REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Special Issue on Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective

Guest Editors: Patricia Gray, Shakira Kennedy, Eric Levine, Lynn Levy, Amanda Saake, and Benjamin Sher

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Reflections from the Guest Editorial Team: Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective

Patricia Gray, Shakira Kennedy, Eric Levine, Lynn Levy,
Amanda Saake, and Benjamin Sher

Abstract: This serves as an introduction to the Special Issue on Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective for *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*.

***Keywords*:** continuing education, lifelong learning, professional development, integrative practice, practice competency, program development, social justice

Two years ago, Patricia Gray and Dr. Darlyne Bailey began conversing about Patricia's role as the director of continuing education (CE) at the academic institution where she worked. Dr. Bailey and Patricia continued their discussions on CE and its importance to social workers and other allied professionals. Their conversations moved from the philosophical and the exchanging of ideas about the micro-macro divide in social work practice to the less discussed topic of "bridging the role of Continuing Education and lifelong learning." Dr. Bailey asked Patricia if she would be interested in filling this unmet need and in doing so through the *Reflections* journal's long reach.

At the same time, Patricia and other CE directors had recently started to share ideas about their roles and responsibilities in programming, adhering to multiple regulations, and working in collaboration with New York State Education. These conversations led to creating the "Continuing Education Consortium of New York City," with the group members' primary goal being to provide support to one another as they planned their independent programs. In one meeting, Patricia broached the idea of writing about CE in *Reflections*; the CE Consortium team said yes, and just like that, the journey began.

We all knew that, as it had for decades, CE provided staff and professionals opportunities to acquire and improve their knowledge, skills, and competencies. Further, with the increase in licensure renewal requirements for practice, professionals such as social workers needed CE units. Acquiring post-graduate competencies allowed professionals to respond to new and everchanging issues affecting individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations.

Considering the many benefits ascribed to CE, our Consortium knew that professionals wanted to ensure that they remained well informed to serve their clients. Additionally, Laal et al. (2014) opined that those who wanted to cope better with workplace changes continuously learned new skills and trained for new challenges.

The CE Consortium answered the call to reach across America through *Reflections* to provide social workers, allied professionals, directors, faculty, and other individuals the opportunity to

write about this lifelong journey called continuing education. We received manuscripts from CE consumers, who offered challenges to create a futures perspective for CE, such as combining social work and police. One author wrote about the possibilities that could bloom from supporting conversation and intervention between two distinct professions, thus benefiting clients served by both. Consumers challenged CE not to continue to offer the same mundane individual workshops where boredom quickly sets in, but to expand and think about ways to integrate professional practice, be on the cutting edge of social work practice, and disrupt the status quo. Finally, we reviewed manuscripts that depicted professionals sharing their commitment to mentoring, supporting, teaching, and learning from participants attending their workshops.

Ultimately, sixteen of the manuscripts reviewed showcased professionals dealing and coping with challenges to program design, strategies of helping experts become effective teachers, securing funding to support professionals, and the pros and cons of continuing education. Additionally, the authors reflected the teaching and learning notion outlined in the rich descriptions depicted in the manuscripts.

If there was ever a time in which we need CE, it is now. We live in a world where the coronavirus pandemic continues to create havoc across the world, especially within the United States' BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities. The virus seized upon the physical, emotional, and mental health of these individuals indiscriminately. Glaude (2020) speaks to the notion that the ugly underbelly of racism is out in the open where the hate, strife, oppression, and inequality exists and where the lie is more acceptable than the truth. Similarly, Yang (2018) discusses the advent of artificial intelligence and the disappearance of jobs, widening the chasm of income inequality for the poor. Finally, environmental issues such as fires and hurricanes affect and destroy communities, leading to food insecurities and making it almost impossible for individuals, families, communities, and organizations to flourish. Practitioners need tools to hone their knowledge and skills and to make a difference in the lives of our clients, institutions, communities, and organizations.

In hindsight, it felt like the stars aligned with Dr. Bailey's exploration of designing the Special Issue and the creation of the CE Consortium. Together, and with the support and encouragement of the *Reflections* team, a remarkable partnership now exists. Practitioners across the United States answered the call through an outpouring of submissions, which resulted in an entire issue entitled *Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective*, of which we are proud.

We hope that this Special Issue on continuing education reinvigorates your passion for sharing your wisdom, knowledge, and skills. Please continue to walk with us in CE's ongoing offerings and the pledge of lifelong learning.

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Your Workshop Title Sounded Different

Rita Abdallah

Abstract: When it comes to the common practitioner, continuing education can be characterized as a means to an end versus an exploration and immersion of knowledge, wisdom, and experiences. As an instructor, I have utilized present-day strategies such as video, roleplay, and self-assessments to deliver a successful and relevant learning experience. My mission is to help practitioners bypass classroom distractions and engage their imaginations for professional and personal growth.

