance and motivation were invaluable. With their help, I could integrate Web supplements in teaching and learning. With no limit I started placing my syllabus, assignments, Power Point slides on the web. When I saw students getting frustrated with printing multiple Power Point slides from my course websites, I found a way to convert the slides into text-based HTML pages, which reduced the amount of pages to print to two or three. I worked on these web developments on my own time in order to serve students effectively and to develop independent learning environments for the students. Initially, to transmit text based information, I used the web, and to promote communication with the students, I primarily used email. When students became comfortable with the static nature of my websites, I wanted to offer more for them and I started compiling Internet resources related primarily to the courses I taught. I developed SOLE (Social Work Online) through which I provided a link to more than 500 websites related to policy, social welfare, research methods, statistics, and the social work profession. I felt comfortable integrating Internet resources relevant to my courses by accessing them instantly, enabling me to offer virtual tours to several social welfare agencies in the comfort of my own classrooms. Students were delighted to have ready access to several websites on social welfare programs and policies related to their assignments.

In 1997, I designed several online interactive activities. Using programming, I developed CGI forms to enable students to complete assignment sheets online and submit the assignments directly to me. Additionally, I used "Question Mark" software to design exam questions and to administer exams online. Some students were highly panicked by the fact that they were to submit their exams online, and in fact, some students submitted exams more than once. Since the university offered lab assistance, configuring each computer to administer the exam became easy. Some students requested a paper copy of the exam to refer to while taking the computerized exam, which was an interesting strategy to reduce test/computer anxiety.

I also designed online discussion forums for my own students and for the Asian Student Association, using Web Board software. As an administrator of the student forums, I had the ability to determine access privileges. Web Board software offered several possibilities in terms of enabling student access to certain discussion forums and offering read and/or write privileges to the students. For example, I could create a threaded discussion for an assignment, in which students could both ask and respond to the questions. After the due date, I blocked the write privileges, which then enabled students to read the archived discussions without posting new messages. Such capabilities were extremely valuable to moderate and facilitate online discussions.

Using computer applications developed a positive learning environment for students; however, I did not have an opportunity to compare my work with others as very few have adopted computer technology in my university. In 1997, I attended a summer institute hosted by University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign (UIUC), where the online productions of their faculty were showcased in a sophisticated manner. This showcase helped me do a self-assessment and value the products that I had developed for my students.



When I visited India in 1999, I found tremendous advances in computer technology. There was a mushroom growth of Internet Cafés, where college students spent their time in groups. I used these cafes to do online banking and to send email to my friends, colleagues, and family in the U.S. However, the connection was extremely slow, taking 15 to 30 minutes to access an email and to send one or two messages. I visited my school where I got my M.A. in Social Work and found some technological advances. The school had computers with SPSS to use for research projects, but students had very limited access. My 11-year-old niece talked about learning ORACLE programming at her school. Schools have become competitive by integrating programming languages from middle school onward. To sharpen my skills in web designing and programming, I took some crash courses on programming languages, database administration, and graphic designing.

Using Blackboard software for course management was easy; it cut down my work associated with programming and using several software packages considerably reduced my time spent in designing the online learning environment. Since 2000, I have been using Blackboard software for course management in all research courses where technology is extremely useful and adaptive. With 24-hour high-speed Internet access from home I can offer frequent online consultations and revise student research proposals. Such capabilities enable me to do paperless, digital consultations, which students originally resisted. However, due to their growing technological sophistication, students now prefer digital submissions. Over the past years more than 80 to 90 percent of transactions are paperless, via a digital drop box. Digital transactions enable students to do corrections and to submit and receive papers very quickly, but they do place time pressure on the faculty as the students expect quick turnaround.

In 2002, I again visited India. This time, I used my parents' laptops to check my emails from my own home and used Internet cafés whenever we traveled. Internet access was now easy, simple and fast. Some of my friends and family members had personal computers, which had become affordable and easily available, with Internet connections in their homes. I was impressed to see that the school curriculum from the first grade included beginning concepts about computers as well as computer games. Families used Video CDs to watch movies on their computers and became comfortable with burning music CDs. This time the Internet Cafés were less crowded due to the increase in computers at homes.

In the beginning years, my computer use in the classroom was often met with both fascination and reservations. Now it very rarely intimidates students and several of our new students are extremely technologically savvy. This knowledge has changed several students' attitudes. A student who initially refused to cooperate in using the computer, recently chose me as his thesis advisor. He had honestly expressed his frustration and refused to use the technology for one full semester, while other students were actively using and producing more than 24,000 hits during a semester. This student said he liked my approach to teaching but did not like technology in the classroom as it intimidated him. However, by the time he was in his final semester, he actively used online media to send his papers and to get my feedback via email or digital drop box. He admitted that his attitude toward computers has changed due to my consistent use. Another student refused to use a computer mouse with her right hand as she heard that the use of it affects the hand. Sometimes, students are preoccupied with the newness of technology. Some students talked more about the technology than the course content, which made me wonder whether I covered the content or taught them about computers.

Computers have become part of my daily life, teaching and life-long learning. I acclimatized to learning the computer technology so that I could function effectively and easily in the new land of opportunities. When I arrived here, I had to adapt quickly and start my school life. Similarly, I have easily made a shift from one computer program to another without any fuss, as my campus jobs did not give me much time. I have become accustomed to newness. This ability to adjust became handy when I used several software programs for web designing and using different versions of SPSS in my classrooms. I feel a responsibility to tell others how much computers have helped me to grow as a professional. My journey with computer technology continues and I view it as an important service to our profession.

Let Us Begin

**By Ruby Guillen, MSW, Department of Children and Family Services, Los Angeles, California
Raymund Manning, Ph.D., Northrop Grumman Space Technology, California
and Joseph T. Powers, MSW, Orange County Department of Education, California**

This narrative is the story of how three individuals with widely diverse backgrounds came together to identify and establish a solution for social work resource problems by utilizing Internet hierarchial search procedure principles. In addition, this solution has the capacity to be duplicated and manipulated to fit the constructs and parameters of any given region and/or county-regardless of distance.

"All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."
- John F. Kennedy, 1961

Ruby's Experience

As a Los Angeles County foster child, I was a recipient of various services from social services providers. I remember being shifted out of one agency into another, often without knowing why. I wanted to locate resources for my needs but I did not know where to go or whom to ask. I remember my mother, who was born and raised in Mexico, telling me that she had to attend English parenting classes due to the lack of Spanish-speaking referral information. Soon after I emancipated from this government agency, I began to question this system of care—the system that shrouded child-safety policies. As a result, I began searching for answers to the questions that I had regarding my foster care experience. This effort then directed my desire to work and study in the field of social work. Consequently, I enrolled at a university to study social work. At the same time, I began expanding my social work experiences by seeking employment and doing volunteer work for a string of non-profit organizations or government social service agencies, some of which were: (1) A resource coordinator for incarcerated women; (2) A resource coordinator for the homeless population in Long Beach; (3) A domestic violence shelter; and (4) A children's social worker for a county agency.

In my first placement as a resource coordinator for incarcerated women, there were no sets of referrals and/or social services laid out in a formal manner. Instead, I traveled throughout the local community and the rest of Los Angeles County in attempts to gather information and resources in order to assist incarcerated women paroled into their former community. My traveling for resources became a repeated, time-consuming process because human service provisions would change—without warning—and so did the regulations that governed how these services were accessed. In addition, I experienced levels of frustration when calling resources and being placed on hold, getting an answering machine, or receiving a dead end. Repeatedly, I would contact social service agencies, document the contacted referrals, paste together a referral list, and run to the copy machine to make copies for the clients I served. I remember seeing the faces of some of these women when I would hand them a pasted-up referral list as they would leave through the front door—and some women had nowhere to go.

In my second placement as a resource coordinator for the homeless population, the process of referral distribution was random. For example, I would pull out a stack of referrals from desk drawers to consolidate referral listings for potential clients. I observed folders within folders that contained many referrals—all of which came in different shades of color, size, and shapes—with each referral having different calendar dates and instructions. I began wondering how one produces and maintains an organized and comprehensive list.

In my following social service placements, the referral distribution was better than the previous placements—but not by much. For example, during placement with a domestic violence shelter, a female client needed referrals. The evening staff handed her a very short list of referrals and told her to come back the next day when the administrative staff would be available to assist in generating a more comprehensive referral list. At that time, I wondered what would happen if she was greeted by her angry husband for leaving his house, and if she would return the next day to obtain the needed referrals.

In another social service placement with

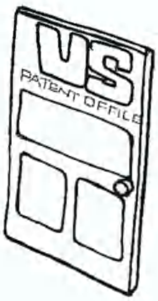
a large child-protective agency (as a child, I was on their case load), I was given a book of referrals, but I saw social workers creating various referral folders to compensate for the lack of referrals maintained in this book. This time, I thought that there may be something better here at this facility.” I left my desk to locate my union steward and asked, “Is there something better than this book and file folders?” Soon after, the union steward instructed the workers to participate in a work action—an official strike. We did, and our clients went without services.

What I have gathered throughout my social service experiences are that referrals are not being adequately shared with those needing services. I began questioning this rationale. Are these agencies holding these referrals and/or resources because cloaking resources under secrecy enables an agency to continuously provide available referrals for their specific clients? Is it their means to an end? Or is it that limited finances and/or strict budgets do not allow these social service agencies to propagate themselves and/or their referrals to other service providers? Is engaging in the design, printing, and mailing of social services flyers to the community and its organizations a financial burden? Do these agencies have access to a sizable funding base to commit to a long-term “marketing” effort for Los Angeles County and to the clients they serve?

I then began reflecting on my childhood and on my employment in social services. I remembered my own complaints—being placed in an environment that placed limits on receiving information and/or referrals. Additionally, while continuing my work with human services, I finally realized that in my line of work, the lack of referrals was a common issue for me and everybody else that worked alongside me. I began to gain an understanding that small non-profits faced similar referral difficulties. This stumped me. I wondered how I could take this concern and locate a universal solution.

This yearning then fueled my desire to look for alternative solutions—one of the many solutions was using computers based on Internet principles. I began visualizing this solution—an idea of building an open-forum community that imparts free referrals to anyone in need. It would not matter if a person were employed for a non-profit or government agency or worked as an independent contractor. Everyone would have free access, as opposed to a “closed” padlocked Intranet service. I began drawing charts and diagrams and researching; reading anything remotely related to the charts and diagrams that I generated.

In addition, I began the exchange of information with colleagues from the government social services and continued this dialogue with classmates while pursuing a MSW. I then reflected on how many people I approached and the responses I received in my attempt to create a referral open-source Internet community. But I could not get a focus on how to motivate people into believing that this conflict deserved a new approach, via computer.



While flipping through a computer magazine, I read an article about an individual gaining credibility and capturing an audience that enabled his vision to become a reality by filing his idea with the United States Patent Office. I researched the patent process and contacted patent attorneys. I made appointments and spoke with experts in the computer field. Later, during a conference with a law firm, I was informed that a patent would be feasible, but it required dedicated work and funding. A year later, the patent process was now on its way and intellectual property rights were documented and filed. Now, with documents in hand, I had a clear vision with potential, filed in the United States Patent Office. I asked for volunteers, and this time around, I received about twenty-two "volunteers" ranging from businesspersons to computer engineers. From this pool, we all took part in outlining objectives and mediating tasks. During this developmental process, I observed that over 50% of this pool had money as a primary focus, while the client remained secondary.

I felt trapped. This idea needed talented people to establish it. However, I realized that it would be difficult to maintain the genuineness of this idea—establishing and linking social service agencies in an open-forum community by utilizing Internet principles—without the constraints of operating business hours and/or accessibility costs. I began asking individuals from this project what they honestly thought about establishing a no-fee-for-referral access Internet framework—meaning that no one would be charged an admission or service fee for the download of human service referrals. For example, during a business meeting, a finance manager discussed how the main thrust of this Internet process is to generate as much revenue as possible. He began writing numerical figures and plans in his notebook. I informed him that his motivation appeared to be different from that of this Internet project—to provide free, accessible referrals. He agreed. Soon afterward, he discontinued communications. At the same time, I observed other "volunteers" beginning to step down. In time, everybody stepped down, except for three individuals. These three are Ray (a rocket scientist—literally), Joseph (an educational therapist), and myself (a children's social worker), along with other "quiet volunteers" participating in this forum when they are able to do so.

Joseph's Experience

Being from a family of 12 children, I learned to maximize resources when there was little left. Whether it was tangible things, such as clothing, food, money, space, or transportation, or non-tangible resources like time and energy, there was always a need to make things stretch. As the middle child, sixth born and third oldest male, it was up to me to create alternatives and to mediate for needs. This type of experience prepared me for what I discovered to be my passion: Social Work.

I began my formal education wanting to serve and help those in need. I began my quest as a teacher, which is a step toward my overall goal—to be an agent of change for those in need. During this experience, I observed how dignity and compassion when providing referrals and services are two very important components. Further, as a "change-agent" I learned that I may make a difference to one individual at a time—by acknowledging the client's right to self-determination.

However, in order for me to assist the individual, I need to have the tools ready to assist. As a worker in a helping field, I was often frustrated when I gathered agency-sponsored referrals that were not in the best interest of the client. Consequently, clients, at times, would not use the referrals or resources that I would provide. At times, the resources were listed but not available. This reinforced my desire to search for a method to develop a qualitative resource that was fluid and could be updated quickly to ensure maximum efficiency. But during this explorative process, I wondered how a fluid qualitative resource could be accomplished, especially when agencies are scattered throughout the county. How would they be able to connect?

