

## Calling Students to Serve the Homeless: The Reflective Research Story

*The effective social work researcher engages in systematic, objective, deductive, quantifiable, value-free, self-less, and emotionally placid scientific inquiry. At least that's the lesson I was taught when reading hundreds of research studies during my graduate and doctoral education. And as I began my dissertation, I learned that the lesson was an apostle's creed, a dogma to be embraced and challenged only at risk of excommunication. My first major independent research project in the early 1990s undermined all my convictions in this true faith. The following narrative highlights some of the interactional dilemmas, cognitive puzzles, and distressing emotions that led me to a more complex understanding of the scientific enterprise.*

by  
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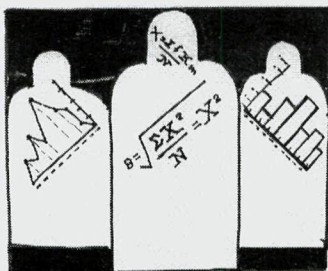
### Background for the Reflective Story

Social work research can contribute both to the knowledge base of the profession and to the self-understanding of the researcher. Typically, however, our colleagues, journal editors, and sponsors of research do not encourage research processes and accounts that fully report what was actually done and how subjective factors affected the inquiry, the researcher's hunches, and the actualities of scientific inquiry including the false starts, miscues, minor setbacks, and other variations from the original plan. As social work practitioners we use various writing devices such as case notes, process recordings, case studies, critical incident analyses, written supervisory agendas, diaries, logs, and practice stories in order both to achieve agency purposes and to further our professional growth. These tools enhance professional reflection and reflective practice.

While our profession promotes reflective practice, how are we encouraging reflective research? We are not. My professional socialization, for example,

prohibited such an approach to research. One research instructor brought me to the attention of the school's dean for using the pronoun "I" in a research report. During his long tenure as Director of the Ph.D. program, another research mentor persuasively directed me to a positivist research study (his implied message: "This is the only legitimate form of research"). He clearly indicated to some of my bolder peers that innovative studies or accounts of those studies would not be tolerated (his explicit message: "Do it my way or I will guarantee that it will take you many years to complete your dissertation").

The dictates of conventional social science writing seem to preclude narration by the researcher as a whole person participating with others in a particular research environment. Social work researchers continually think, sense, and feel as they inquire. They are influenced by their personal values and they are responsive to the pressures and constraints presented by the research setting. Researchers probably use their imagination in all phases of a project. They fre-

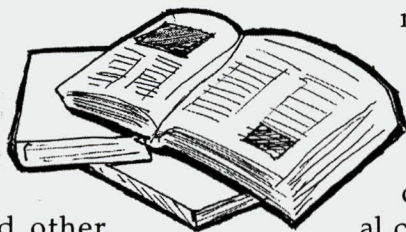


quently struggle to manage their emotions, whether positive or negative, emotions such as anger, amusement, anxiety, loneliness, affection, fear, trust and mistrust, excitement. Yet, I have found that many frown on accounts of these complex and almost invisible aspects of the research process.

Fortunately, I am not alone in questioning the code of conduct by which errant researchers of earlier generations were disciplined. Postmodern scholars have called into question the entire way that we generate knowledge. They invite us to examine the socially conservative, power-maintaining practices of the leaders of our scientific communities, universities, and other knowledge industries. They also suggest that control over the forms of representation of scientific activity (the nature of an acceptable research report, for example) is a way to maintain control over the way social reality is defined. Feminist researchers are supporting inquiry that gives "voice" to the researcher and to others not often heard from during the research process. Researchers committed to symbolic interaction promote a naturalistic inquiry, one requiring immersion in the lives of those studied, and one acknowledging the diverse ways a research story can be told.

Postmodernists, feminists, and symbolic interactionists gave me permission to break the old rules. My training as a social work practitioner provided a framework for such creative deviance. This narrative, then, is my effort to extend the reflection-in-

action model of social work practice (Harrison, 1987; Papell & Skolnik, 1992; Pray, 1991) to research. It applies strategies used by "reflective practitioners" towards the goal of becoming a "reflective researcher." It intentionally relates the personal and practical issues that I faced during research, the compromises made during the research process, the influence of my private experience on topic choice and research efforts, the importance of social memberships—gender, occupation, social class, eth-



nicity—to my research decisions, and the interpersonal and organizational context of the study. In short, this story attempts to capture some of the "lived experience" of conducting scientific inquiry and to promote greater tolerance for innovative social work research reporting.