***Keywords*:** practitioner, mindset, imagination, learning techniques

After I give the preliminary overview of any continuing education program I am leading, I ask workshop practitioners their reason(s) for attending. As an instructor, part of me hopes to hear flattering responses such as "I want to learn about this topic so I can help others," or "I am so excited to be here. I love learning new ideas."

Instead, I often receive these practitioner comments: "I'm here for the continuing education credits," or "Your workshop title sounded different."

Although many practitioners have grown accustomed to the replay of "just another workshop" for their license maintenance, others may seek alternative and attractive continuing education opportunities that promote personal growth. I have observed that contemporary continuing education practitioners derive satisfaction from classroom exchanges between teacher and practitioners. They greatly appreciate the most current and practical new knowledge and the wisdom to be gained from their participation in a meaningful professional encounter. This sort of teacher-practitioner workshop does more than just tick off the minutes—it explores fresh ideas that create more enlightened perspectives. Such experiences can serve to jumpstart participants' imagination to more readily absorb new material and apply it beyond the classroom.

From one vantage, continuing education presents an opportunity to progressively shape one's profession and help evolve how it impacts society. In this narrative, I discuss continuing education's challenges and opportunities from the perspective of both practitioner and instructor.

Practitioner Mindset

In my experience, when practitioners peruse the myriad of continuing education workshops, they are primarily looking for a practical solution for their most important need—continuing education credit. Informal surveys I have used to poll my continuing education program practitioners find that the attendees often are facing a mandatory deadline with their license bureau for a requisite number of credits or are looking for a class at a specific time and date to fit in with busy home and work routines.

My experience also reveals that practitioners might select a program to deepen their own

expertise in order to best serve clients or stay atop of profession changes. For example, a healthcare case worker selects courses focused on trends of the assisted elderly who reside outside of the home, management of chronic illness in the home, recovery from physical or emotional trauma, or other similar situations.

Based on a combination of subjective and intellectual needs, it appears practitioners narrow down course offerings based solely on the words or phrases in a continuing education workshop title. If none of the words or phrases appears attractive, potential practitioners likely move on to another offering. Consideration of an instructor's capabilities is not typically an aspect of a practitioner's selection process. It may or may not occur to the practitioner to search for instructors who, by reputation or word of mouth, employ a livelier learning approach. Expectations for the deliverer of content appear to fall to the bottom of the scale.

Instructor Mindset

While the practitioner focuses on the pragmatic and academic aspects of course selection, instructors might take an alternative approach. Some argue that instructors nowadays place greater confidence in human learning potential. As an instructor, I am committed to four objectives when creating and presenting a program.

1. Tapping into the Intersection of the Relevant, Useful, and Interesting

For this first point, the instructor should have a vision for how the "current" relevant topics in society fit into the core continuing education material and integrate user-friendly and appealing content. For example, I've observed the role and impact of humor in multiple workplaces. In workplaces where leaders had promoted healthy humor already, I easily bonded with co-workers, felt empowered, and formed strong outlets for dealing with hardship. My imagination percolated with ideas, and I joyfully looked forward to each workday.

In settings where competition and showmanship dominated, humor was expressed in the forms of laughing at others, sarcasm, and microaggressions. Relationships felt ambiguous and tenuous due to underlying unspoken motivations and agendas. Without humor to soften the daily demands at work, burnout became a forgone conclusion. Negativity was a disease others and I picked up on the job, and the only cure was to leave the organization.

Like me, many social workers are employed in the human business of treating those wounded in the body, mind, and heart. The continuous exposure to pain and suffering has a wearing effect on professional caregivers. With professional stress on the rise and billions spent by employers to retain engaged, creative, and productive workers, there is one tool most able to address these challenges—humor.

2. Distilling Research, Published Materials, and Expert Insights into Simple Messages to Use for Personal Reflection and at the Workplace

Teaching humor awareness comes from a personal mission to highlight differences between

healthy and unhealthy humor behavior. Although rarely encouraged and celebrated, healthy humor offers individuals and organizations a means of managing hardship, relaxing the body, and providing a sense of belonging. Healthy humor removes the formal walls between professionals and their leaders, clients, and the community at large. Unhealthy humor burdens people with additional stress and creates distance and discomfort.

The challenge in outlining a humor workshop for clinical professionals has been the lack of dedicated research in the field. The workshop ultimately became an intricately woven series of highlights and stories from many disciplines and individuals who recognize and appreciate the enormous power of humor.

3. Employing a Variety of Learning Techniques to Engage the Mind and Heart

Instructors have their fair share of challenges in today's educational setting. Instead of paying attention and staying in the moment, practitioners:

- use the program as a time to catch up with other tasks.
- are distracted by lack of sleep, food, or drink.
- attach to their devices and have difficulty disconnecting from social media.