Through another working experience at a runaway shelter, I observed how telecommunications—as a resource—is a benefit. I wanted to inform a child's parent that their son was safe, and that a contact would be made the following day to schedule a conference with the intake director and their son. The child's parents, being from another country, did not understand English, which made communication difficult for this English-speaking agency. Using an overseas operator via a telephonic communications network, I was able to have the call reversed and then dial the child's home. Without violating confidentiality, I was able to let them know that their son was no longer living in a dangerous condition and that we would be contacting them to set up an appointment for a reunification conference.

After school I obtained employment with Orange County Children and Family Services as a Bilingual Senior Social Worker working with group-home children. This opened my eyes to the need for resources and how frustrating it is to want to help and not have the resources to do so. I would find myself in a situation time and time again when the client would need to attend a parenting class, attend family or individual counseling, or just find out about housing. Using the current method, a paper trail, I found myself buried in searching directories, trying to find resources for my group-home kids. This reduced the amount of quality time that I was able to provide. Again, I wondered how this problem could be addressed.

Now employed at Orange County Department of Education in Alternative Chapter, Contract Education Support Services (ACCESS), I continue to work for at-risk children. There, I am able to help the students and their families to acquire services to meet their needs. One such situation occurred that I had never experienced before. Working as a school social worker, I was told that a student had committed suicide. Wanting to provide services for his family, I spent over two hours looking through the many pages of the current resource directory and contacting several social service providers, only to find that several of the listings were no longer current or no longer available. I called provider after provider to ensure that they would be able to meet the needs of the student's family. At this point, I reflected how frustrated my recipients must feel. After deliberating I came to the conclusion that referral availability needed to be addressed—but how?

Soon after this experience, I was approached by a social work colleague. She presented a referral availability program by way of diagrams and hierarchical charts—via Internet. These diagrams and charts led me to understand how the Internet process would enable me to do two things: 1) Provide referral and resources for my clients at a moment's notice; 2) Assist and encourage my clients to learn how to access free referrals or resources for their own needs—client's right to self-determination.

Now I was given the opportunity to apply my tools of management to help create a resource locator for the helping profession. Working in the traditional social work fashion, I believe in a grass roots approach to provide for those in the trenches. One of the most challenging things for me was trying to find resources in a timely manner. This can now be accomplished through modern technology at www.resourcescout.com.

Ray's experience

I became involved with ResourceScout (before it had a name) by accident. I had packed up my laptop computer and driven to a coffeehouse in Long Beach in order to get some writing done. As I walked into the coffeehouse I saw a Ruby, an ex-roommate of mine. Since it had been about five years, we both did a couple of double takes before we recognized each other. We chatted about the things that were going on in our lives before Ruby explained her attempts to locate social service resources via computer. Ruby knew that I was a techno-geek and used computers everyday, so she felt comfortable bouncing ideas off me. She was also happy to be able to talk computerese as she had come up against a number of technophobic coworkers. We parted that night with Ruby saying that her group met every Thursday night at 7:30, and that if I wanted to get involved I could just show up and help.

The following Thursday I met a number of the key players. I was impressed with the enthusiasm of the team as well as the absolute desire of the team to improve the process of finding and providing social service resources. Up to this point I had assumed that resources were neatly catalogued by the employing agency or, at least, by like-minded professional social workers. After thinking about it and recalling the difficulty that we had finding food and shelter for runaway youth as part of a volunteer effort that I performed in the mid 1980's, I realized that the search for and provision of social services had not advanced in that 15-year time period. It was time to get involved and see if I could contribute.

At that time in my life, I was struggling with career choices and the need for a greater calling than merely building satellites for a living. There was a desire on my part to make a difference in the world, to help others beyond contributing money to worthwhile causes. Though the ResourceScout effort wasn't going to change the world as the semiconductor or the personal computer had, it was still a means to make a positive contribution.

Throughout my life I have always found trouble whenever I became bored. I recognized that boredom and drudgery were evil. I could also see that professional social workers always having to look for resources was a time-consuming and wearisome task. Putting myself in their shoes, I could see where I would soon become frustrated with trying to locate, verify, and provide resources for clients. If resources were properly catalogued, then it would be relatively simple to let a computer do the searching. This would free up a significant amount of a professional social worker's time for other tasks as well as remove a large source of frustration.

At the beginning of my involvement with ResourceScout, most of my time was devoted to developing the business plan. We wrote, edited, and re-wrote the business plan many times. Along the way, we brainstormed regarding the technology that we needed to perform our intended mission, the opportunities for funding to develop the product, and the specific layout and format of the provision of resources. We knew that we could significantly improve the process; we just needed a chance.

In order to demonstrate the eventual product to potential investors, I put together a working model of the social service resource database and search capability in an Excel spreadsheet and macro. It was clunky, but it gave us the idea of what we needed and what we should avoid. But we also decided that we had to make the demonstration product look, feel, and act like the eventual product.

Hence, it was time to go on the Internet.

On my birthday in early August of 2001, one week before we were to sit down with web programmers, I considered myself an HTML, Javascript, and Perl virgin. I had never written a single statement in any of these languages up to that point. But all computer languages are similar. So within a week we had an Internet-based demonstration that performed geographical and categorical searches of a trial Los Angeles County database. The entire ResourceScout team was shocked that things had come together so quickly. We were lucky because the meeting with the Web programmers showed us how willing people are to take your money and a piece of your company if they think that you need them. And it showed us that they wanted in on the action strictly for the money—completely the opposite of why we were developing the ResourceScout product.

Conflicts

During the development and showing of early versions of our product, we encountered resistance to the idea of online resources. A number of people insisted that a paper-based set of resources was needed. An online set was not equivalent nor was it acceptable. We were surprised at the passion of those who could not get used to the idea of an online set of resources. Everyone needs a comfort zone and for these people, having a paper-based resource list was it. We decided to maintain our long-term vision and continued to develop a set of online resources and associated search capability. Those who needed a paper-based resource list would have to print them from the Internet as they found them.

We also experienced resistance from a number of groups for (initially) unknown reasons. There was a lack of interest, there was open aggression against our product, and there were other reasons proposed that would stall our progress. We took the resistance seriously and had long discussions concerning our outlook, our product, our methods, and our timetable. We felt that we were on the right track: the combination of online resources and a user-friendly search process was the way to go for providing resources. We proceeded with our product and tried to listen to rational arguments while disregarding arguments that had no foundation. Later, we learned that some of these groups had been trying to develop their own set of online resources and resented that they were not going to be first.

A number of people wanted to get on board on this project just to make money off this idea. As is obvious from our narratives, we saw our mission as helping people locate and find resources. We weren't involved in the project in order to generate money as a primary focus or to simply sell the idea to business professionals who would have a different outlook than we had. Along the road we encountered social workers who opposed our idea because they thought that we were in it for the money. We encountered early participants who wanted to generate a sellable business plan and go public with stock offerings, and we also encountered computer hardware and software people who wanted a piece of the action in order to milk it for income. We also reviewed non-profit versus for-profit status. After many intense debates, we chose for-profit status as we felt that this would encourage this project's growth by allowing its founding members to preserve the creative force and to continue in directing the energy for this project to succeed. In each case we had to step back and return to our roots – helping professionals and non-professionals locate resources. The choices that we made reflect this principle.

Barriers

As a team we recognized that we would encounter barriers as we moved forward toward bringing our project to life. The first barrier that we encountered was technology.

We needed to be able to create a project that was not only user friendly but functional in providing the information that was being sought. We borrowed code from other applications that had been proven and time tested. We altered the functionality of the code to perform categorical and geographic searches of the database of social service providers. This allowed us to create a fluid database that can be updated instantly as entries change.

The second barrier we confronted was the task of gathering information and creating a reliable database. With new organizations being created and older agencies no longer available, we wanted to gather as much information as we could to provide resources. Through current information directories, telephone contacts, and surveys, we were able to start building a database to meet the daily needs of social workers and those in the helping professions. For example, we received a large listing of 24-hour crisis hot-line referral telephone numbers. We called each referral at 2:00 am on Friday and Saturday morning to verify that they were available at this time period—as stated in the listing. Some referrals were attached to an answering machine, while some were closed altogether but had a recorded messages regarding their hours of operation, so we called these agencies on Monday morning to verify service provisions hours of operation. Once verified, we were able to list the agencies accordingly. In addition, we are maintaining a schedule to verify referrals—in group clusters—while providing accessible e-mail. Any person may key in a referral error or complaint at any time—24/7—and the referral's corrections are posted as soon as possible. At times it has been difficult for agencies to release listings out of concern for serving their population, and only after we demonstrate the benefits of using a computerized search tool have they relented and chosen to participate. Now their workers can locate resources for their clients faster and the time required to search out local providers in the individual's area has been reduced.

An unanticipated barrier became apparent when it became time to offer the service to public agencies for use. This became a challenge due to concerns of administrators about the ability to control and coordinate resource management. Although there is a way to locate nearby service providers in areas where resources are sparse, the concern is that once a service has been expended, the service would no longer be available to any additional recipients. Only after demonstrating the efficiency of the program were we able to provide a better understanding of the allocations of resources and the inability to spread resources evenly. This also drew attention to the areas that required additional services and the over-saturation of services in areas that were not being used efficiently.

Another unanticipated barrier that required addressing was the ability for this program to sustain itself and ensure its longevity. We dealt with this issue by creating a corporation entity to seek out sustainable funding for the project. Currently the founders, with the goal of creating a tool that could be used by the helping professions and by those in need of provision-related services, have sustained the project. The members have been able to dedicate their own time to create, develop, and produce the tool known as ResourceScout. This project has been a labor of love that brought together individuals from several industries, each member having a single mission: to help others to help themselves and to assist those in the helping profession.

Lastly, an unanticipated barrier was the resistance to change by practicing service providers. Any change creates anxiety and apprehension in people used to doing things a certain way. Changing over to a new process requires an effort to bypass the standard process and apply the new one. The advantage of embracing technology and improving efficiency, after an introductory period of familiarization, advances the user to higher levels of effectiveness.

Ethics

Professional social workers and those in the helping professions have the ethical responsibility to do everything in their power to assist their clients in meeting their needs. In addition to maximizing the care and resource options available for clients, these professionals must find ways to maximize the number of clients that they serve.

We have taken the "maximize clients helped" responsibility and developed a resource to facilitate this obligation. Our mission is to be a catalyst to assist clients in their interdependence with their communities. Furthermore, we feel that in the interest of maximizing social service provision for our clients, it is appropriate that verified resources be disseminated as widely as possible, thus the utilization of the Internet to make resources available to all interested parties.

But it is also the professional social workers' ethical responsibility to do no harm to a client in need. Along those lines we felt that it was our ethical responsibility to contact each resource and attempt to confirm that the information we listed was as accurate as possible. The use of the Internet and a central database facilitates the accuracy of resources by allowing us to rapidly update and change referral information when needed.

We started the development of ResourceScout in Los Angeles County because we were familiar with the territory and the resources. But it also has proven to be a great training ground in the development of the product because it is one of the largest counties in the country. The lessons that we learn and the mistakes that we make in Los Angeles County will guide us as we go statewide and countrywide. For example, we learned that basing the search on Global Position Satellites (GPS) coordinates will be better in the long run due to the possibility of having facilities on city/zip code boundaries. In addition, this computer process does have the capacity to be duplicated and manipulated to fit within the constructs and parameters of a given region while also possessing the ability to expand and incorporate regions nationwide, thus allowing artificial state boundaries to blur as we attempt to help our clients.

Conclusion

It is understood that social service provision, referrals, and resources derive from a framework composed of bureaucratic government agencies, corporations, and non-profit agencies. In addition, this framework is fragmented through various county and local jurisdictions. Consequently, it does not allow for clients or those in the helping professions to maximize referral and resource distribution and accessibility. We, as well as the "silent partners," do understand that to create an open referral/resource Internet center is a monumental task. But, "Let us begin."

CALL FOR NARRATIVES

Special Issue: Forthcoming In 2004

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

In celebration of 50th anniversary of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education,* which desegregated public schools, and the 40th anniversary of the landmark federal Civil Right Act of 1964, which desegregated higher education, ***Reflections*** will publish a special issue on past and contemporary accounts of the struggle to achieve social equality within the helping professions—including their educational and training programs, agencies and professional associations as well as within external communities and organizations, including host universities and colleges. Narratives should focus on the struggle to achieve desegregation, civil rights, racial equality, and nondiscriminatory practices within the helping professions. Original narrative articles and oral history interviews are welcome.

Manuscript submissions should be sent to special issue editor:
John Kayser, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Denver
2148 S. High Street
Denver, CO 80208

Deadline: September 2, 2003.

Integrating Electronic Mail in the Speech Classroom

Lucia Buttaro, Ph.D., Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York

Teaching English as a Second Language to a large group of students in a short amount of time becomes easier with the help of email, on-line chat rooms, and message boards. These devices allow students to feel less self conscious while learning basic language concepts, opening a whole new world of tools for ESL teachers to enhance student learning.

Introduction

In this narrative, I will present the case study of a class in which I integrated ESL (English as a Second Language) theory and methods with "electronic exchange writing" to the benefit of my students' learning. With the help of e-mail, the participants of Kingsborough Community College exchanged ideas and opinions on a variety of topics that, at times, were selected by themselves and, at other times, were selected by me (the Speech professor). They produced an impressive range of written work based on their readings of stories about their own cultures as well as other cultures. The participants improved their command of English; they developed a sense of pride in their own work and enlarged their awareness of themselves as members of an international and global community.