### The Reflective Research Story

The following story is an account of a two-year evaluation project. Details and impressions are drawn from notes of key meetings, early drafts of research documents and reports, conversations with colleagues involved in the project, and memory. This reflective story offers a brief and alternative version of the conventional research report (Forte, 1997). As a social work researcher trained in the logical-positivist methodology, I began this project intending to follow the steps tra-

ditionally designated as essential to program evaluation (Ray, 1993). I will organize this story, however, by relating some of the dilemmas, relationship issues, contextual factors, and reflections on my not-so-step-by-step progress.

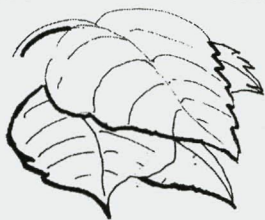
### Identify the Evaluation Purpose

In the Spring of 1993, many in the United States were considering a revision of the concept "government" and a new understanding of the obligation of the nation to its poor and undervalued members. Those promoting a society committed to increasing profit for the economically clever and to eliminating sympathy for citizens less able to compete presented the loudest arguments. I felt angry at such narrow-minded Social Darwinians and worried that the quality of our community life might worsen.

During this time, two representatives of Home Base, a Newport News agency coordinating regional efforts to help the homeless, invited themselves to my undergraduate social work class. They spoke eloquently for 50 minutes, documenting the dramatic increases in the number of homeless in our area, the inability of service providers to meet client needs, and their troubled feelings about moving possessions of the newly homeless to a storage facility. They almost begged for assistance. Because my family had lost its home when my parents divorced and several of my siblings were sent to an orphanage (while I resided with an uncle), I was receptive to their plea. Also, I resisted the idea that our country should abandon its com-

mitment to mutual aid processes and systems. For their own reasons, many of my social work students were also receptive. Together, my students and I decided to recruit other volunteers.

Soon after, a sociologist colleague fortuitously gave me a Request for Proposal. As part of the National Service movement stimulated by President Clinton, the Virginia Campus Outreach Opportunity League (VACOOL) had offered to fund innovative efforts to engage students in service learning. The sociologist conveyed that since the funds available were meager (less than \$3000 per year) and the topic was not academically prestigious, the project did not merit her attention. However, as a younger pre-tenure social work professor, I might consider it. For several weeks, I felt much ambivalence. On the "no" side, other teaching, service, and scholarship duties would be more difficult if I took on this project. My worst vision—I would be distracted from accumulating the dossier evidence ensuring tenure. At least, failure would damage my fragile reputation. (How trivial these concerns seem now when weighed against the needs of people sleeping on concrete and eating endless meals of macaroni and cheese.) On the "yes" side, there was a louder inner calling. Our program chair had been offering an innovative "Volunteer Services" course that could be expanded with VACOOL help, so I was amenable to the idea of mobilizing students. Symbolic interactionists, my favorite theorists,



were doing interesting work on altruism that I might use for this project (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Moreover, I had fond memories from my earlier efforts as agency director when I worked to forge school-agency partnerships and recruit volunteers on behalf of persons with serious mental disorders. Finally, raised Catholic, the oldest of five, I had a strong sense of responsibility for others. Recognizing that little additional government aid was forthcoming, I anticipated irritating guilt pangs if I said no and looked forward to the moments of pride associated with meaningful service if I said yes.

From such personal and interpersonal deliberations and assurances of help from several social work students and faculty, a sense of purpose emerged. We agreed to design and implement a one-year pilot project involving Christopher Newport University (CNU) students and area agencies serving the homeless. Our ambitions were not modest. We hoped to increase student commitment to service, aid service providers in helping the homeless, and start a campus-wide service-learning center.