Instructors can no longer expect the full attention of practitioners, and it is recommended that today's instructors accept distraction as the uninvited guest in the room. To excuse the guest would cause unnecessary disruption. It may be in the best interest of all involved to request that the uninvited guest be silenced. This will now allow the instructor to utilize other sanctioned teaching measures to which practitioners are also much accustomed—such as video, guided imagery, movement, and self-assessments.

Kinash et al. (2015) highlight a "disruptive pedagogy" in which video enhances the learning framework from didactic to constructivist with practitioners better able to manage their information-gathering (p. 129). Practitioners report through surveys and interviews that video aids learning in a number of ways (Mitra et al., 2010). These include assisting in comprehension and recalling information, providing alternative perspectives, stimulating interest, motivating further research, and increasing knowledge (Kay & Kletskin, 2012).

4. Offering a Forum Based on Mutual Respect, Service, Understanding, Compassion, and Clear Communication

These teaching components may appear obvious—however, their translation between instructor and practitioners takes effort. Beyond talking points, how is the instructor offering touchpoints that resonate with practitioners? Welcoming practitioners as they walk in the door, placing materials on the tables, and possessing and radiating calmness create a welcoming and comfortable environment.

Anyone can read slides and go through the motions of giving a continuing education presentation. Connecting with, appreciating, and rewarding practitioners can turn an ordinary

program into an extraordinary experience. How does the program evolve from monologue to dialogue? How excited are practitioners throughout the workshop, and are they inspired to share their new knowledge? These are the questions required of modern continuing education instructors.

Conclusion

This article offers the following key takeaways: First, the continuing education instructor needs to appreciate that the participating practitioner has made decisions about the workshop before entering the classroom. These decisions acknowledge interest in the topic and frame an expectation of the instructor message delivery and showmanship. Second, the instructor must interactively build momentum in the classroom using creative engagement. Because of today's widespread technology usage, this may require instructors to avail themselves of contemporary media in and beyond the classroom. This and other forms of technology are a positive influencer and stand among the new rewards of continuing education.

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Beyond the "Sage on the Stage": Helping Experts Become Effective Teachers

Douglas Behan

Abstract: Social work continuing education programs are charged with providing quality training to support social workers in practice. These programs hold a gatekeeping role to ensure the programs they offer are scholarly, engaging, and practically useful for social workers. Traditional methods of teaching that rely primarily on a lecture format are still prevalent, particularly because most subject matter experts have not had formal training on effective teaching methods for adults. Optimal learning experiences for attendees are maximized when a continuing education program (a) has defined acceptance criteria for selecting the programs they offer and (b) provides support and tools to assist instructors in creating and delivering engaging training programs that are based on adult learning theory.

***Keywords*:** social work continuing education, adult learning theory, professional development

When I became the faculty director of a university-based social work continuing education program over 10 years ago, I was not prepared for the job. Despite having over 20 years of experience as a clinician, instructor, and administrator, I did not know how to ensure programs for social workers were engaging and impactful. Despite having clinical expertise, I was never trained on how to design or deliver an effective learning experience. I assumed that knowing the work meant a person could also teach it. I was not alone in this perception. I was the norm.

Who Are We Teaching and How?

By the time a person becomes a masters-level social worker, they have completed at least nineteen years of formal education where they were primarily socialized to assume a passive learning role. It is a scene we are all very familiar with—sitting in a row of desks, eyes forward, listening to an expert dispense knowledge. A free-flowing back-and-forth exchange with other students, and especially with the teacher, is not a common occurrence in this approach. In his 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2005) famously referred to the concept of educational banking in which knowledge is deposited into the heads of students so it can be withdrawn someday in the future. Freire sees this type of education as "projecting an absolute ignorance onto others" and writes, "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 53). However, professional social workers, who work on the front lines of society's most pressing social problems, are certainly not "ignorant"; they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience into the classroom that should not be discounted. Many instructors have impressive experience, knowledge, and interesting stories, but if working professionals—who the day before were engaging in the dynamic activities of a social worker—are now expected to sit passively for an extended period in a classroom or webinar and bank information, they will eventually get bored and therefore distracted (e.g. checking phones, thinking about other responsibilities). However, when they feel personally engaged, they lean in and stay involved in the training.

Continuing education programs should guard against bank learning approaches in their programs. Professionals do not need to build a repository of knowledge for the future; they need it for their work *the next day*. Their minds are not empty and in need of filling—they have lived experience and arrive in the continuing education space with professional knowledge that can significantly contribute to the learning environment. This dynamic calls for a different teaching approach that is applied and immediate. The challenge becomes, "How do I involve the participants in the learning process and not talk at them?"