One task cycle often spiraled into the next through content connections (Willis, 1996). Within the task cycle, students individualized topics and carried out the tasks to suit their own interests and learning styles, which gave them the freedom to build language proficiency at an appropriate level. All of these activities helped with oral presentations and face-to-face discussions. The purpose of using computers as part of the course was not to replace other learning methods but rather to provide additional means to accomplish the task, in this case, speaking skills.

In order to provide a framework for this study, I will review some of the literature related to English language skills via the use of e-mail. The Internet represents an abundant informational resource. For example, it has tremendous educational potential in being able to facilitate intercultural exchanges through which students may work collaboratively, first gathering and sharing information, and then discussing and analyzing issues. When used effectively, technology can help to encourage collaborative learning and the development of critical thinking skills, as well help students learn problem-solving techniques (Means et al., 1993).

Several philosophies guide us as we ESL professors make decisions about technology and English language learning. Two of the most important are the ideas of scaffolding and collaborative learning. A key feature of scaffolding is to select goals that build upon everyday experiences of students and provide them with social support. In collaborative learning environments, students learn from each other. Instructors are not expected to have the right answer but instead facilitate the knowledge construction process (Hsi, 1995).

The participants for this study were students who were taking intensive ESL classes at Kingsborough Community College. This means that they had a reading/writing professor and a listening/speaking (speech) professor as well. The participants went to Kingsborough five days a week for a total of twelve weeks during the fall semester of 1999. Participants' ages averaged 25.3 and they represented a total of eight countries: China, Honduras, Russia, Taiwan, Haiti, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Ukraine. The participants met with the speech professor six hours a week; one hour a week was spent in the language laboratory where participants would perform drill exercises on audio tapes to practice the sounds of the English language.

Although in the initial stages participants were together physically because they were taking classes together (ESL and Speech), they took the opportunity to get to know each other and the professor better by engaging in electronic small talk. Students set up e-mail accounts on one of the free e-mail providers on the Internet, the one requirement being the ability to send and receive e-mail attachments. This was necessary because they would be sharing their writing with Internet partners as well as with their professor. Internet discussions were about everyday topics of interest to them; for example, movies, television, fashion, sports, hobbies, and religion. Soon, the focus moved to more demanding issues and assignments. They began to select their own topics based on their perception of issues (e.g., pollution, the ozone layer, comparing the study of the English language in their native countries to that of the United States) which were, in their view, significant, both locally and internationally.

Theoretical Rationale

Participants who are reluctant to speak or cannot respond spontaneously in class are able to improve their speaking after "practicing" in chat mode. While a chat does require a certain degree of spontaneity, the slight time lag means that the participant can plan and correct what is written on the screen, something more difficult to do in oral discussions. Also, chatting via computer has a certain facelessness to it. The screen and the keyboard seem less intimidating than humans do, and shy participants who hesitate to speak in class suddenly have fingers flying across the keyboard. Thoughts and arguments first composed in writing on e-mail give participants time to reflect before they engage in oral work. Whenever we have a class discussion based on e-mail entries, I find that the quality of the arguments is enhanced and thinking is more creative than without this kind of preparation. In addition, those who come to the class computer illiterate often become the most enthusiastic participants during the chat. The Internet can also be used effectively for interactive reading tasks, so students frequently located, read, and reported on articles, information, and resources they discovered on the Internet. I provided guidance in using Internet search engines and on occasion recommended specific web sites. Because students located a variety of materials in these searches, they could later discuss the topic from different perspectives and share a wealth of information.

Interest in listening is augmented as well. The tactile action on the keyboard and the appearance of the entry on the screen make the work easier to read, help thoughts to flow, and enhance the overall thinking-composing-writing process. "Thinking and writing are interdependent processes" (Olson, 1991, p.147) that can be enhanced on a computer. Reading, speaking, and listening skills can also be strengthened because once participants input their entries, their classmates can read them and then respond both in writing and orally. Students reported in their course evaluations that they found the support in technology helpful because it gave them confidence to complete course tasks independently.

If, we, as professors, provide a sequence of topics and integrate them with other aspects of course content, we find that certain topics are more open ended than those that ask for information only. The topics ask the participant to report on something learned, studied, or experienced, then invite the participant to contribute personal opinion or reflection as desired, and this may stimulate the writer to add questions about the information provided by the classmate.

During the twelve weeks of fall 1999, I used topics that would (a) foster cooperative writing and discussions in small groups; (b) introduce word stress rules; (c) reinforce textbook material and class objectives; and (d) reinforce aspects of usage that troubled participants (e.g., definite articles, word order, and adverbial clauses). The first prompt asked participants to introduce themselves to each other, going beyond details of everyday life to include a focus on their previous language study and how English might present difficulties to any learner. On another prompt, participants collected examples of English slang and idioms. Questions flew back and forth. Why did a character on a TV program say knife point and not knife edge? Another participant had heard the term "sleepy elevator music" and asked for clarification. The sources for their slang and idiomatic expressions were rich and varied: radio, movies, television, audio and video tapes, compact and video disks, newspapers, reference tools, magazines, billboards, posters, and mail flyers.

As participants send messages back and forth, they gradually construct an area of given or shared knowledge. The slang posting allowed participants to draw on their own interests in movies and music, to share these interests, and to identify specific cultural differences and similarities in language use. They had a range of models for emulation, they could work with information given previously or old information, and they could also offer new information to each other. One of my goals has always been to enhance cultural awareness, and I found that the computer culture facilitated this. Students would send me e-mails describing their cultures and countries. It was a delight to download images of Bangladesh or to read a poem they had written to a boyfriend or girlfriend. They shared feelings about the class. They would ask for clarification of ideas or suggest topics for debate. There was a feeling of comfort in knowing that they were not being "judged," Slowly but surely, they stopped introducing their passages with "Please forgive me, my English is so poor." Or "Excuse my English, next time I try to improve."

Using a combination of self-selected and instructor guided materials, the course capitalized on the rich language resources available on the Internet and used them in authentic tasks and texts. Students were encouraged to challenge their language skills by keeping track of new vocabulary and structures that they learned from the Internet. Some Internet tasks were simulations of real life activities, such as locating housing in another borough or comparing products through different e-businesses.

In the early stages, it became clear that participants were benefiting from a communication between themselves and a "real audience." Their willingness to make use of critical thinking skills and their ability to manage whole and meaningful texts began to increase. The following was observed: Participants (a) learned to look at and assess their work and the work of others from different perspectives; (b) learned to write clear, forceful, and effective prose to convey their intended ideas; (c) gained a rich insight into each others' lives and the culture of their respective countries; (d) gained a better understanding of the use of the computer as a communicative as well as a learning tool; and (e) discovered that written exercises helped with oral communication.

Conditions for an Ideal Learning Environment

In the SLA (second language acquisition) and English as a Second Language (ESL) literatures, research repeatedly points to four conditions that, when present in the language learning environment in one form or another, support optimal language learning. These conditions are summarized briefly below:

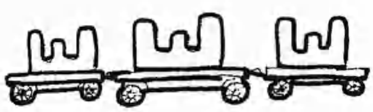
Condition Number One: Opportunities for learners to interact and negotiate meaning with an authentic audience.

Many researchers have noted that learning is essentially interaction between students and others (Ahmad, Corbett, Rogers, & Sussex, 1985; Kelman, 1990; Levin & Boruta, 1983). If learning is such a social process, then social interaction is necessary for learning (Vygotsky, 1978); this is especially true for second language learners striving for communicative competence. "Social interaction" implies the negotiation of meaning. Other researchers have found that language learners must be involved in purposeful interaction, which includes a real audience that is actively involved with the learners (Pica, 1987; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Webb, 1982, 1985). The implication, then, is that learner involvement in authentic social interaction in the target language (TL) with a knowledgeable source (e.g., the teacher, another learner, a technology, a family doctor, or other who can negotiate in the TL) facilitates language acquisition. Participants began to focus on sharing knowledge, being heard, and getting the message across and not so much on grammar or punctuation. They were writing not only for me (the professor) but for each other as well.

Condition Number Two: Learners are involved in authentic tasks, which promote exposure to and production of varied and creative language

Authentic, in this context, means something that students know something about and are interested in that has a real purpose behind it (Reid, 1989; Roen, 1989). Johnson (1991) explains that an authentic task must provide learners with a reason to share ideas and information, preferably within a system that allows problem solving, as studies have found that learners interact more when working on problem-solving tasks than on other activities. Grammar drills, tasks common to many ESL classrooms and software, are not authentic tasks in this sense.

Today, the significance of computer-mediated communication in society and in the classroom is even greater. Some 3.4 trillion e-mail messages were sent in the United States alone in 1998, or more than 10,000 for every man, woman, and child in the country ("eMarketer Tallies the Number of E-Mail Messages," 1999). E-mail is also becoming a major form of business communication. In fact, in one survey of U.S. business managers, e-mail actually ranked higher than telephone communication or even face-to-face communication as a frequent means of workplace interaction (E-Mail Tops Telephone, 1998). With e-mail becoming a principal form of communication for business, academic, and civic affairs, learning how to communicate and collaborate well in this medium must become a goal in its own right.



Spolsky (1989) claimed that "whatever the language learner brings to the task, whether innate ability, a language acquisition device, attitudes, previous knowledge, and experiences of languages and language learning, the outcome of language learning depends in large measure on the amount and kind of exposure to the target language" (p.166). An authentic task alone, therefore, may not be sufficient; varied and creative language implies a diversity of tasks and sources and learner use of both receptive and productive language skills that take into account the multiple learning styles and preferences among learners (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The computer allowed participants to become more active. They were not empty vessels waiting to be filled with English. They were curious about topics or expressions they had heard on TV or the radio. I learned about what sitcoms they watched, which ones they preferred, and how they reacted to new words or phrases. They watched *Seinfeld* and *Frazier* but felt connected somehow to *Third Rock from the Sun*. When I asked why, I was told that the aliens were immigrants to a new land so they could relate to the characters.

Condition Number Three: Learners have opportunities to formulate ideas and thoughts and intentional cognition is promoted.

Learners need adequate time and feedback, both of which facilitate the formulation of ideas. They must also be given the opportunity to reflect on and communicate their ideas; however, presenting learners with opportunities to formulate ideas and thoughts does not imply that they will take these opportunities or make the best of them. During the learning process, learners must be "mindful" (Zellermayer, Salomon, Globerson & Givon, 1991); that is, they must be motivated to take the opportunities presented to them and to be cognitively engaged. A certain degree of guidance, whether from peers or others, may facilitate learning and promote mindfulness (Zellermayer, Salomon, Globerson, & Givon, 1991). I learned that part of the problem stemmed from the fact that participants were not doing enough writing even when provided ample opportunities to do so in class and at home. These writers lacked extended experience with writing and needed a great deal of practice to achieve fluency and clarity.

Addressing the challenge to get participants to care about what they were writing was also crucial. Recycling key concepts and vocabulary allowed the participants to develop familiarity with the topic about which they wrote or spoke. I found that this type of context for language development supported learning over the course of a whole semester.

Because of large classes and curricular activities, teachers and individual students often have insufficient opportunities to communicate in the classroom. Likewise, students and teachers may not communicate outside class because of a lack of suitable office hours, busy schedules, or simply shyness on the part of the students. E-mail can open up an extra channel for teacher-student communication. Teachers who use e-mail with students need to be aware, however, of the time commitment it may involve. Many students who might hesitate to ask questions in person are much more forthright via e-mail. Over time, teachers gain experience in deciding when to give a full reply over e-mail and when to simply acknowledge the concern and save it to discuss at the next class meeting.

E-mail is useful for informal consultation. If students know that teachers are willing to communicate with them via e-mail, they will have excellent opportunities for *authentic* communication. Students may have minor questions that they would hesitate to mention in person, but for which an e-mail message seems to be an appropriate way to obtain the answer. My students also e-mail me to set up appointments, let me know why they have been absent, inquire about assignments, or submit their homework.

Condition Number Four: An atmosphere with ideal stress/anxiety level in a learner-centered classroom.

Before learners can be mindfully engaged and willing to communicate and share their ideas, they must experience an optimal level of anxiety in the language learning environment. This means that feelings of worry or apprehension must be facilitative, rather than debilitative (Brown, 1987; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Lozanov, 1978). Technology use can assist in the creation of an optimal stress environment by creating a learner-centered classroom, which implies that learners have some control over their learning (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Kremers, 1990; Robinson, 1991). Kreeft-Peyton (1990) suggests that giving more control to the learner removes the confounds of teacher; learner; and school personalities, styles, and goals.

Due to the familiarity with the content and their sense of expertise about it, most participants wrote with newfound confidence. As a result, they moved from stitching together bits and phrases to writing with fuller expression, going beyond the plain listing of facts to a more richly synthesized presentation. Because of their confidence, they were able to take risks that resulted in a more creative and effective presentation. Ultimately, their speech improved as they used language for purposes that both interested and made sense to them.

I have found that electronic dialogue journals achieve the same benefits as or greater benefits than paper journals do, with more convenience and spontaneity. Students can easily send their journals at any time of day or night, and I can respond at my convenience as well. A good electronic management system on both ends allows me and my students to keep excellent, searchable records of the correspondence. Wang (1993), in fact, in research on the differences between the discourse in the dialogue journals written on paper and those sent via e-mail, found that students wrote more text, asked more questions and used language functions more frequently than did students writing on paper.

Briefly, there are many strategies by which the four conditions presented above can be operationalized in the second language classroom, including using group-work techniques, providing concrete opportunities to interact in English, focusing on survival skills and functions, using problem solving, providing a multitude of media, recycling content in various ways, and providing open-ended opportunities for meaningful language use. In addition, providing adequate time on tasks, adequate feedback, prompting, and other assistance; and adequate information and learner opportunities to choose and participate support the conditions.