#### *Establish a Research Team or Organization*

Contrary to the stereotype of the lonely researcher pursuing his or her individual dream, our inquiry involved many people. Trained at the graduate level in group work, I recognized the power and excitement of creative

group collaboration. As a doctoral student, I participated on a research team organized by an industrious researcher. That team effort was successful and served as a model for later research teams that I led, teams composed of graduate social work students. As a field instructor with 10 years experience, I also knew that students can bring a fresh perspective and vitality to any venture led by more seasoned social workers. VACOOL's Request for Proposal required student involvement in every aspect of the program and its evaluation. Therefore, I decided to create a three-person research team including myself and two social work seniors. Additionally, to maximize the involvement of the local practice community and the university, we created a project advisory board of 14 concerned social workers, faculty, student life administrators, and students.

Unfortunately, we did not anticipate some group composition problems. I am White, male, and 45. The two students were White, female, and in their early twenties. Later, I discovered that I had underestimated possible difficulties related to differences in social position (full-time, full-pay professor contrasted to full-time, minimal pay, meager stipend students). The students were not aware of issues of the accountability and program reputation foremost in my mind. The team struggled to agree on the desirable level of commitment and time and energy expenditures. The students argued that they wanted to do more but were limited by other school obligations, while I believed that without more effort on

their part our successes would be very limited.

Naively, I also failed to foresee all the research implications of developing a team that would both implement the program and evaluate it. In regard to mixing the two roles, our VACOOL research consultant advised us to consider the pros (higher level of enthusiasm and rapport with study participants if we collected our own evaluative data) and the cons (research bias and expectancy effects that could weaken the validity of evaluative conclusions based on data collected by program administrators). In short, he suggested that we only implement the program and leave program evaluation to an outside expert. After informal weighing of our options, we discovered that there was no money for more "neutral" evaluators and that no faculty would volunteer for the job. We felt compelled to assume both administrative and evaluative duties.

My group-work teachers had taught me the use of symbols and labels in fostering group solidarity. As the first step in creating a group culture and sense of project identity, the team and social work program director deliberated until we arrived at a suitable name. We decided to call ourselves Creative Response Empowering Worthwhile Volunteer Activity (CREW-VA). "CREW" had an association to the university's proximity to the James River and to the image of energetic and precise rowers. "Empowering" symbolized the social work auspices of the program, and "VA" placed us in our home state.

### *Decide on What Outcomes Are Being Evaluated*

After approving our proposal, VACOOL orchestrated a planning session for participating colleges. As a new funding organization committed to programs harshly criticized by conservative politicians, VACOOL was determined to be accountable. It mandated that our outcome data would include counts of students involved, service hours, number of service recipients, and of collateral support volunteered, and also include extensive demographic and academic information about all volunteers. Recording requirements included regular monthly reports with three major seasonal assessments. My students and I already felt overwhelmed and wondered how we could develop and support a new program while collecting so many numbers. The difficulties of satisfactorily documenting our achievements never lessened.

As a researcher hoping to demonstrate the utility of the symbolic interactionist framework, I believed that we might accomplish more than simple increases in service activities. Piliavin and Callero (1991) developed a field-tested conceptual model for understanding the process by which novices develop a commitment to the volunteer role and service identity. Their identification of key variables—community support, the development of interactional capacities, and personal transformation in internalized norms, volunteer role salience, and self-identifications—seemed a helpful way to organize program goals. Reluctant to for-

sake my theoretical bias, I hoped that our use of such a framework would recruit more social workers to the symbolic interactionist school.

Unfortunately, my excitement about the framework and theory-driven evaluation was only partially shared. A helpful social work research consultant at the annual Bachelor of Social Work Program Directors conference liked the social constructionist view of social problems and gave a strong endorsement. The VACOOL psychologist/research consultant wondered about the complexity of the framework and about problems related to operationalizing key concepts. Students were generally unfamiliar with symbolic interactionist tenets and concepts. Known by my Italian-American and Irish-American loved ones by the Italian word for "thick headed," I was not deterred.