In his seminal work on adult learning theory, Malcolm Knowles (1974, 1984) differentiated the learning process for children or "pedagogy" with adult learning, termed by him "andragogy," which posits that adult learners approach learning in a fundamentally different way from children. A teaching approach matched to adults recognizes that they:

1. Are self-directed learners seeking to add to an already established skillset and reservoir of experience.
2. Respond best to a mutual and collaborative engagement with the instructor versus a more formal and authoritative approach.
3. Have learning goals which center on addressing existing real-world problems versus the subject focus used with children.
4. Experience an immediacy to apply what they learn (Knowles, 1974, 1984; Merriam, 2001).

Despite these distinct aspects of adult learners, the old pedagogical model, which is subject-focused and not student-focused, still underlies the approach of many teachers. Students are expected to revert to their old classroom conditioning and passively listen to instructors when they share their expertise in extended lectures (Ebert-May et al., 2011; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004). It is a tough sell to ask professionals to go back to the passive learning mode of their school years. A good continuing education program ignores this reality at their peril.

Attendee feedback will let the program know if a workshop fails to provide useful content applicable to their work or if the instructor failed to appreciate the expertise existing within the group and simply lectured the whole time. It is vital to hear their voices—they are the customer. This was the wake-up call I received when I started in continuing education. We would frequently offer a program with an instructor very well known for their expertise, but participants would make tepid comments on the survey forms we distribute after every training. They would voice things like "He really knew his stuff but it was pretty dry," or "There was too much content—I couldn't take it all in," or "She only left a little time for questions at the end." Certainly not the positive feedback you want to hear.

Participants also let us know that they overwhelmingly appreciated trainings that used mixed learning modalities that engaged them as professionals: "I loved that we had real conversations...The training just flew by, we did so much...I can't wait to use the skills we just practiced with my clients." It became clear we needed to create a new organizational approach that prioritized providing an engaged learner's experience.

What Does Good Training Look Like?

This led to an exploration of the literature on best practices in training adults (e.g., Flint et al., 2002; Soney, 2003), which seems to reside in an insulated space from the academic approach toward teaching (Ross-Gordon, 2011). We decided to move from an approach of *teaching* the professional learner to *facilitating their learning*. This new approach incorporates mixed teaching modalities that allow professionals to actively engage in the construction of their own knowledge (Clapper, 2009). We underwent a process of evaluating the instructors we had been using against this more active type of teaching and sorted them into two groups—one that was already using this approach or was deemed capable of pivoting, and another group that was unlikely to evolve from the traditional lecture format. This latter group we would need to move on from.

The new approach involves going beyond simply telling people things via lecture—it involves adding elements that allow people to *see* new information (e.g., demonstrations, video, graphic representations) and then *practice* applying it (e.g., role plays, case studies, discussions, small group activities, simulations). Active learning modalities allow professionals to personally relate to and practice new learning, which increases the chances of retaining and using the newly acquired knowledge in practice. Active modalities are also more likely to engage the learner on an emotional level, which also enhances learning (Clapper, 2010). Incorporating these elements into a training requires forethought by the instructor on the training design and delivery. It also requires more effort from the instructor beyond simply lecturing.

The opportunity to review the steady stream of feedback from professionals after their training experiences also forced me to look at my own teaching in the social work master's program. I was doing a lot of *telling* students what they needed to know based on my experience. It forced me to rethink how I was planning each class session. I reduced my lectures to short lecturettes (15-30 minutes), increased opportunities for students to share their own fieldwork experiences as it related to the course material, and added more hands-on practicing and engaging with the course content. This new approach reduced the number of concepts and skills I could teach each week, and I had to resist the urge to still try to cover everything that I found important. I needed to trust that an engaged experience with less material is superior to a boring experience with all the material. The subsequent formal and informal feedback I have received from students regarding this revised approach has remained consistently positive over the years. I now think back with regret for subjecting students to the old approach for so long.

Guarding the Gate

Providers of social work continuing education have an obligation to their attendees to guard the gate against the old style of teaching and usher in more useful and engaging student-centered learning. But how? Over time, our approach has yielded certain useful beliefs that help ensure our programs are learner-centered. The first is to become skeptical of a central tenet of formal education: the belief that expertise on a topic means the expert is also a deft teacher. Think again. Many bona fide experts are the driest, most boring teachers imaginable, which means the transfer of knowledge typically breaks down—particularly if the event is longer than an hour. Teaching is more than expert knowing; it requires engaging learners so that knowledge is

successfully conveyed and applied. Learning stops when an expert shares their knowledge in a dry and unengaging manner that allows participants to lose interest or feel talked down to. The proverbial "sage on the stage" approach is a poor way to educate professionals. This approach is more effective with passive bank learners, but not with experienced professionals (Curran, 2014). Trainings need to be carefully vetted by continuing education programs prior to being offered, not just to ensure the instructor has the proper expertise, but also to assess their vision and ability to deliver the material in a learner-centered manner.

Who Gets in the Gate?