It is very important to think carefully about integrating electronic discussion with other classroom activities. Electronic discussion can be an excellent follow-up to or a preparation for an oral discussion with the teacher planted firmly at the center of the room.

It is also important to avoid correction of students' errors in electronic discussion. Rather, I model correct language for them in all my responses. Also, I analyze the transcripts to gain information about the students' language level and needs. I prepare lessons based on some of the linguistic features noted in the students' written communication or even have the students work in groups to analyze linguistic features of their writing (Kelm, 1995).

I would recommend that participants write as they would in a dialogue, letting their ideas flow. As one participant put it, "It's like a public journal." Since everyone is part of the audience, participants do take more care in their writing than in a traditional journal. One participant said, "I'm conscious of who I'm writing to and because of the amount of people who have access to the computer, I think of how what I'm saying will be reacted to." Another participant said, "I tend to proofread more when my writing is on the screen." A fourth participant said, "You can see the grammatical errors more easily on the computer. It reminds me textbook of verbs, tenses. I am very visual." I try to give participants topics of high interest so they will write about them.

For some assignments, I am the main audience. When I respond to entries, I focus on content, looking at logic and thinking and prodding participants to probe further. I always ask questions or express opinions for participants to respond to during the next session. In my responses, I model grammatical structures with which participants have trouble or on which we have just begun working. I also use new terminology to help enlarge vocabulary range. Participants are required to complete all e-mail works, which are corrected, and the grade is given in class when they give five-to ten minute speeches.

For other assignments, participants are the principal audience. They type in their entries, read a specific number of other entries, and express their opinions about them via e-mail. I often use this type of assignment to let the class decide on oral discussion topics.

I usually ask participants to make an entry during their free time within so many days. Then, either I have the participants read all the entries on the computer screen or I make printouts of all entries, passing them out. Participants silently gather the opinions of all the classmates and have time to reflect on them. Participants who are usually timid about participating in class became more active participants. They had had a chance to first get their thoughts on paper and to think through their own and others' opinions. Such a process, while time consuming, ensured that everyone was engaged in writing about the topic and in participating in the class discussion.

The rewards are great, in that participants learn from realistic and stimulating examples, which provide a focus for discussions. I was removed from the responsibility of being the sole supplier, interpreter, and/or judge of language use.

Computers and communication are closely interrelated, and a marriage of the two can allow participants to organize and process their knowledge at the touch of a keyboard button. We have found that computer technology presents both participants and professors/teachers with exciting and rewarding challenges.

W. B. Yeats said that "education is not the filling of the pail, but the lighting of a fire." In my experience, there is no better means to light students' fire than to involve them in authentic and challenging communication, inquiry, and problem solving using computers and the Internet. To accomplish this, I had to rethink traditional ways of teaching. I had to engage in acts of creative imagination and ask my students to do the same. The positive results achieved are sometimes matched by the frustrations of technical problems or the difficulty of trying open-ended tasks in narrowly defined academic time periods. But I believe the process is worthwhile, and necessary, if I am to help students achieve their full potential in the age of communication technology.

For the participants, there were benefits to their knowledge of technology, English as a second language, and the world. They were able to compare and contrast their experiences as immigrants to those of Liu Zongren. Also, since they were exposed to other participants who came from different nations, they shifted from being ethnocentric to more cultural relativists. This means that they became less judgmental of others in the class who did things a little differently and expressed their opinions according to what they were experiencing. Hence, they learned that there are no right or wrong answers; people are just different.

It was rewarding for me to confirm the hope that, through the use of literature, participants could gain an understanding of the world far removed from their own reality. For both participants and professors/teachers, this approach to learning and literature differed from conventional classroom-based instruction, in that the work evolved from the participant's own experiences and reactions and took them beyond the confines of Kingsborough Community College and their cultural boundaries.

E-mail encourages participants to use computers in realistic situations so that they can develop communicative and thinking skills. Even if we are technologically phobic language professors/teachers, we can become adept at engaging participants to use e-mail in skill development and the most timid language participants can come alive while creating meaningful communications via the keyboard and screen.

Most of the participants in my class are computer literate in word processing. However, because word processing alone has certain limitations, using e-mail can be more effective. As one participant put it, "It is a very realistic form of communication because it is real conversation about real, relevant topic with real people." In addition to developing writing skills, e-mail activities further develop participants' reading comprehension and thinking skills. With follow-up classroom activities, speaking and listening skills are also enhanced. Although most of the participants studied English in their own countries, they were not used to conversing and thinking in English. What made the project a success was the fact that the Speech professor could be contacted at school, via phone at home, and via e-mail. With the America On Line system, participants and professors/teachers send private messages and make public entries.

An additional feature of e-mail is chat mode, in which two or more participants use the computer simultaneously to "talk back and forth." Participants give opposing sides to argue and defend. Reactions to having such a discussion debate in chat mode have been surprisingly positive. Students have to type in information to support their idea and persuade the other participant. This lets them think more about their environment and improves their skill of debate. I thought that debate, composing, and thinking skills would be enhanced, but I was unsure if chat mode would have any effect on speech/debate skills. One participant said:

> *"I feel very free when communicating in chat mode. And lots of things which are difficult to say can be expressed by chat mode. Actually, my partner and I just like arguing and we say lots of things to make the other angry. It's quite funny I think. And I don't know why, I can think a lot of things when using computer talk. I find it easier to think on chat mode than in an actual conversation. Also, chat mode helps my writing and thinking because it cultivates the ability to think and compose spontaneously."*

Assessing Assignments

The e-mail assignments become part of the participants' portfolios and self-assessment process. All participants have portfolios containing all e-mail entries. Based on their portfolios and oral/aural work, they write a self-assessment in which they comment on their language skills and suggest strategies for improving these skills for the next assignments. Afterwards, each participant and I have a conference in which we discuss his or her perceptions as well as my own. In terms of e-mail entries, we look at how the participant's thinking and debate skills have developed during the semester. I keep a separate printout of participants' entries arranged chronologically. By reading through these during the course of the year, I can track class progress as a whole and see where I need to reinforce grammatical structures and vocabulary. Participants are eager to communicate their thoughts in comprehensible language, knowing that what they write will be read by their classmates and me. They are also clearly interested in reading, understanding, and responding to what their classmates have to say. All students who participated in this project benefited from enhanced performance, increased motivation, and greater confidence in their ability to handle academic tasks. The students marveled at the resources available to them via the Internet, and, as they gradually became more comfortable and competent with the technology, they also benefited from sharing information and opinions with peers and learning from not only their professor but also each other. If we are in a chat mode, all eyes are glued to the screen during the composing and receiving stages.

Conclusion

The highlight of the course was an exchange with a key-pal (a pen pal with whom one corresponds electronically by e-mail). The key-pal correspondence provided students with real opportunities for authentic and meaningful communication and it also presented opportunities for cultural exchange (Lafford & Lafford, 1997; Ma, 1996; & Meaher & Castanos, 1996). The key-pal correspondence offered a useful way for students to increase their pragmatic competence, such as using appropriate polite forms, engaging in small talk, and experiencing various levels of formality.

Students often completed reflective tasks by writing in an e-journal, an interactive communication via e-mail with the instructor. The instructor could respond quickly and efficiently to each individual, asking for further information and reflection by integrating comments into the students' own electronic entries.

The chat rooms gave students opportunities to communicate informally with classmates. In addition, the chat rooms enabled students to participate in simultaneous discussion (with only short delays) rather than experience the delays of letter correspondence. Students responded to task prompts posted by the instructor and also replied to their classmates' commentaries.

Students' responses throughout the course reflected keen awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in the English language and their interest in making suggestions for improving course content and procedures. They commented that they learned new vocabulary and language structures from a variety of tasks and new idioms from their key-pals. Since many of the tasks were open ended in nature, students felt that they could work at their own pace and level of proficiency, but for many, the tasks took longer than the recommended time.

The tasks using technology were perceived as useful, interesting, and challenging. Most commented that the use of computers was a modern and effective way of performing tasks, and they enjoyed communicating with the instructor via e-mail because they could receive timely feedback. Students enjoyed key-pals as well because these provided them opportunities for meaningful communication, insights into a foreign culture (in this case, an American one), and opportunities to reflect on their own cultures. Combining face-to-face discussions with reflective writing or oral production activities gave them the courage to embrace fluency in the English language.

As discussed throughout this article, the Internet is dramatically altering how people read, write, and communicate. The Internet is so vast and complex that learning how to incorporate it effectively into the language classroom can be quite challenging. The challenge seems even more daunting because of how quickly the Internet continues to change. For all these reasons, learning how to use the Internet for teaching has been compared to trying to get a drink of water from a gushing fire hydrant! Nevertheless, I believe that keeping some basic principles in mind makes the process simpler and clearer. These principles relate to androgogy rather than to methodology, and in that sense they should remain useful guides even as particular tools change.

Success in today's Internet-connected global society—whether in the business world, academia, or civic affairs—depends in large measure on the ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures and to interpret information from varied cultural contexts. This goal, too, should be consciously integrated into the Internet-enhanced classroom.

Finally, the vast amount of information available on the Internet means that critical learning and literacy skills are more important than ever before. More than ever, reading now means reading between the lines. We, as educators, should help learners think critically at the micro-level, for example, by analyzing the perspectives and biases of individual World Wide Web sites. We should also help learners think critically at the macro-level by considering how new information technologies are helping reshape social, political, and economic contexts in a broader sense.

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PERSPECTIVES FROM A SOCIAL WORK EDUCATOR ON EMBRACING TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

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The following narrative describes the author's perspectives on embracing technological change in a university setting. The application of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory is used to understand faculty responses to technological innovations in teaching and learning.

Introduction

As I sit down to write this narrative, I look out my office window on a college campus and am amazed by how much technology is embraced by the students I teach. Many students now carry cell phones with attachments in their ears, personal digital assistants (PDA), notebook computers with compact disc players (CD), and digital video recorders (DVD) as a regular part of their backpack. This is the net generation of students who are "growing up digital" (Tapscott, 1999). Although I am not a product of this generation, I am not that old and often wonder how I completed school without all these technology tools. However, as an educator of this digital generation, I am excited about the possibilities for teaching and learning that these new technology tools provide.

I often think about how to teach these new digital age students as well as help them understand the role technology will play in their lives as a helping professional. Students who choose a helping profession want to work with people and issues that affect them. In the classes I teach, many students state that they are often not interested in computers and other technology tools since the skills they want to learn involve interactions with people, not machines. However, I have observed that most of these students embrace technological change despite these feelings. In a course called "Computers in Social Work," many students express initial trepidation at the thought of using computers in a lab setting on a weekly basis. However, they easily overcome that trepidation and often amaze me with their understanding and use of technology in ways that enhance both their personal and professional life.

The university is often thought of as a dynamic place that embraces new ideas and technological change. It seems to be the ideal place to utilize technology tools and motivate students. As faculty members, we should lead the way for our students to embrace technology in their learning and professional work.

My University Experience

I completed my graduate education in the late 90s and relied heavily on the personal computer, word processing, and statistical software for my coursework. This would be considered an advanced use of technology when I compare my experience to colleagues who completed their education in previous

decades. None of my courses used any other form of technology beyond these tools. With the advances in technology, it is not uncommon for courses to have web-based teaching and learning activities and to deliver course instruction entirely over the Internet. I cannot believe how rapidly things have changed since transitioning from student to educator, and I am amazed at the impact these technology tools are having on my teaching and learning. With my interest in the use of technology, I was hired in my first teaching position to help faculty use technological innovations in their teaching and learning. As a new faculty member, I found this to be a difficult challenge as many of my colleagues were not interested in any use of technology. Clearly, others must embrace these technological tools for technological advances to occur. Rogers' (1962) Diffusion of Innovation Theory helped me to understand the faculty response to embracing technological change and how to best support them in using it.

Application of Diffusion of Innovation Theory Research to Faculty Responses

Diffusion theory research is helpful in understanding the roles that characteristics of adopters have in the diffusion of a new innovation. Rogers (1962; 1983) classified five categories of adopters in diffusion research: 1) innovators, 2) early adopters, 3) early majority adopters, 4) late majority adopters, and 5) laggards. These five categories apply to my experiences of faculty responses to embracing technological change in teaching and learning in a university environment.

Innovators

Rogers (1962; 1983) described innovators as venturesome, daring, and risk takers. They tend to understand and apply complex technical knowledge and are often self-taught. In terms of technology use in education, many of them taught themselves to write code for web pages and to use a variety of software programs. Many of the individuals I worked with developed online courses and used web-based teaching and learning activities long before the technology and software made it easier to do so. They tended to be challenged by newness and forged ahead on their own, with or without institutional support. Many of the faculty that fit in this category love technology and were motivated by the intrinsic challenge of something new and different rather than by extrinsic rewards such as tenure and promotion. Often, they are considered the computer or technology experts of the department. Innovators are important to the start of any change in a social system. I have found them to be the forerunners in getting students and other faculty involved in thinking about technology and how it can be used. I was fortunate to be mentored and influenced by individuals in this category during my graduate education. In graduate school, various faculty mentors encouraged me to become interested in technology, which has influenced my work in using technology tools with students now. Interestingly, as influential as these innovators were, they were not responsible for helping other faculty members and students embrace technological change because they were often seen as different from others and possessing a knowledge and skill not needed by everyone.