### *Decide on the Standards of Success*

Being a novice program evaluator with beginning-level student researchers, I felt that we were continually improvising. What would qualify as a program success? Scripts for our action were unavailable. VACOOL had no information about pilot programs offered at small liberal arts colleges like ours—located in a suburban area populated mostly by lower working class white students who often attended college while they held down part-time jobs and tended to their families. No VACOOL grantee had focused attention on the homeless, a population that many students find

scary, incomprehensible, or underserving. We knew of no published research report on our kind of project that we might use as a model. How eagerly might our students respond to a call for service to the homeless? Since I enjoyed the new and innovative as well as the tried and true, the extemporaneous as well as the routinized, I felt scared but also pleasantly challenged.

Our practical concern, however, was "what might we actually achieve?" The VACOOL director wanted specific estimates for each of the outcome categories. My previous experience as an administrator in a mental health clubhouse provided some guidance. There, the executive director's motto for dealing with demanding bureaucracies was "when in doubt, make it up and trust that you can deal with the consequences later." Such administrative folk wisdom seemed relevant. So, we guessed. We guessed on the high side and hoped to avoid embarrassment at the end of the evaluation year. Ironically, this became a powerful motivating factor and fortified our determination to triumph.

### *Choose and Select a Research Design*

Rigor in the research design requires control of all extraneous factors. Many controls (random sample, laboratory conditions, multiple measurements) can be bought. However, little money was available to our service-learning pilot program. Painful compromises were inevitable—painful to a new professor equaling diminished likelihood of

publication of the final report in a top-level journal. We had no list of all potential student volunteers nor any likelihood that an experimental procedure with random sampling and random assignment was doable. A non-probability approach was necessary. We were uncertain whether we could obtain any sizable pool of students, let alone enough for a control and an experimental group. Thus, random assignment was impossible. And we doubted that students would cooperate in single-system repeated measurements over the program's course or in a follow-up after graduation day. So, we settled for a pre- and post-intervention quasi-experimental strategy. Frequent consultation with the VACOOL consultant and one invaluable 90-minute consultation with the BPD expert fleshed out the sketchy details of our original design. Finally, extensive qualitative data collection and analysis—although encouraged by VACOOL and valued by our team—was beyond our capabilities. So with a forced sense of humility, we planned a small pilot study.

### *Develop a Sampling Strategy*

Brainstorming an alternative to random sampling, the research team decided to compare a convenience sample of CREW-VA recruits with a purposive sample of seasoned VACOOL volunteer program leaders. The purposive sample would consist of college students who not only had a history of volunteering but were so committed to service that they were recognized statewide for leadership. In theory, their scores

on our measurement package could serve as a standard of full commitment to service. CREW-VA recruits would progress from novice to full-fledged volunteers emulating the highly experienced leaders. All VACOOL service leaders were invited to a two-day conference in the Virginia mountains in late Fall 1993 and thus, with minimal trouble, we expected to administer our survey instrument to over 40 mature volunteers. This plan looked great on paper.

The day before the conference, the largest state snowfall in five years blocked all access to the retreat. We listened to the radio for hours hoping for an indication that the highways had been cleared of snow. Weather conditions did not cooperate and the conference was canceled. Disappointed, we settled on a much less desirable quota approach to sampling. In the end, we sampled a small but equal number of CREW-VA volunteers and of Circle K volunteers (Circle K, a national organization, offers altruistic college students an established support mechanism for ongoing community service). And we hoped that the comparisons between our volunteers and Circle K members would be informative.

In our original strategizing about sampling, we aimed also to attract faculty and students of all disciplines, both genders, and various ethnic-racial memberships. Despite creative recruiting tactics (rewards for volunteers who enticed their friends, school newspapers stories, frequent e-mail announcements, and students masquerading as homeless women with cardboard advertisements for the program), our final CREW-

VA group was hardly representative of the university. Our campus, and consequently our program, had too few people of color. Moreover, the disposition towards altruistic activity seemed distributed at the University in patterns suggestive of the whole country. Young female students attracted to the helping professions (social work and psychology) and to sociology accepted most of the service burden. No male served on the research team or the Advisory Board. Despite numerous requests, we could not convince one of 20 business faculty to offer a 50 minute presentation on the economics of homelessness. The research team members and I struggled to contain our dismay, our anger, and our critical feelings towards the non-volunteer "free riders" at our university.