Guided by an awareness that workshops need to be engaging and provide useful skills, continuing education programs should find instructors who have both subject matter expertise *and* a teaching approach appropriate for adult professionals. Easier said than done. Some instructors bring the whole package with them—they know a lot and they know how to deliver it in an engaging manner. Others, not so much. However, ignoring this second group entirely will significantly limit the breadth and depth of a program's offerings. Remember, most experts have not been trained as teachers, so their blueprint for teaching is the old-style pedagogy.

In working with lots of instructors, I've found they can roughly be placed into two broad groups. The first includes those from academic settings, generally professors, who have a firm grasp of research and theoretical knowledge, but less practice experience and wisdom. The second group includes clinicians, who bring the lived experience of daily social work practice, but who are often less acquainted with current research and theory. Their direct experience often leads to more engaging teaching; however, teaching from clinical experience needs to be grounded in academic rigor. Often the "sweet spot" for an ideal instructor is one who has practice experience as well as a passion that leads them to stay current in the research and theoretical developments in a defined area.

Another group that can yield fantastic instructors includes subject matter experts who have a willingness and potential to work differently but who need help in unlearning some of the old educational conditioning we have all experienced. To do this, a program needs to establish workshop submission standards that are shared with potential instructors up front. This helps ensure instructors know the program seeks training that is engaging and delivered through a mix of learning modalities. The standards should ensure each proposal has a) sufficient scholarship to meet the needs of experienced professionals (e.g., instructor's experience and training, a workshop reference list), b) clearly defined learning objectives, c) a plan to use mixed learning modalities (e.g., videos, lecturettes, group discussion), and d) built-in activities that involve participants (e.g., simulations, small group activities, discussions). To see the instructor's plan for their training, programs should require all proposals include a timed outline of the training day that lists the learning modalities they plan to use and the specific times they will take place. A firm workshop schedule prevents long digressive lectures. Instructors unwilling to design a workshop with this level of detail will be dissuaded from submitting a proposal or screened out early. Others will get the point that a certain type of training experience is expected and rise to the challenge.

After each training, evaluation data should be collected from attendees to measure their

satisfaction with the design and delivery of the event. We have found qualitative responses to be particularly enlightening. This data is useful in determining which instructors hit the mark, which instructors to move on from, and which instructors are effective but need guidance to improve in specific areas. Our evaluation data clearly shows learners prefer engaging learning experiences, which helps us know which instructors to rehire.

Teaching the Teachers

In addition to setting clear expectations for the format and delivery of a workshop, continuing education programs should be prepared to help willing instructors meet these standards. When a potential new instructor is interviewed, it is important to ask them to describe their teaching philosophy and approach, and then carefully listen to their answer. Do they describe an engaged group of professionals learning together or do they focus solely on the topic areas they plan to tell people about? If you do not hear an awareness of the need to engage the group, then the instructor will most likely need guidance to meet the standards. Our program has adopted a relational approach with instructors. We seek to develop a good rapport with them at the outset, learning about them and helping them to learn about our program. We purposefully share a vision for the type of experience we want our attendees to have—engaged and involved. Developing a working relationship yields many benefits, including making post-workshop feedback easier, allowing for new workshop ideas to emerge over time, and the creation of a sense of mutual loyalty that good relationships typically produce.

When an expert instructor needs guidance to meet your standards, it can be a delicate endeavor. Written standards or guidelines are extremely helpful. By referencing the established guidelines, it helps avoid a face-losing experience for the instructor when they are told their vision for the workshop does not meet the established criteria of the program. Statements can be tactfully employed like, "These are the guidelines we have for all of our workshops; it looks like some elements will need to be added to your proposal."

Unfortunately, this process required our program to move on from some well-respected instructors who were unwilling or unable to adapt. This process ranged from simply not rescheduling some instructors to teach again, to having awkward conversations about how their approach or evaluation feedback did not warrant running their workshop in the future. Letting prominent experts go was not an easy process; it included a fair amount of self-doubt: "They have so much experience! Is moving on from them the smart thing to do?...Their evaluation scores aren't bad—some people really like their teaching style." The principle that helped sustain us in building this culture was to focus on the primacy of the attendee's experience. If they leave informed and energized, it will likely transfer to their work with clients—which is the primary role of a continuing education program.

Our program has been able to develop many talented professionals who showed interest and readiness to take the career step into teaching. They have reached the point in their career where they feel a drive to share and teach what they know. Many diamonds in the rough can be polished into gems with the right support. On our website and publications, we often have ads stating, "Are you ready to teach? Contact us." We have found many instructors with years of experience working in hospitals, schools, nonprofits, and mental health centers who are

brimming with rich practice wisdom. Others have specialized experience with distinct populations such as older adults, survivors of abuse and trauma, and youth in the adoption system. It is clear they can be a bright light in the classroom, but they are a product of the bank learning approach and need to learn how to teach adults. Their professional experience provided the basis for *what* to teach, but they now need help with the new skillset of *how* to teach.