Early Adopters

According to Rogers (1962; 1983), early adopters have many of the same characteristics as innovators but with an important difference. They often have a larger degree of concern for social acceptance. Early adopters are certainly influenced by innovators but tend to have a greater degree of opinion leadership than innovators, and they are often role models within a social system and respected by their peers. Early adopters are motivated to change if they see an advantage over other methods. For example, faculty members' support of and interest in a technology tool such as *Blackboard* (course management software that supports a web-based learning environment) depend upon the extent to which they perceive it as offering a relative advantage over current teaching methods. If they do not see an advantage or if they see the software as too complex, they will not use the software. For example, a couple of faculty (whom I consider early adopters) began to use the *Blackboard* software regularly and found it useful. They began to tell other colleagues and gradually more acceptance and use of the technology tool began. In helping faculty to embrace the use of technology in their teaching and learning, I have begun to see the influence these individuals have on embracing technological change. I have spent a great deal of time with these early adopters, helping them learn and use *Blackboard,* as many of them possess interest in technology but not expertise. This type of specialized support is useful in the long run as these individuals were often the ones who would help get the change process started. Although early adopters are considered important to the beginnings of any change in a social system, Rogers (1962) found that the long-term success of any innovation depends on the active participation of both early and late majority adopters.

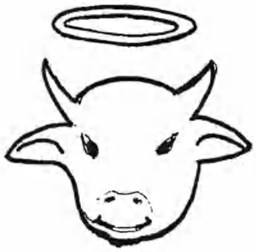
Early and Late Majority Adopters

Rogers (1962) described early and late majority adopters as interacting frequently with peers, seldom holding positions of opinion leadership, and deliberating carefully before adopting a new idea or innovation. These two groups differ from innovators and early adopters because they are generally the majority in a social system. Rogers (1962) described early and late majority adopters as ones who respond to pressure from peers but are skeptical and cautious when approaching change or innovation. Thus, this group of adopters tends to be more risk adverse and proceeds with caution.

According to Rogers (1983), if the members in these two categories have adopted an innovation, diffusion has reached a saturation point. Therefore, widespread adoption of an innovation occurs when it reaches early and late majority adopters. I have found Rogers' description of early and late majority adopters as characteristic of many of the faculty with whom I have worked. Most faculty need to connect the use of technology to the traditional system that they view as already working well. Hence, it has been difficult to get support for technology-based teaching and learning because many do not see how to integrate some of the technological innovations in a system they perceive as going well. For example, I recently presented to a group of colleagues information about the use of *Blackboard* in teaching. Most of the group responded fairly critically as they could not see how technology could enhance what they are currently doing. Since this group of adopters is a large group, it is important that they get group support and training and influence from innovators and early adopters rather than from laggards, or the diffusion of an innovation will not succeed.

Laggards

The most interesting group in any social system are what Rogers (1962) described as laggards. Laggards are people with no opinion leadership and a point of reference in the past. These individuals tend to be suspicious of innovations and can make the innovation-decision process lengthy. The term "laggards" has a negative connotation, and indeed I have



found these people to be the most resistant to change. Their resistance can take many forms. For example, some individuals responded to the introduction of e-mail with "Do not want it, do not have it, do not need it, and will not use it even if I have to." Others have many sacred cows that they consider important to the profession and their values: I have heard some people state, "Social work is a profession about people and no technology will ever replace that." Others have questioned whether the use of technology in education and social work is academic scholarly work in which social workers should be involved. Yet, uses of technology for databases, communication tools such as e-mail, virtual support groups, online courses, and counseling all have a place in the helping professions today. Laggards can be very opinionated as well as opposed to any technological changes in teaching and learning. These faculty have been the most difficult to work with in terms of embracing technological changes for teaching and learning because they see no value in the innovation. Naturally, if they do not value the innovation, they will be resistant to trying it and using it. Rogers (1962) stated that this group often never accepts the innovation until peer or social system pressure forces them to.

Lessons Learned

Many technological changes in education are a result of innovators by whom I was fortunate to be mentored during my graduate education. These mentors help me to see the advantages of using technology in my teaching and learning. They also helped me envision how technology could be used in practice by exposing me to skills and training as a part of my education. Their enthusiasm and skill helped me to learn new skills about technology that I did not possess. Now, due to their influence, I am an early adopter of these technological changes and am excited to share the possibilities with my colleagues, many of whom are laggards. I realize that I have some unique technology skills that I gained from these innovators that I can share with my colleagues. Skeptical faculty help me keep a critical perspective about the use of any innovation and not get carried away with enthusiasm for technological change. They have helped me to make sure that I do not let these technological changes drive good teaching practice. These colleagues remind me of important social work issues, such as the digital divide and the value of face-to-face interactions that technology cannot replace.

At the same time, I remind these skeptics that technology can provide something new and exciting along with advantages over previous methods of teaching and learning. For example, distance education courses via interactive television are now considered a fundamental aspect of our social work program, as well as many others across the country. When educators recognized that delivering education via television was compatible with their own values and philosophies about teaching, they were more likely to adopt it. When they discovered that teaching over interactive television was not as difficult as they feared, they were able to experiment and eventually adopt and support.

In my experience of working with educators and trying to get them to embrace technological change, I have found it helpful if they recognize which category of adopter they are and verbalize it. It is much easier to deal with resistance to change when it is verbalized. I often have exchanges with colleagues who gladly tell me they are laggards and cannot give up some sacred cows. It is a relief to faculty when I acknowledge these feelings are acceptable as change often brings resistance in some form. I have learned that this type of exchange is much more productive in getting support, interest, and involvement in a new technological innovation.

Summary

I have learned that change is a process that involves people, ideas, and innovation. In my own involvement in faculty development in a university environment, I am not too concerned if the innovation fails or is not accepted by adopters as it may mean that it was not useful in the first place. I do know that it is important that we recognize technological change and innovation as a part of the helping professions. It is up to people in all adopter categories to figure out the best way to use it. I am challenged by all the innovations and look forward to how I can embrace technological change in the 21st century.

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Call for Narratives

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Manuscripts are due by September 30th, 2003

A Distant Perspective on Distance Coordination

Gary Bess, Ph.D., California State University, Chico

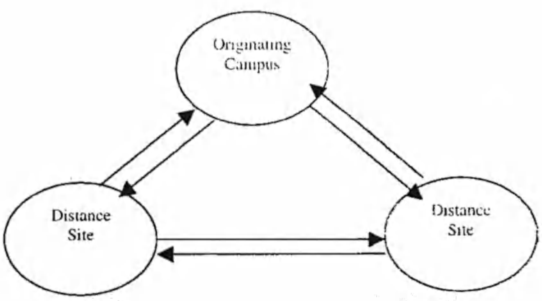
This narrative is a personal account detailing the challenges of implementing a rural Distance Education program sponsored by an urban university. The author discusses how he brought opposing elements together to create a successful educational program.

For six years, between 1995 and 2001, I served as the site coordinator on a rural northern California campus for a pilot distance education Masters in Social Work program offered by California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). We were one of two receiving sites during the first three-year round, and one of two paired sites (one of four remote campuses) during the second offering. The local university had offered an accredited BSW program since 1957, and the distance program was viewed as an opportunity to test the waters of MSW interest and resources

A network of fiber optic cables links the California State University (CSU) system, thus making it possible for real-time audio-video transmissions. A professor in a classroom at Long Beach in southern California, for example, was able to present to classes of students at two remote sites, seeing and hearing students in the distant classroom, and they the professor.

My students could also see their counterparts in the other remote classroom and be seen by them as well. By viewing one of four classroom wall-mounted monitors and by speaking into desk-mounted microphones, students could address their professor and respond to comments by students at the other remote site. Confused? See Diagram A for clarification

Diagram A



Though the computer-age term *multi-tasking* was not part of my vocabulary during this period, on reflection it resonates strongly as an apt descriptor, given that site coordinators were assigned — perhaps by default — multiple roles. In many ways we were the local embodiment of the student affairs coordinator, field liaison, teaching aid, community-relations coordinator, and admissions director. I also taught several of the macro-focused courses. Though administrative direction was forthcoming from the Long Beach campus, our remoteness – 500 miles to the north of Long Beach – required me to sometimes ad-lib my role.

Having obtained a distant and detached perspective, and no longer engaged as an employee of CSULB, I can take a fresh look at this experience with an eye toward preparing others for this or comparable roles.

Big versus Small

Working in a small rural town as a social work professional is unlike working in the big city. I know because I've lived and worked in both. In the city, you have counterparts – others that do what you do or at least perform similar kinds of work. You are not one of a kind. You can disappear when not on duty and not worry about being approached by a prospective applicant or his or her friend, colleague, or parent. Your social work coordinator's persona is invisible in the city; there is no need to whisper across tables in restaurants about your crazy day for fear of being overheard by someone with an interest in what you do. Though confidentiality is always a value to uphold, the likelihood of encountering someone who knows me is substantially diminished in the city.

Conversely, in a small town, there is often just one of everything: one Taco Bell, one Radio Shack, and one distance education coordinator. I'm a local personality of sorts, albeit in a small pond. Those interested in obtaining a master's degree in social work call me. Their choices are few – they know it before they place the call. In addition to the part-time and weekend distance program that I represent, they can commute to an MSW degree-granting program, 85 miles to the south, though the commute can be longer if they live farther north or along a country road. If accepted to that program, they likely will need to attend full-time – a difficult commitment for returning students. Or, they can pursue a master's degree in a different area, aware that it possibly may not be as personally or professionally fulfilling.

In my small community, I'm a local resource with extra-community ties. With my connections to Long Beach, I'm not encumbered with the usual challenge to my credibility that local experts face – I'm credible at home as well as away.

The calls from prospective students often concern questions about the program: "How long is the program?" "When are courses offered?" or, "What is the field requirement?" These I can quickly answer.

There are other questions, however, which are a bit thornier: "How difficult is the program?" "Can I work and go to school?" "How much reading is there?" These questions I dread. First, they are difficult to answer as they reflect on individual capacity. I offer my perception, saying that the odds are against success if students work. I profile former students that tried. The caller always assumes that he or she will escape the odds. I never truly found an appropriate response, maybe because I never felt comfortable saying what I actually believe.

First, I don't respect this all-to-common line of questioning. In fact, I resent it. I resent the value implicit in the question: "What is the minimal amount that I'll need to do to earn my diploma?" While the public relations role that I play says that I should respond with awareness that my comments could appear in tomorrow's newspaper – another dimension of small town life — the professional in me says that I don't want to invite into our fold those that won't give their *all*.

Yet, perhaps their naiveté is a reflection of their absence of professional socialization, and perhaps their attitudes will change. Maybe I also see in them what I recall in myself. Though I didn't dare ask how much work was involved, I silently questioned whether I had what it takes to be a social worker (e.g., smarts, resources, or innate qualities). I also know that in a different context, the espoused value – expediency – can be important to social work. Reducing red tape or improving access to services is central to social work. Can this minimalist approach be redirected to benefit clients in their charge?

I never resolved this question.

Multiple Roles

Another factor is the autonomy of my coordinator position, necessitated by the distance between the main campus and my remote site, the convergent roles that I played, and the unpredictable circumstances that required on-the-spot improvisation. I personally liked being autonomous. I liked doing my job without having to regularly check in. I made myself available to students before and after class every Saturday and was able to reflect on policies that affect them without feeling duty bound to support or uphold them without commentary. It is easier to take this approach when you are not on the campus.

My irreverent attitude toward policies and procedures, something that I didn't readily disclose, was often challenged by the role that I played. This attitude probably has less to do with social work and more to do with who I am. Being out of earshot of the main campus made it easier for me to speak my mind, and to reframe and interpret policies.

Being a one-person shop has other advantages too. You know what is going on – or, at least, no one knows more than you. Questions are brought to you from students, faculty, and administration, as you are the fulcrum of the hourglass, sifting and filtering grains of information. Students ask: "What is the thesis approval process?" You find out. Professors ask: "How's the course going?" You provide feedback. The field department needs student field evaluations, and you call them in.

If you are concerned that your work should be in lockstep with school policies and procedures, you likely are not suited for the role of site coordinator. There are too many tasks to master, with each having separate sets of requirements to learn, and if you wish to fully rely on a canned approach, distance programs won't support this.

Student Relations and Faculty Relations

There is also an interpersonal dynamic to the distance education work. You need to like people and to be able to work well with them. Since this is a three-year program, relationships need to be sustained over that period of time. You see the same 20 students in each class for three years. You place them in their field assignments and you work with them on their thesis. You see them grow and you see them resist growth. You learn about their families, the sacrifices they make to obtain their education, and the stressors that can take their toll.

You also become acquainted with the faculty, their styles of teaching, and their expectations of students as well as of you. An interesting ethic of university education, which presents a distance education challenge, is that the classroom is sacrosanct. The instructor is in charge. There is no interference by university representatives, other faculty, outside administrators, or even a distance coordinator.

In the distance program model, however, faculty rely upon the distance coordinator for distribution of materials, test giving, amplification of concepts, and coordination of in-class activities. The distance coordinator also is a barometer of the classroom – a resource that faculty can choose to use or not. Teaching face to face in a conventional classroom allows instructors to gauge the class' mood, to take its temperature of comprehension, and to informally meet with students before or after class to answer specific questions or to discuss class performance.

Though distance students can call and email their instructors, this isn't quite the same thing. And during this time frame, not all students were on email, as we assume today; thus communication vis-à-vis email wasn't the norm. Similarly, calling an instructor at the university, which could work for some, was also an uncomfortable experience for students who hold their professors in awe – or at least are concerned that they not seem foolish or whiny by calling.

It is easier to have an on-the-spot encounter by waiting in line before or after class. So, it was not uncommon for some students to present their questions to the distance coordinator in lieu of their instructor. My challenge in fielding their queries was to help where I could but not to provide information that could be undone or contradicted by the instructor. He or she would determine the final grade based on his or her directions and assignments – not mine.