### *Select Measurement Tools*

While symbolic interactionists have developed grounded theories and interesting, sensitizing concepts, most are allergic to operationalizations. Using symbolic interaction as a base for a mostly quantitative evaluation project was tricky. Fortunately, Piliavin and Callero (1991) had done some groundwork in specifying measurement strategies for many aspects of the "transformation to an altruistic identity." These we borrowed. However, they failed to provide evidence that their ad hoc measurement procedures had validity and reliability. Review of Corcoran and Fischer's (1987) measurement book and other collections of social work measurement tools in-

dicated that there were few validated competitors available for appraising goal achievement. Since time constraints made a pilot test of the instruments impractical, the Piliavin and Callero tools were used as they were.



Several supplemental tools were chosen but here, too, compromises were made. The self-report altruism scale seemed solid but had an item that team members and volunteers considered odd. It equated disposition to service with frequency of blood giving. We left it in. A scale appraising the congruence between respondent's image of the volunteer role and his or her self-image used a complex semantic differential format, one that later proved perplexing to many of our volunteers. So, its format had to be slightly changed for the post-test measurement.

### *Decide on Specifics of Data Collection*

With hindsight, it is clear that our data-collection plan was too ambitious. Our overall survey instrument was eight pages long and took almost thirty minutes to complete. Probably, because of the rapport felt with the research team, study participants obliged and only voiced soft grumbling. We also planned to

meet regularly with all volunteers and collect data about program integrity—quality of match up, frequency of service activity, and so on. Twenty students could fit volunteering but not support groups into their busy schedules. Attendance was so low that we improvised a back-up monthly phone call system. Ongoing weekly service was the mode of choice, but due to students' busy schedules, we created and monitored several full-day one-time projects. We also anticipated that it would be relatively easy to collect data from our comparison group—20 members of Circle K. However, concurrent with our evaluation project their club went through a leadership crisis. A faculty advisor quit and a new student assumed the president's position. Club attendance was very sporadic. Numerous follow-ups were required to obtain pre- and post-program data from all of Circle K. My student research assistants nearly resigned over these data gathering difficulties.

Our plan might have paid closer attention to temporal issues, for example, the typical semester calendar and its possible influence on data collecting. At semester's beginning, the pretest period, students had few competing demands and were very excited about our service-learning program. At semester's end, students were swamped with term paper and exam expectations. The initial "halo effect" and final "reverse halo" effect appeared to affect our findings dramatically.

Here is a brief alternative portrait. The reflective research story so far reports on mistakes, mishaps, and troubling emotions.

Such research difficulties and departures from the ideal emerge most vividly during recollection. However, positive images also emerge. By the end of the first semester, our team was proud of some notable accomplishments. The advisory board had met three times to assist in program design. Volunteers had conducted a remarkably successful fall coat drive for homeless children and an extravagant Christmas party and meal for a dozen homeless families. (Imagine here the dozen posters of homelessness drawn by the children and displayed through the campus center. Imagine also the collection of hundreds of coats and sweaters to be distributed at the local shelter.) CREW-VA had attracted a dedicated core of service learners and the plan for the formal evaluation of the second semester service learning seminar seemed promising.

*Develop or describe the treatment/program.*

I dreamed of finding a detailed intervention protocol like Sheldon Rose's unpublished 20-page curriculum for multi-modal stress management groups. While Piliavin and Callero's (1991) model offered a framework for program goals, it offered no guidance for developing the intervention. Only after our study have some symbolic interactionists returned to their roots as applied sociologists. A careful review of the social work literature provided little help. In fact, not only have social workers failed to develop detailed and tested models of altruistic socialization, the literature indicates conflicting views on the

value of supplementing social work efforts with volunteerism.

Drawing on my group work training and the school's flexibility in offering innovative "topics" seminar courses, I decided on a sixteen-week structured and educational service-learning class on "Homelessness." With the help of student assistants and two social work faculty, we developed a clear, organized scheme for the class-based socialization process. Conceptually, this included recruiting, showing and shaping, placing, certifying, and internalizing as the key phases. This was straightforward. However, in terms of the details, we took a large leap of faith. We trusted in our capacity to create an ideal combination of didactic presentation, modeling, empathy-building activities, group support for altruism, and public and private service reflection for each seminar session. In most cases, after one class we created the lesson plan for the next week's class. To aid in determining what part of such disciplined spontaneity worked, I kept copious notes on session by session curriculum decisions and class reactions.