It has been a deeply rewarding aspect of my career to see talented social workers move into the classroom and receive stellar survey responses from participants expressing how dynamic and helpful the training experience was. The development process involves providing a clear vision and coaching on a) what the learner's experience should be in the training and b) exploring which engaging elements can be incorporated into their training design. After a few discussions and curriculum reviews, the instructor has a well-designed training. Initially they are usually nervous, but once they get into the classroom with a good delivery plan, their knowledge shines. Talking to a new instructor after they have successfully conducted their first workshop is a delightful experience. Participants are generally highly receptive to their knowledge, practice wisdom, and good preparation.

To further support instructors meeting our vision, our program created a booklet called *Best Practices in Social Work Continuing Education* (Behan & Donnelly, 2014) that includes section titles such as Preparing for Your Workshop, Mixing Teaching Methods, Engaging Your Audience, and Starting and Concluding Your Workshop. The document has proven useful for new instructors as well as for instructors whose evaluations show a need for improvement in some areas. We regularly receive comments from instructors like, "This was so helpful—it covered all the things I was nervous about," and "This really helped me rethink how I am running the workshop." The document is posted on the program's website along with the workshop proposal guidelines. Documents like these help establish a program's culture and standards, which can then blossom in the classroom experience.

Conclusion

Social workers have a difficult and multi-faceted job that requires life-long learning. When social workers commit time and money for training, continuing education programs can best support them by offering training that is scholarly, engaging, and practically useful. Creating a program that primarily focuses on the learning needs of adult professionals is essential, but it can be challenging, as it requires a deliberate rejection of the deeply entrenched model of expert-led teaching that most of us have experienced throughout our lives. This article describes one program's efforts to create the practices and culture to prioritize the adult professional's learning needs.

Our process involved adopting a gatekeeper role to ensure instructors were capable and prepared to deliver optimized training. Proposal submission guidelines based on adult learning theory were established to shape the content coming in the door. Some potential instructors easily met these standards, while others simply were unable to adapt their approach. Others, particularly new instructors, required guidance and mentorship in developing their approach. Coaching instructors in building their presenting skills and knowledge can help ensure the training offered is in line with the organization's culture of meeting the needs of adult learners. The outcome of

this approach is that attendees generally leave a training feeling energized and prepared to use the new skills they just experienced. By treating the social work professional as an active adult learner, training impact is increased, directly enhancing their work with clients.

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Those Boots Need More Support: The Boot Camp Model Lacks What Many Students Need

Leia Bell and Rebecca Sarlo

Abstract: This essay explores the boot camp model as a disruptor to higher education and its applicability to industries beyond technology. We examine the bootcamp model applied to the healthcare field. An estimated 30 million jobs paying at least $55,000 annually without a bachelor's degree exist in the US—yet middle-skilled industries, including healthcare, have trouble finding enough trained workers. At the same time, educators and critics of higher education look for ways to streamline education, to reduce costs, and to create efficient pathways for students to acquire the skills needed to fill critical workforce vacancies. Career-Technical Education (CTE) has long offered accelerated programs aligned with industry needs. Further, a CTE model based on a genuine commitment to student outcomes offers valuable insights regarding how to effectively implement boot camp-type programs while providing the student services many of today's students need to achieve academic success.

***Keywords*:** workforce development, career education, technical education, coding boot camp, technology boot camp, healthcare education, higher education disruptor

It is 8:30 on Tuesday morning, and "Natasha" is in a lab with a group of eight other students gathered around a hospital bed. The bed has an adult male mannequin in it; the students and instructor refer to him reverentially as "Mr. Smith." Today, they are learning how to transfer a patient from his bed to his chair.

Natasha and her classmates are enrolled in a nursing assistant program at Clearwater Healthcare Education Center (CHEC) in Clearwater, Florida, an accredited, non-profit Career-Technical Education (CTE) provider that has offered specialized training in entry-level healthcare positions for 25 years. Most students complete the lab and classroom portions of this program within six weeks before completing a 45-hour externship, which gives them experience working in both long-term care and hospital settings. During the program, students are required to learn and perform the 20 skills they will need to pass their certified nursing assistant licensure exam after they graduate.

The class, mostly composed of women ranging in age from 18 to 35, is active, if not lively, while practicing new skills. Most students in the class possess one or more of the characteristics used to define nontraditional students, including being over 24, having a GED, being a single parent, having delayed college entry by at least one year after high school, and being a first-generation student (Cooper, 2008). As such, most of the women have jobs that they work after class ends at 12:30 pm, as well as family responsibilities.