In some instances, I'd provide advice or direction, suggesting that the student check these ideas with their professor during class or by telephone or email. Having already bounced the idea past me, students approached their professor with greater confidence. At other times, I couldn't render an opinion. I didn't know – especially if it was a micro or human behavior inquiry – or I didn't want to second guess the professor or interfere with the class process. Much of my decision making depended upon my relationship with the instructors, my understanding of their approach and course objectives, and my trust of them (and they of me) relative to my and their roles.

In the best of situations, the distance coordinator served as a bridge. Not quite as profound as Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, I did, however, keep communication going, hopefully enhancing the students' educational experience by facilitating it.

Community Relations and Agency Relations

The six years of my involvement with the distance education program was an exciting time. Contributing to the excitement were the relationships that developed between the program and local and regional agencies. The professional community was supportive of the program, recognizing the need for additional graduate-level social workers in the region.

The community also represented a source for student field placements – a requisite part of social work education. Not all the agency representatives were social workers, however, and yet I was required to negotiate field placements that would meet social work-training requirements. This included having a graduate social worker as supervisor of record and having students placed within a prescribed time period in order for them to also attend classes on Saturdays and matriculate according to plan.

Agency representatives expressed concern that the courses that students were taking did not prepare them for rural social work. Courses were taught by university faculty whose background and experiences were primarily based in urban settings, and the block field placement arrangement initially proposed did not fit well with their internship structures.

There also was a general sense among agencies that an urban university could not transplant its program without substantial modifications to accommodate small town issues, values, and resources. It was my role to address these concerns with the university, to introduce questions about the fit between current curriculum and practice applicability and whether the block placement model was viable.

I also saw my role as allaying concerns on the part of agencies that the students they accepted would be qualified and that professors were seriously interested in modifying the curriculum to accommodate rural requirements. This seemed to help, though a feeling of uncertainty remained. A distrust of outsiders is, in part, human nature. Yet, the students were not from the outside, which, on reflection, likely helped, as did CSULB's stated commitment to foster the development of a homegrown program, a program that has since reached fruition.

The role of the distance coordinator is multifaceted. To be effective in this domain, comfort with autonomy is desirable, as well as is multiple and, at times, unclear roles. In this capacity, I found a power and comfort in ambiguity and a challenge that was fulfilling.

Sometimes we assume that bigger is better, or that urban knowledge is superior to rural know-how. As site coordinator, I had one foot in each world – an employee of an urban university charged with managing a rural social work program. As I reflect on my several roles, I would also add one additional function — *quality assurance manager*. While it is true that CSULB's teaching and administrative staff provided the structure, established most policies, and tapped campus faculty to teach in the program, it was incumbent upon me to monitor for local relevance, to filter out unwarranted *urbanism*, and to reframe information in ways that made sense to my rural constituency.

You learn as you go in work as in life. I learned a great deal about similarities and differences between the metropolis and the range, and between social work *wannabees* and social work graduates. I also learned that even in roles of mid-level responsibility, that answers are not always easily given or that the ones that are given, are not always from the heart, let alone the truth.

Freud, Skinner, Rogers (and a Cast of Thousands) Fistfight in Purgatory: The Human Behavior Curriculum as Reality TV

John A. Kayser, Ph.D.
and Mark A. Lyon, Ph.D., University of Denver

In the pantheon of "what is funny," therapeutic humor stands upon an exalted plane. Its lofty goals are to make us laugh and to help us heal. In this article, the authors offer a broad parody of the mental health field, its founders, its academicians and practitioners, and, of course, its all too easy targets: television, movies, and big business. If laughter indeed is therapeutic, who better to parody than ourselves and our need to compartmentalize the vibrant and complex human heart into humorless theoretical language, dry diagnostic categories, soulless technical jargon, and trendy academic debates about which human behavior theory is most relevant in the post-modern era?

Authors' Note: This narrative was submitted to *Reflections* just a few days before the September 11th terrorist attacks rocked America. This tongue-in-cheek parody was intended to humorously reflect on the authors' experiences of the lengthy and sometimes overly serious debates that often occur among academic types regarding what (or whom) to include/exclude in the human behavior curriculum. Despite the terrible tragedies at home and the resulting war and conflict abroad since September 11th, the authors hope that there is room left in the hearts and minds of professional helpers for humor. Our inspiration for the following imaginary narrative comes from movie producer and humorist Mel Brooks, whose broad parodies highlight the eccentricities and absurdities of life. Humor, we have found, is an essential antidote for academics who think too much and play too little.

Surviving Reality

Reality TV shows have been the latest rage for sometime now—*Survivor, Temptation Island, Big Brother, Mole, Weakest Link, The Chamber,* and so forth. Of course, we're not admitting to having watched any of these trashy and exploitive shows. However, as esteemed university professors (or "steamed," as the case more often seems to be), it is our sworn scholarly duty to be on top of current cultural trends, even if those trends are taking us further into the vast wasteland which former FCC Chairman Newton Minnow used to talk about. (Or was that *Mad Magazine's* Alfred E. Newman?) We shoulder this heavy burden in order to fulfill various roles of wise sage, iconoclast, soothsayer, and cynic (job descriptions which pay little to nothing, by the way). Commenting authoritatively on things we know little about is what we in academia do best. A Ph.D. is not jokingly called "piled higher and deeper" for nothing.

Leaving aside the ludicrous notion that these TV series have anything remotely to do with reality, "did you ever wonder," as Andy Rooney says, where the idea for the progenitor show of reality TV, the CBS program *Survivor*, came from in the first place? A good guess by learned folk might be that it's adapted from such classics as *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1862), *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1962), or possibly even a derivative of the old sitcom, *Gilligan's Island* (Schwartz, 1962). Is that your final answer? Sorry, Skipper, but the truth is much more disturbing (and shallower) than that.

A little-known fact is that the idea for *Survivor* actually came from an academic refugee from the helping professions who drew on his long experiences in making curriculum and program changes. The process is very much the same—which human behavior theorist/psychotherapy guru gets to stay or be booted out of the curriculum. It's just like members of the TV tribes voting to decide who can stay or who has to leave their little island. Should we boot Freud off for his misogynist ways? Trade Kohlberg for Gilligan? Can Michael White (a real Australian) and his band of down-under narrative therapists out-duel Stephen DeSazar's American tribe of solution-focused gurus? Eliminate Erik Erikson in favor of Milton Erickson (or maybe just do self-hypnosis and forget the both of them)? Or perhaps, the divine ya-ya sisterhood of empowerment/feminist/post-modern/social constructivists will at last vanquish the Rocky Balboa research-types ("yo Adrian")—those nasty quantitative/evidence-based/logical positivist/dust bowl empiricists? (Should that happen, kiss not only reality TV shows good-bye, but objective reality as well.) How satisfying it would be for them to finally say to male patriarchs everywhere, "You *are* the weakest link! Goodbye."

In fact, as the following narrative demonstrates, the original TV pilot for *Survivor* was, in fact, called *Freud, Skinner, and Rogers Fistfight in Purgatory*—a title obviously based on the executive producer's familiarity with the works of noted American Indian author, Sherman Alexie, particularly his collection of short stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), which later became the basis for the Sundance Festival award-winning movie, *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998). Although we risk being expelled from our lifetime membership in the exclusive "White Male Club of Privilege" for bringing you this inside information, our dedication is to bring the readers of *Reflections* the truth, as we co-construct it.

A Hollywood Scene

At the Copycat TV Network, a program concept meeting is underway. All the players are present. (To protect the guilty, the names have been made generic.) Professor Sabbatical Moonlight, erstwhile faculty member from the Celestial School of Bio-Psycho-Social Therapeutics, Magic, and Metaphysics at Hollywood University and producer-wannabe (known as "Sab" in the show biz community, but called "Sob" by his remaining friend in the academy), the last to arrive, rushes in.

"Since our time is short," begins Sab, "let me pitch you this idea I had about putting all the world's greatest psychotherapists on one island and letting them fight it out regarding whose theory of professional helping is the best."

The deep rumble of Mr. Moneybags, senior marketing vice-president of *Mindless Entertainment* (ME, Inc.), a potential corporate sponsor for the show, echoes off the smoked glass and lacquered wood of the paneled office. "Liked your concept paper, son. But can't figure out how you plan to do that, since those therapists are all dead."

"That's our new wrinkle—human cloning," replies Sab. "We'll get DNA samples of dead therapists or theorists such as Freud, B.F. Skinner, Carl Rogers, Melanie Klein, Karen Horney, and a bunch of others and grow them just for this show. We'll pit the clones against each other in a psychotherapy showdown. These guys are all dinosaurs anyway; it'll be better than *Jurassic Park.*"

"Not bad," Ms. Network Executive (known as "Xnet" to 500 of her closest friends) responds, "but here's an even better idea. Let's get your *Jurassic Park* therapists cloned as one tribe. Then we'll get a bunch of living professional helpers as the other tribe. They can battle it out, T-Rex style."

"Who would we try to get?" says Sab.

"Oh, my analyst is always foaming at the mouth about some 'empowerment and strengths' people who are just *ruining* the psychotherapy market. Maybe we could get them," replies XNet.

Jowls shaking in time with his head nodding, Mr. Moneybags affirmatively chimes in: "This will be great! Call 'em *The Pathologizers* versus *The Strengtheners*."

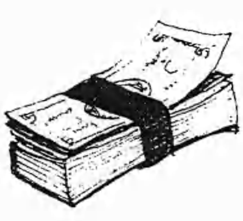
XNet looks uncertain. "Not sure we can get the cloning past the network censors."

Patting her arm, Mr. Moneybags reassures her. "Like the name *Strengtheners* a whole lot. My company could tie that in with a new denture adhesive we're ready to market."

Sab jumps up from the table. "Hey! We could get some drug companies to sponsor the *Pathologizers*. Maybe that wonder drug, PERMANAP, could be the sponsor."

"People, people!" chides XNet. "We're getting off track. Sure, there's easy money to be made. Big money. But, let's get back on task here and remember what we're all in this for." Picking up her minidisk recorder, she speaks: "Memo to Marketing: Each of the tribes has its own corporate sponsor."

Salivating, Mr. Moneybags agrees. "It'll be like the cola wars. Maybe even bigger than *Star Wars*." Moneybags pounded the table. Organic muffin crumbs spray everywhere. "Gotta have big names, people! Gotta push the product! If I get my sales people on this, they gotta have some kinda angle to wrangle. Can't send 'em out there without a carrot."



"Well, Oprah is more than we can afford," Sab whines. "But Dr. Laura and Judge Judy are both available. Of course, if we really want sleaze, we could try Montel, Ricki, or Jerry."

"It's a start," replies XNet. "Have your people get in touch with my people. We'll lay out a story line, mock up a set, test the concept in a few key markets, then see about moving into production. I gotta feeling this could be early retirement."

"Great, babe. Kiss, kiss. Love ya. Ciao, baby," says Sab, exiting the office, stage left.

Scene One—*The Pathologizers*

Three months later, on the remote desert island, Purgatory, somewhere south of the Galapagos, the *Pathologizers* gather together for the first time. Austin Powers, international studio page boy of mystery, scurries among the stars. "Dr. Freud. Dr. Freud. Paging Doctor Sigmund Freud."

Pausing between cigar puffs, Freud looks up. "Vat is it, mein good man?"

"Are you Herr Doktor Professor Freud? Groovy, baby!" says Powers.

"Yavol. Vat? Do I look like dat meathead, Skinner?" barks Freud.

"They're ready for you on the set, Dr. Freud," replies Austin.

Looking severe and darkly foreboding, Skinner set down his pet pigeon, Pavlov, and arches his eyebrows.

"OK, Sigmund, that's it! Maybe your name's really 'Sick-mind.' Not that I believe in any such idea as a 'mind.' Not that I have 'beliefs,' for that matter. You'll pay for that smart remark. Got some nice little contingencies here in my fist that you'll be learning from real soon, you neurotic twit."

"Skinner, you asinine American pellet head." Freud spits back. "I haf no time for your reinforcement fantasies."

Jumping between them, Carl Rogers attempts to get them to cool it. "Can't we all just get along? Can't we self-actualize, together?"

"Bah, Rogers! You and your stupid push for growth," snaps Skinner. "I hope Mazlow's pyramid falls on top of your bald head."

"Now Biff, you needn't be so cold. I was just trying to say ..." replies Rogers.

"Don't call me Biff!" screams Skinner. "That's a character from *Death of a Salesman*, you moron. Do I look like the pathetic son of a pathetic salesman to you? It's 'B. F.!' The whole world knows it's 'B' (as in Burrhus), 'F' (as in Frederic)—Skinner!'"

"Skinner, you dolt! It could be 'B.M.' (as in bowel movement) for all dat I care," mocks Freud.

"Typical bathroom humor remark, anal face. Maybe you should go sleep with your mother, you perverted Victorian prig," says Skinner.

"Ooooh, vas dat an adjective, Biff?" taunts Freud. "I thought everything vas 'strictly behavior' wit you. No adjectives allowed! How could anything be perverted, den?"

"There's perverted *behavior*, that's how!" spits Skinner.

Freud replies, "So, how vould you operationalize dat, pigeon-boy?"

"Isn't it obvious, you rip-off artist of the Judeo-Christian ethic," snorts Skinner. "It's anything a pigeon wouldn't do, even if given the chance."

"Who you callin' a rip-off artist?" challenges Freud.

"Everyone knows about the struggle between the flesh and spirit. You just gave 'em new names and tried to pass it off as science instead of religion. I think you got messianic fantasies, boy," says Skinner. "Not that I really believe in anything like 'fantasies.'"