*Obtain Approval for Human Subjects' Safeguards*

Due to the nature of our topic, our self-report survey instrument, and our continuous monitoring of student reactions to our project, we anticipated few ethical problems. We had none.

We failed, however, to anticipate the length of time required to obtain the green light from our Institutional Review

Board. This committee consisted of overworked faculty members who volunteered to review research proposals. They had other proposals to review. This stalled progress for three weeks.

*Implement the Intervention and monitor Program integrity.*

Program implementation presented expected hassles. These included coordinating seminar leadership with the two other faculty, attracting faculty for presentations on selected topics, matching students to out-of-class placements and then, trouble shooting in regard to the match, and keeping records on all this. Any time spent on dealing with such hassles meant time neglecting other academic responsibilities.

But the joys and satisfactions were great as students began to respond to the program. Three students at their own initiative spent a below-freezing night with homeless adults at a local mall. My two research assistants prepared a dramatic role-play for the other students demonstrating the way some burned-out workers callously relate to the homeless. Our reports at interim meetings with VACOOL member schools were very well received. One seminar episode was even a "peak experience." By chance, a CREW-VA volunteer had told her mother who teaches at a local grammar school and who knew of the success of the geography club in studying homelessness (They won a national competition) about our project. The geography club, composed of 4th and 5th graders, joined our seminar to

share their maps, their interview data, and their analysis of the geographical correlates of local housing problems. The following 30-minute discussion engaged three generations—the children, the college students, and the college and public school faculty—all concerned about our community, all committed to helping the homeless.

### *Analyze and Interpret Data*

Data analysis was expedited by the use of two statistical software packages. Additionally, I am fortunate in that a famous sociological statistician works in the office next to mine. Entering and analyzing the quantitative data was, therefore, time consuming but manageable. However, at first and repeated glances, our results were disappointing. CREW-VA students had not internalized the hoped-for personal norms, empathy for the homeless. Few had fully developed a service identity. Moreover, CREW-VA students changed somewhat in many measured ways but not dramatically more than Circle K students. Failure to include enough empathy building, the brevity of student involvement, and the possibility of an artificial high in the pretest scores were all suspects explaining our minimal impact.

Yet, we couldn't believe that our program had failed. Only after working at the data analysis for more than a month, organizing VACOOL reports on basic service activity, and presenting preliminary findings at a national social work conference did we see that the program had achieved some noteworthy successes. Sta-

tistics on attendance, hours of service, number of people served, and intention to volunteer again were quite high for our type of student body. For example, almost all CREW-VA students had served more than the recommended hours and with the exception of one student starting a new job, all had indicated a desire to soon volunteer again. Several of the statements culled from transcripts of the qualitative data also indicated success (Forte, 1997). One student wrote, "This was my first actual awareness of the homelessness problem in the Peninsula region and the rest of the country. It helped me to learn the way citizens and especially private organizations are trying to deal with the problem of homelessness. Most importantly, on a personal level, this course allowed me to feel a need to volunteer in any way possible." Another volunteer wrote that the seminar increased her "awareness of the homelessness situation in the area as well as the country...the importance of [her] involvement in community projects."

### *Report on Evaluation Process, Findings, and Conclusions*

According to the research texts, science operates as a self-correcting community and researchers are aided in the pursuit of truth by educated peer criticism. Such texts do not realize how cluttered the marketplace of ideas has become. At the first public report on our project, a national conference of 500 plus social workers, only five (none of them researchers) attended. Perhaps the working title, "Calling

students to serve in a capitalistic society," scared them off. Perhaps, the competing workshops were more "jazzy." Maybe social workers don't care much about research. Yet, despite the small turnout, participant views were quite useful. Sadly, VACOOL's reactions to the final program report were also limited in that the director took a new job and the contract with the research consultant ended.