For Natasha, like many of the students in her class, going to college after high school was not assumed. Natasha graduated from high school and went to work in a retail job for nearly four years. Academic success did not come easy for her. Even though she knew she needed to attain

additional training to start a career, she was reluctant to do so for several reasons, including a lack of success in her K-12 educational experience, financial concerns, uncertainty about the return on her investment, and lack of support at home. No one in her family had ever been to college, and she was unsure if she was "college material."

Selecting a career training school like CHEC was an attractive option for Natasha for several reasons. First, and perhaps most important, CHEC's programs are short and have a clear path to a career in healthcare, an in-demand and growing field. Additionally, her access to CHEC would not be hampered by her need for academic support, and she would not be required to take noncredit, remedial coursework. If she needed to catch up academically after taking time off from her education, she would do so during her program.

For Natasha, deciding to go back to school was a big first step in her efforts to start a career. Although she may have felt reluctant to return to school, she was reassured by the short length of the program and the high demand for nursing assistants in her area, which she learned about from family members. Hopefully, if she works hard, Natasha will secure a position as a nursing assistant soon after she graduates.

Natasha's story is not unique. Rather, her experiences represent many students' experiences at CHEC and in higher education overall. Since 2006, postsecondary populations have changed significantly as the percentage of non-traditional students grows faster than that of traditional students year-on-year (Anderson, 2016). Non-traditional students account for more than 71 percent of the higher education population, with the number of non-traditional student enrollments expected to continue to grow (MacDonald, 2018). The reality is that the majority of today's higher education students do not follow the traditional and direct education-to-career path (i.e., high school, college, career, continuing education).

Non-traditional students are enrolled in all types of postsecondary institutions, from traditional four-year universities to industry-aligned CTE programs (Niu & Tienda, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, enrollment statistics suggest that non-traditional students are most interested in programs that take two or fewer years to complete, have flexible course scheduling and modality, and focus on careers. Programs that are designed to allow students to enter a career quickly are the most popular (MacDonald, 2018). Non-traditional students seek short, flexible programs and coursework that enables them to continue working and caring for their families—in short, balancing a multitude of adult responsibilities (e.g., childcare, full-time employment, and finances) while upskilling and earning credentials that allow them access to specific career pathways (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Pursuing additional CTE training after entering their desired career path facilitates students' career growth and stability. In effect, continuing education becomes a relative term when CTE *is* continuing education for those who seek to improve their circumstances by entering and progressing along a chosen career pathway while balancing school, family, and work responsibilities.

Employers Struggle to Fill Middle-Skilled Positions

Around the corner from Natasha's home, "Angela," who owns a small home health agency, has

a growing concern over the skilled worker shortages impacting her business. Consistent with national trends, which project the number of home health aide (HHA) jobs to increase 41 percent between 2016-2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), her community's demand for HHAs and certified nursing assistants (CNAs) has grown exponentially over the last several years and shows no signs of slowing. In just her area, Pinellas County, there are nearly 5,000 HHA job openings and more than 14,000 CNA job openings annually (Florida Department of Economic Opportunity Bureau of Labor Market Statistics, 2018).

Despite offering a relatively competitive wage in her industry, Angela has been unable to hire enough HHAs and CNAs to meet the demand for in-home care. She is unable to take on new patients, and her existing care providers are complaining of being overwhelmed by their schedules. Beyond needing to employ new caregivers, Angela also needs her current aides to gain additional skills that were not part of their CNA training to meet the needs of her clients, who expect her caregivers to provide an increasingly broad range of services. However, it is difficult enough to find CNAs to work for Angela's agency; it is even harder to find CNAs who are certified to manage therapies and oversee patients' administration of medication. Angela has begun to partner with a local CTE provider, CHEC, which, in addition to offering accelerated healthcare programs for new healthcare professionals, provides continuing medical education and certification training (e.g., Medication Technician) to help expand the range of services her HHAs and CNAs can provide.

Career Technical Education - The Quiet Disruptor

Boot camps and other similar programs have emerged in recent years in response to the urgent demand for highly skilled IT employees and the perceived lack of response from higher education to the industry's need (Price & Dunagan, 2019). The allure of boot camps and similar programs is their streamlined, accelerated, industry-aligned model that allows students to enter their fields of interest efficiently and cost-effectively. Similar to applications within industries like technology, boot camps offer promise for addressing staffing shortages within middle-skilled healthcare careers by creating more efficient pathways and the potential for reduced costs for students.

Nonetheless, when applied to traditional CTE student populations, the promise of boot camps and like programs is accompanied by unique challenges. These challenges stem from the fact that organizations like CHEC differ from technology boot camps in one crucial way: the demographics they have traditionally served.