"Actually, I have a lot of unconditional positive regard and empathy for both of your approaches," interjects Rogers.

"Oh, shut up, Carl," replies Skinner and Freud simultaneously. "Go talk to the dolphins and whales. You never say much anyway."

Turning back to Skinner, Freud chides, "Maybe you should go sleep wit your pigeons. Or is dat one of those things a pigeon vouldn't do?"

"Your momma," replies Skinner.

Roused at last by the increasingly intense mother-bashing remarks, Karen Horney suddenly commands, "Grow up, will you, little boys? This is not a phallic contest! No one's got a tape measure. Both of you act as short on brains as you are on your other favorite organ. Classic case of *womb envy*, if you ask me."

Startled by Horney's loud voice, Melanie Klein jolted awake. Still disoriented to time, place (and, of course, always to persons), she comments to no one in particular: "It is the feces in their mothers' breasts that keep them detached."

"WHAT!?" shouts Freud, Skinner, Rogers, and Horney in unison. Immediately, they vote Klein as the first one to be kicked off the island.

From the studio control booth, Sab yells in triumph. "See! I told you this would work. This is colossal! Huge! Mega-huge!"

"Groovy, baby," says Austin, as he leads a weeping Melanie Klein from the set back to her trailer. "Should I pop in for a sec and see if your lights still turn on? Yeah, baby! Let's hop on the good foot and do that bad thing."

Nonplussed, Klein responds, "Oh, behave!"

Wearing her black mini-skirt, 3 inch Manolos, and fishnet stockings, XNet shakes her head, "That's just the trouble with neo-Freudians. No matter what they say, it's still always about sex." Pulling out her minidisk recorder, she pushed the record button, snapping, "Memo to the therapists. Boundaries, people. We need boundaries!" Turning to Sab, she ordered: "Make sure Anna Freud gets the memo, too. And get some PERMANAP for Skinner. He really needs to chill."

Scene 2—*The Strengtheners*

Meanwhile, on the leeward side of the island, the *Strengtheners* begin a slow, melodic, undulating dance around the leaders of their tribe, Nick Potency and Victoria Powerdaughters. Led by the tribe's mascot, the diminutive Mini Me, the *Strengtheners* begin to whirl and twirl, hypnotized by the lush duet of Cher and Britney Spears, as they reach the top of their mountain lair, where they...

WE INTERRUPT THIS NARRATIVE WITH AN EMERGENCY BROADCAST MESSAGE:

While fairness dictates that we should now parody the *Strengtheners* in an equally outrageous fashion, we're not sure this tribe has a sufficient sense of humor to appreciate the therapeutic and healing powers of laughter (much less get the jokes we'd make at their expense). Since our lawyers advise that there is less risk in making fun of the dead than the living, we leave to the reader's own imagination who from the contemporary strengths and empowerment helping establishment might constitute such a tribe and how they might interact during their stay in Purgatory.

This is a test. Had this been an actual exercise in the use of equal opportunity humor, you would have been instructed to tilt your head back and continue laughing (loudly, we hope). This is only a test. We now return you to your regularly scheduled narrative, already in progress.

......Then, to the wild cheers of rapture from the *Strengtheners*' tribe, Victoria Powerdaughters finishes her speech. Lowering her voice to a whisper, she tells the assembled multitude:

"Now, here's the secret you should know about our group, which you must guard with your life. Though our concepts are all about empowerment, self-determination, and capitalizing on people's strengths, we actually spend most of our time criticizing other people's theories and approaches for their faults and deficits. In literature, that's called irony. In the helping professions, however, it's viewed as an enlightened, progressive innovation. Never, *ever* reveal this secret—especially to the *Pathologizers*! They might figure out we're more alike than different. Let's just call it Victoria's secret, shall we?"

Scene Three: Fade to Black

History, as we all know, has a way of taking unexpected turns. Despite the fact that the *Strengtheners* routed the *Pathologizers* handily in the pilot episode, the network chickened out on the pilot version of the show. The network executives liked the sex angle, because sex always sells. Just not sex involving once dead therapists. "Too creepy, even for Hollywood" was the message Sab got. Also, the network's marketing department surveyed consumer focus groups about the pilot episode and discovered the *Strengtheners'* noble purpose and purity of heart didn't make them very appealing to television audiences, who identify more readily with Homer and Marge Simpson. However, Sab was able to negotiate a six-figure deal for the version of *Survivors* that the world now knows and loves (as long as the ratings hold), which, of course, we (truthfully) have never seen.

So all the players lived happily ever after. Even the academics in the helping professions were happy because they had found a kindred spirit in the entertainment industry willing to indulge their predilections for booting off anyone not agreeing with their favorite theoretical point of view. The only casualty was Mr. Moneybags, who was laid off when his company, *Mindless Entertainment*, a division of *Enron/WorldCom/Arthur Anderson Institute for Corporate Ethics and Creative Accounting*, a wholly owned subsidiary of *StarbucksDisneyMicroSoft-IntelAOLTimeWarnerMetLife-RJReynoldsOPECOil* merged with

MarthaStewartVerizonMcDonaldsDowJones NASDQWallMart-OilofOlay. Fortunately, however, his daughter, Miss Moneypenny, found work in a series of spy movies, flirting with the actor formerly known as SeanConneryRogerMoore-(OneOtherGuyNobodyRemembers)-TimothyDaltonPierceBrosnan. So, at least Moneybags didn't end up as a sob story.

The Moral

To paraphrase an old Bob Dylan's song (1968), the moral of this story, the moral of this song, is simply that one should never be where one does not belong. So, when you see your colleagues carrying something, help 'em with their load. And don't go mistaking Purgatory for the curriculum across the road.

Translation: No curriculum is perfect. See the connections between seemingly disparate theories and points of view. Keep an open mind. Inject humor, humanity, and, gosh, maybe even a little intellectual humility, into curriculum discussions. Keep on dancing. And, as Mel Brooks says in the movie *SpaceBalls* (1987), "May the Schwartz be with you!"

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The Uses of Humor in Social Work Practice

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This narrative examines the functions and uses of humor in social work practice. Two types of humor, purposively telling a joke and spontaneously responding to a situation, are illustrated as a way of putting people at ease during initial contacts, engaging reluctant clients, exploring taboo areas, and improving cognitive and problem-solving skills. Practice principles and cautions are also presented.

Laugh and the world laughs with you;
Weep and you weep alone;
For the sad old earth must borrow its
mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.

Laughter is essential to life. Jokes, witticisms, ironies, teasing, clowning, and other verbal and nonverbal behaviors are a fundamental characteristic of interpersonal communication and have a profound impact on everyday interactions (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Humor serves numerous functions. Humor permits expression of inhibited thoughts and feelings and provides for a release of associated repressed or suppressed anxieties and tensions (Freud, 1928; Freud,1960). For oppressed and vulnerable populations, humor and laughter provide a safety valve for coping with painful realities.[1] Ethnic and racial humor helps a stereotyped group to vent anger and to dismissively laugh at the dominant culture's stereotypes. Laughter affirms that "the injustices suffered are undeniably wrong" (Bowles, 1994, p. 3). Humor also surfaces the less visible, more subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination. By making the less visible more visible, oppression is challenged (Gordon, 1998). When a member of the ethnic and racial group pokes fun at absurd stereotypes, laughter in the face of adversity releases tensions and provides hope.[2] Laughter "deflects, unmasks, and frees us from unreal, pretentious, and imprisoning beliefs or perceptions" (Siporin, 1984, p. 460).

Humor is essential to life and is potentially useful in social work practice. Humor puts people at ease during initial contacts, as they enter an unfamiliar situation and meet a professional stranger for the first time. Shared laughter serves as a social bridge and facilitates engagement and rapport. Laughing together softens the power differential, reduces social distance, normalizes the helping process, and advances the therapeutic relationship. Socially, laughter provides people with a common experience, akin to breaking bread together. Feeling more at ease, clients are more likely to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Humor also provides a ticket into taboo areas by helping both client and worker cope with their emotions. Gentle humor relieves anxiety or embarrassment and eases pain. In dealing with resistance or power struggles, humor may increase positive reactions to ideas and motivate involvement (Gitterman, 1998). Finally, humor stimulates and enhances cognitive processes, problem solving, and self-exploration (Suls, 1983).

Humor should be constructive and devoid of countertransferential ridicule, sarcasm, or hostility (Tuttman, 1991). Destructive and harmful humor often serves the purpose of masking vulnerability and achieving superiority at another person's expense. Moreover, one is cautioned about using humor to avoid dealing with important client issues, e.g., a client may feel that the worker is not taking his or her problem seriously (Huxtable, 1989). Finally, some clients may not respond to humor. In some situations, the worker may simply not be funny; in others, the worker's type of humor may be misunderstood or misinterpreted, e.g., teasing a client who is unable to handle teasing. The worker must deal with the awkwardness of the situation by quickly assessing whether the humor was misunderstood or misinterpreted (Pollio, 1995). Effective humor is spontaneous, gentle, and well-timed and requires the capacity to laugh at oneself.

Two types of humor are available to a social worker: (1) purposively telling a joke, and (2) spontaneously responding to a situation (Pollio, 1995; Richman, 1995). These two types of humor will be illustrated for the purposes of putting people at ease during initial contacts, engaging reluctant clients, exploring taboo areas, and improving cognitive and problem-solving skills.

Using Humor to put People at Ease During Initial Contacts

Illustration 1: In a first meeting of an adult educational group, the worker asked members to introduce themselves and to share something that they wanted the other members to know about them, such as a favorite hobby, a special pet, and so forth. The worker wanted to help members become comfortable with each other by keep things safe and light. As members went around the room, they were becoming more relaxed and interested in each other. This flow shifted when a member created an awkward moment. She prematurely shared, "Hello, my name is Gail and I am a recovering alcoholic and victim of sexual abuse." The group became silent. After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, the worker responded with a smile: "Gee, I was hoping you would share something more personal and intimate about yourself." All members (including Gail) began to laugh at the paradoxical comment and the uncomfortable moment dissipated. The worker followed by stating, "Gail, I appreciate that you shared these life experiences with us and we will be examining how all of us have dealt with life traumas."

Using Humor to Engage a Reluctant Client

Illustration 2: A social worker specialized in reaching difficult adolescents. A 14 year old was referred for anti-social behavior and rebelling against parental limits. Family and legal pressures coerced him to see the worker. He arrived with a scowl on his face and pronounced, "You are the ugliest looking social worker I have ever seen." Quite a beginning, but it did not throw this social worker.

He used situational humor to join the resistance. He replied, "My looks are really that bad, huh?" The youngster replied, "Worse than bad!" "Well, because you think I'm ugly and we have to work together, would it help if I went into the closet for about five minutes so that you will not have to look at me?" The youngster looked confused, smiled, and responded that it would help a great deal. The worker went into the closet (large space with a light and a chair) and before shutting the door suggested that if the boy needed anything to let him know. After five minutes, the worker inquired if the youngster could get used to his looks. And when the youngster suggested that he was still ugly, the social worker returned to his closet. At the end of the session, the worker left the closet and said that it was time to go and that he hoped the boy had found the session helpful. The youngster looked bewildered and left.

The social worker envisioned the subsequent conversation between the youngster and his parents.

Parent: "What did you and Mr. Kelly talk about?"

Youngster: "Talk? We didn't talk. He sat in the closet the whole time."

Parent: "If you don't want to tell me, just say so, but don't say such ridiculous things."

Youngster: "Call him if you don't believe me."

The mother did call and was surprised to hear that her son was telling the truth.

The second session followed a similar script. The youngster announced that the worker was still ugly and would appreciate his returning to the closet. (The social worker was becoming anxious and his self-doubts increased.) However, by the third session, the youngster stated, "You know, you are not quite as ugly as I thought at first. You don't have to go to the closet today, but could you look out the window so that I don't have to look at your face." In a Rodney Dangerfield voice (connoting not being appreciated), the worker responded, "I get no respect." The youngster laughed, their conversation began, and shortly thereafter he began to discuss his life troubles.

Using Ethnic Humor to Ease Tension and Overcome Obstacles

Illustration 3: My student, an Irish American middle-aged woman, was assigned to work with Mr. Kennedy, a 62-year-old Irish-American widower who was forced to retire on complete disability because of severe diabetes.[3] One leg was in a cast following a fall at a local city hospital when he attempted to get off an examining table where he had been left unattended. Mr. Kennedy was then placed in a shelter because a fire had destroyed most of his home and all of his clothing. Mr. Kennedy was in the hotel for two weeks when the Department of Social Service worker informed him that he would have to attend a hearing the following week to determine his eligibility for an extension. He cursed and yelled that he didn't intend to go to any hearing. "I've worked hard all my life, paid my taxes. I am not going to any meeting." After this outburst, he asked if the shelter had "a social worker like in the hospital." He wanted to see a social worker and see what she could do to "help me with you damned people."

The student agreed to help him stay in the shelter while he was on crutches and unable to look for an apartment. She agreed it must be hard to go up and down the stairs on crutches and told him that she would request a fair hearing and try to have it held close to the shelter. She called the Hearing Office to request a hearing at the shelter because of Mr. Kennedy's physical condition. The student could not reach Mr. Kennedy by telephone, so she left a note in his mail box apprising him of the new date. When the day came, Mr. Kennedy did not arrive. She called him but did not receive an answer. The following morning Mr. Kennedy arrived at the worker's office for the first scheduled meeting. She felt annoyed and the following conversation ensued:

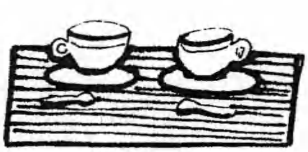
> *I asked Mr. Kennedy why he had not come the previous day, and he looked puzzled. I asked him if he received my note. He said that he had gotten some paper in his box, but didn't know what it was about. I continued by asking if he had read it. He said that he didn't have his glasses with him that morning. I kept asking if he had read the note later in the day. Mr. Kennedy became fidgety and looked quite uncomfortable. His face was red, he looked angry, and he started yelling. 'I am sick and tired of this bull shit — you are just like all the others asking me to do things I can't do for myself.' I pointed out that I had found a more convenient location for the hearing for him, and all I asked him to do was to get himself to the hear-*

ing on the right day.