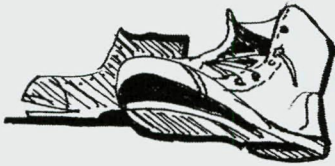
### *Plan Strategy for Knowledge Utilization*

Choosing a research topic like "Service to the Homeless" reflected our hopes to lessen local suffering and to make sympathy for the downtrodden more popular. Based on the pilot project, a detailed budget and proposal for a staffed University service-learning center was presented formally to the University president. He was impressed and promised to find us \$30,000. But before he could act on his promise, the new Republican Governor challenged our University restructuring plan and threatened to withhold essential funds. Political battle beckoned and service-learning disappeared from the president's priority list. The next president has had no interest in funding a service-learning center.

However, our story continues. A campus minister inspired by the CREW-VA pilot project is facilitating varied service-learning projects. We have presented information about our project at one regional conference for social work students and one for service-learning organizations.



Many service-learning programs survive, although with limited funding, and conservatives may still criticize national service programs, but more students are pitching in to help.



### Lessons

My reflective research story, as an exercise in professional risk taking, is an effort to demonstrate that research writing might serve to integrate the dichotomies identified by the profession. In this story telling, I learned that objectivity and subjectivity, deduction and induction, rationality and imagination, practice and research, reflection and action are intertwined during the research process. If I were to live the experience again I would, of course, do so differently. The story is based primarily on retrospection and includes only my viewpoint as the researcher, thus omitting other important and perhaps more critical voices like those of my research assistants and the study participants. Diverse viewpoints should be solicited. Nevertheless, this story brings to the forefront of social science doing and writing, ingredients previously suppressed or ignored. These include self processes, social interaction, organizational and environmental influences, imagination and creative problem solving, and ongoing crisis management.

With the conclusion of the CREW-VA pilot project, my emo-

tional roller coaster ride was over. I gained a richer appreciation for the complexity of altruistic socialization, the difficulty of conducting an intervention research project, and the value of modest gains. In the wrestling match between my despair over our society's cruelty and indifference and my hope for progressive changes, there is not yet a victor. Nevertheless, I learned that, although prevalent, cynicism, apathy, and alienation are not inevitable outcomes of life in modern society. A civil society is possible, and as a social worker I can successfully call others to the joys and satisfactions of engagement in and service to their communities.

Since telling this story, I have revised my research methods assignments so students include reflections on their literature search, proposal development, and mini-research project. Several of the other lessons gleaned from this scientific inquiry will seem commonplace to reflective social work practitioners: Pay attention to the social, cultural, and physical context of research action; monitor not only the observable behaviors of participants in a research study but also their private thinking, feeling, and dreaming. As with practice, the effective researcher must demonstrate cultural sensitivity and competency. Good social work research involves the activation of the mutual aid inclinations of all collaborators.

Several insights may appear a bit more novel. First, methodological limitations related to the competencies of the researcher or scarce resources need not undermine enthusiastic, clever,

diligent researchers. For example, researchers who search their personal autobiography may find experiences analogous to central research tasks and use such history to construct efficacious lines of action in the present. Second, those claiming a monopoly on the formula for good research and good research writing do not always serve the interests of the profession. We need our research rebels, innovators, and troublemakers, too. Lastly, the way we write about our research says as much about how we conceive of social work science as the way we conduct research. In our pluralistic social universe, it is important to remember that there are multiple ways to know and numerous ways to report on this knowing. Perhaps stories like this one attempting to integrate standard research report elements—private conversations in the researcher's mind and public conversations among research participants—can play a part in fostering effective research and creating reflective researchers.

Our profession prides itself on its appreciation of diversity. Yet, my impression is that much of our research and writing conventions require a uniformity and orthodoxy that stifle such diversity. Research, as currently practiced, reported, and rated, has not resulted in the effectiveness, respectability, or social justice desired by most social workers. Innovative approaches to research writing as a supplement to conventional research writing offer the profession new resources for resolving differences over philosophy of science issues related to ontology, epistemology, and

methodology for building knowledge that interests a new generation of social workers in scientific practice and for promoting "reflective" research. Let the story telling begin. □

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