Mr. Kennedy grabbed his crutches, stood up, glared at me and blurted, 'Look you dumb social worker...I've been trying to tell you I CAN'T READ!' As he walked out he yelled back, 'I don't give a ... about the hearing, you can all go to hell.'

The social work student realized that Mr. Kennedy probably would not return to meet with her. So, she went up to his room:

> *When Mr. Kennedy asked who was knocking, I told him my name and that I wanted to talk to him. He yelled, 'Go back to your office before you freeze out there.' I said, 'Look, Billy, there's a bullheaded Irish lass on the outside of this door who can be just as stubborn as the bullheaded Irish bloke on the inside. So, you better open the door before the two of us make a holy show of ourselves.' With that, the door opened wide and Mr. Kennedy stood there laughing. 'Well, now,' he said, 'I guess there's still a little of the old sod in you after all...' 'Well, now,, I said mimicking him, 'I guess you are not the only Irishman who kissed the Blarney Stone either.' We both laughed and he invited me to sit down and have a 'good cup of tea.'*



> *As we drank the tea, there was some tension in the air. I broke the silence by saying, 'I am sorry about the other day, I am sorry that I didn't listen to you and hear what you were saying, and I am sorry that I was impatient. I really want to try to help you and hope you will give me another chance.' He immediately answered that if anyone should be sorry, it should be him with his 'trashy mouth and rotten temper.' He apologized for cursing at me and explained that he was upset because it was hard for him to let anyone know that he can't read. He told me that* he is *very ashamed and feels like a dummy.*

The common Irish ethnicity lent special meaning to the worker's use of situational ethnic humor. Laughter eased the tension and helped them overcome the obstacles in their work. Subsequently, the student helped Mr. Kennedy to grieve for the death of his wife and for the loss of his home. She also connected him with a reading teacher. Ultimately, it was the student's use of humor that led to a breakthrough in the quality and depth of their work.

Using Humor to Soften Taboo Areas

Illustration 4: A social worker was recruiting members for a post operative cardiac group. She learned from a nurse that John, a blue collar worker, was anxious about possible impotence and was becoming increasingly depressed. He had been unable to discuss his concerns with the physician. After various efforts to reach for his concerns, the worker dealt with the awkward silences between them by using a metaphor and asking with a smile, "Are you worried about whether the lead has run out of your pencil?" He responded with laughter and tears, and a frank discussion followed. Humor relieved his anxiety and embarrassment.

Using Ethnic Humor to Relieve Tension

Illustration 5: A Jewish couple in their forties sought help with marital problems which were related to a decrease in the husband's sexual drive. He was obsessed with thoughts that his wife was looking at other men. Her adamant denials were met with further accusations. The tension between them was escalating and neither could hear the other. The Jewish social worker told them the following joke using a Yiddish accent to get their attention and to help them listen to each other.

> *An 80-year-old Jewish couple, Sadie and Harry, were having daily fights with loud shouting. Everyone in the apartment house could hear them. Harry decided he would get Sadie real good. He ran into the courtyard and shouted up so everyone could hear: "I had you bevore ve vere married!" Sadie put her head out the window and laughingly yelled back: "You vasn't the only one!"*

The couple howled with delight and finally began to listen to each other.

Using Humor to Improve Problem-Solving and Self-Exploration

Illustration 6: A social work student was working with a group of elderly members who complained about loss of memory but resisted developing compensatory mechanisms for remembering. To encourage members to write things down, she told a joke with an obvious message.

> *Barry and Selma visited their doctor and Selma complained about her husband's memory loss—"He goes to the store and always forgets several things I tell him to buy." The doctor urged Barry to write things down and to go shopping with a list: "This way your wife will stop complaining and you will feel better about yourself." That night while they were watching television, Selma went to get some ice-cream. Barry asked for vanilla and told Selma to write down the name of the flavor. She left the room and reassured him that she would not forget. Barry told her that he also wanted a little chocolate sauce and that she should write that down so as not to forget. "I won't forget!" she replied in an annoyed voice. A few more steps and Selma heard, "And put some nuts on it and write it down so you don't forget." "I won't forget!" she responded sharply. Selma returned, handing Barry a bagel. Barry yells, "See, you forgot the cream cheese!"*

The members laughed and began to discuss what memory loss meant to them.

Conclusion

Gentle humor can help in the formation of a therapeutic relationship. Appropriate humor demonstrates understanding and invites further discussion. When clients are stuck in their perceptions, thinking, and verbalizations, humor can help them to look at their situation in a new way and invite self-reflection. Humor also helps both in dealing with client and worker and with family and group members' interpersonal strains and obstacles. In exploring taboo areas, humor can relieve anxiety or embarrassment and ease suffering.

Humor is a creative tool that must be used differentially based on client background, level of functioning, and specific situation. The worker's natural style and comfort must also be taken into account. Humor cannot be forced or over used. In using humor, the worker should be willing to take risks and be prepared to make a mistake and then to openly deal with it. Similarly, the worker also must be prepared for the client to use humor. When the worker is poked fun at, she or he must have the capacity to laugh at him or herself. I recall conducting a workshop for about 200 professionals. A participant asked a question, and I asked her to stand. When she replied, "I am," I became quite anxious as I thought I had offended a vertically challenged person. I then realized that she was having fun with me and was, in fact, sitting. The ensuing laughter and my sharing my anxiety made the participants much more willing to risk themselves, and the work was considerably advanced.

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Endnotes

[1] Haig (1986) attributes to Freud the characterization of "humour that smiles through tears." p. 544

[2] If an "outsider" would tell the same joke, ethnic group members might feel disparaged. Bowles (1994) states, "A sense of community is fundamental to appreciating the creator's intent, and to the ability to identify with the humorist's marginal position in relation to dominant society that s/he is ridiculing" (p.2). However, when the humor is exaggerated, as we learned from the Archie Bunker character in "All in the Family," humor cushions the devastating impact of oppression - it demeans the demeaner.

[3] Adapted from Gitterman 1996, pp. 306-310.

Sensemaking
Terra Incognita: The Computer on the Couch

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In days of old when mapmakers were not certain of the exact typography of the areas they were mapping, rather than leaving them blank, or making up a shape, they would label the area "terra incognita." That "unknown territory" was generally illustrated as a vast ocean with all types of sea monsters, threatening and terrifying to behold. The analogy is appropriate for this article as we are entering uncharted waters, and forecasts about the use of the technologies such as the Internet to do therapy might result in our dropping off the end of the earth. Or worse! Hopefully the reader will excuse me if the beginning of this article is initially autobiographical; it's because the editor suggested I start with my own experience with technology. I begin in 1970 when I got an award to study the use of computers in the social sciences at an institute at the University in Boulder, Colorado. I was teaching social work at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) in Cleveland at the time. I was the only social worker in the institute and the only practitioner. I was less interested in how to do research, and more interested in how computers might be used in social work. Some of the Colorado faculty were up on various attempts to make the computer more human-like and were trying to get computers to act like people. It was an exciting learning experience and a year later I organized a workshop at CWRU on "Social Work in the Year 2001, and presented a paper Can Computers do Social Work? It became the lead article in the Sept. 1972 issue of *Social Work.* [1]

It was a review of what was possible at the time, and how computers might be used in mental health community organization and influencing social policy. While I saw technology as an important tool, I also discussed some of the reservations I had related to power and social control issues that might result from narrow ownership of computer technology.

I was particularly fascinated at the time by a computer program called *Eliza.* You could type in questions and the computer would give you "helpful" answers. Of course it would type those back onto the screen, as there was no sound or speech at the time. After about a dozen questions it would start to repeat the answers. But it was so good that in some tests persons couldn't tell you if it was a computer responding to one's questions or a live person. I tried it out in one of my practice classes and it was an immediate success.

A year later in 1973 I taught a course on the Future, and presented a paper on teaching about the future in 1974 at the Council on Social Work Education.

My favorite article on technology, the most fun, was written the following year for *Social Work*, it was entitled "Will the Real Jane Addams Stand Up?"[2] It made sense to me to clone Jane Addams. She is beyond doubt one of the giants in the field, and having a dozen or so of her around might work wonders for our field. I wonder if it might still be done if we could get a lock of her hair or something. But remember there are monsters in those uncharted waters. Would a dozen Janes compete with each other or would they work as a mutual aid team? Would we have to balance the growth of settlements and community organization by cloning a dozen Mary Richmonds to develop more charity organization societies (or current equivalents)?

I also had Jane as a computer program that could control social workers by distance through an implant to respond as she would to clients. There was Jane as a robot, and a few other things; some of this can certainly be done with our current technology, but at the time, it was science fiction. But it gave social workers something to think about.

My view of technology may differ a little from current definitions. For example, I believe that in social work the use of case records in teaching was a helpful technology. Like Ivan Illich, I believe in convivial technologies, things everyone can use without a lot of training, like the telephone. One of the greatest technologies that benefited person-kind was when Dr Lister suggested that doctors and nurses wash their hands with soap before they see their patients

Computers are becoming convivial tools. The community organizer can mobilize a petition or a rally nation-wide by instantaneous emails. The researcher can find and use data and compare client responses, finding out what works. But conviviality can also breed opportunity for quackery in helping, as well as excellence, and that is a problem that needs examination. Cyber space is the Terra Incognita of our times. The Internet has become a wide-open arena for virtual counseling. Some of what many therapists do in face-to-face work with a client is being done over the web. Information is given, questions answered and referrals made. You may take tests, some of which will lead to an immediate assessment and a recommendation to see a therapist for a fee, often suggesting, but not insisting that it be those on the web site being viewed. I was referred for therapy when I answered "sometime," the middle response in a five-item response to all questions on a "Mania Questionnaire." I believe that most people would have responded similarly to "I have been full of energy" and "my mind has never been sharper."

While there are people who would rather talk to a computer than to a real person, there does not yet seem to be a way for the computer counselor to deal with major clinical problems online, such as child and spouse abuse or clinical depression, other than providing information, warnings or support group information which can be helpful for some. Questions of confidentiality in online counseling are ubiquitous; bosses often read workers' email; others, including family members, may see the messages; messages get sent to wrong addresses by mistake. Fortunately a number of professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association and NASW are working on ethical issues related to online therapy.

Current research on the success of therapy indicates that a substantial and crucial factor in determining successful treatment, at least from the clients' perspective is the nature of the relationship and the feeling of caring and respect they feel from the worker. Human relationship is the one thing that the computer is not able to offer.

What we have in essence is a technology of people sending a question and getting an answer. It might as well have been a letter or a phone call. What does the technology have to offer? A major contribution can be access. It is available for people in areas where a therapist might not be available, or the client's mobility restricted. A virtual group for an isolated child with a disability can be a "life saver." Clearly such use is an important "substitute" and with careful attention provides a valuable service. Remember, we were once called friendly visitors. Have you been visited by a computer lately?

The computer is making valuable contributions in many areas, for example in the education and licensing of social workers. You can take courses for your licensing requirements, or to get a degree in social work. But there are also risks that in this type of education, practice related education, the computer can become the true "Ivory Tower". It has a lot of information, but not necessarily what the student needs at the time. It can't meet the "requisite variety" and the ability to be a "bricoleur" (think of what MacGyver was able to do in his T.V. show with duct tape and a penknife). It can't match the variety demanded by 25 students eager to talk to you about various approaches to problems they are having with clients, their agency or the broader social system. Nor can it offer the bricolage available to educator-practitioners who have been with students and clients in real, not virtual reality for years, and have learned to rely on their own creative instincts under pressure. People don't always make decisions based on facts, but on feelings, and the computer hasn't gotten there yet.

The sense making of social work is that the profession underlines the responsibility of the social worker to empower persons to deal with the obstacles to the development of productive and satisfying lives. Our profession assumes the further responsibility of helping develop institutional resources that will provide a just society. Social work is humanism in action. No one has yet suggested that role for the computer. As far as forecasting the future, why don't you try it?

The Future of Social Work Will Be:

Great_______

Fair ______

Gloomy ______

None of the Above _______

Makes sense to me.

Endnotes

[1] Abels, P.(1972). Can Computers do Social Work? *Social Work.* (17)5, September

[2] Abels, P.(1973). Will the Real Jane Addams Stand Up? *Social Work.* (18)7. November

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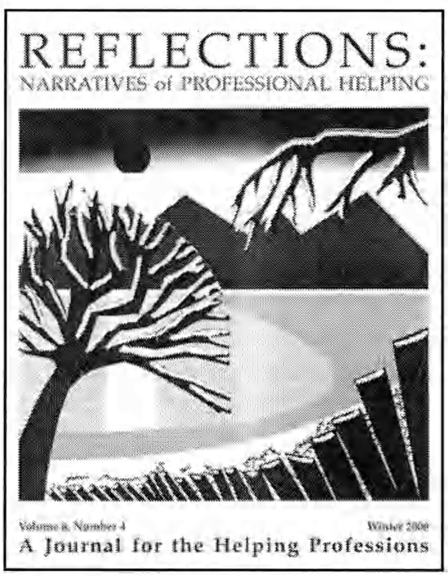

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