Whereas a typical technology boot camp student already possesses a bachelor's degree or has demonstrated some other means of academic success (Eggleston, 2017), students who gravitate toward CTE are more racially and ethnically diverse and are more likely to come from low- and moderate-income households, be first-generation college students, require academic remediation, have a disability, and/or have been assessed as having low English language proficiency (Hinz et al., 2017). Given the confluence of students' personal, academic, and financial barriers, applying the technology industry's boot camp model to other industries—including healthcare, which serves students from diverse academic and

socioeconomic backgrounds—may be challenging. Nationally, nearly 70 percent of non-traditional students drop out of school before earning any type of credential (MacDonald, 2018).

By coupling accelerated, industry-aligned healthcare programs with a broad range of support services aimed at student needs throughout the student life cycle, CHEC has been able to demonstrate positive program completion results. In particular, completion is critical for CTE students because a degree or a certificate increases earnings (Orozco & Wheary, 2010) and lowers the likelihood of defaulting on one's student loans (College Board, 2016).

The Case for Student Supports

As Natasha waits for the class to begin, her instructor, "Mr. Durant," greets her. She responds to him quietly, almost inaudibly, and does not make eye contact. He notes that Natasha appears distressed. Unbeknownst to Mr. Durant, last night Natasha and her brother with whom she lives had an argument; her brother needs her to move out and has given her a limited amount of time to do so. To complicate her housing needs, she is three months pregnant.

Today, Natasha is not sure that she will be able to concentrate in class, so she considers leaving the campus. Mr. Durant encourages Natasha to speak with "Marcus," the learner services advisor on the campus. Marcus schedules an appointment with Natasha right after her class, reassures her that everything will be okay, and motivates her to set her worries aside for the time being so that she can focus on learning and accomplishing her goals.

After class, Natasha heads to the CHEC Learner Services office to meet Marcus, who asks her questions to gain more information about her situation, including how much time her brother has given her to vacate his property, whether she currently has income, and how far she is able to travel to the campus each day. Marcus offers a range of housing options and makes a few phone calls to collect information and advocate on Natasha's behalf. Together, Natasha and Marcus settle on "Jennifer's Home," which is only two blocks from CHEC and specializes in helping young and expectant mothers by providing housing, counseling, and prenatal care. Next, Marcus shares information with Natasha about available community, state, and federal resources and reviews the documentation requirements with her, anticipating she may benefit from these services in the future.

Before she leaves, Natasha shares with Marcus her concerns about her ability to maintain her attendance and academic success, considering everything with which she is contending in her personal life. Marcus encourages her to think positively about the successes she has achieved so far in her program, reminding her that she has almost finished her on-campus coursework and will soon begin her externship—the final step in her program. Finally, he encourages her to speak with her instructor and even offers to facilitate the conversation. Natasha responds that she is feeling better, and she leaves to find Mr. Durant. Marcus enters general notes and recommended interventions into the student database to enable communication across the CHEC team and sets a reminder to follow up with her later in the week.

In his lab, Mr. Durant advises Natasha to attend the open lab he hosts each Friday, which allows students to address any skills gap they may have through supervised practice. The remediation Natasha receives is integrated into her courses and is essential to her academic success. National trends illustrate that 40-60 percent of first-year college students are underprepared for college-level coursework and require remediation. Fewer than 10 percent of students who are required to take remedial classes complete their degree or credential on time (Jimenez et al., 2016). Integrated remediation, which is proven to be an effective method of addressing students' academic needs (Radford et al., 2012), allows students to move directly into their career-focused coursework with academic support rather than requiring remedial courses upfront, which can disengage students before they even start their programs or earn college credit. In response to this research, CHEC has put in place robust academic supports, including differentiated instruction, tutoring, and open labs. The education team meets weekly to review a wide array of student data to identify students who are at-risk and may need additional support.

During the 45 minutes Natasha spent with Marcus, a small group of students has gathered outside his door, awaiting their turn to speak with him. On any given day, Marcus will visit or speak with as many as 20 students. His role on campus is to help students like Natasha navigate any personal challenges they may be experiencing. Typical issues students come to see Marcus about include childcare, transportation, housing, food needs, and legal assistance. Marcus helps connect these students with community resources and offers a kind and supportive ear.

In addition to his one-on-one visits with students, Marcus's position involves all aspects of student support, including building relationships with community organizations like the ones to which he referred Natasha. Additionally, Marcus oversees the process through which students who leave can return to CHEC, monitors attendance and outreach, coordinates honor student recognition, facilitates food pantry donations and diaper bank distributions, and coordinates financial literacy and wellness workshops for students and the community. These services play an integral role in helping to remove or lessen the impact of potential barriers to program completion for a large share of the campus' students.

Program Completion: Just the Beginning

Three weeks later, Natasha has completed her coursework and externship experience. She is excited about finding a job, which will allow her to move out of Jennifer's Home and into an apartment of her own. But first, Natasha will need to pass her CNA exam. She is nervous and unsure about how to register for the exam. Natasha meets with CHEC's certification specialist, whose job it is to assist her with her application and other documentation, schedule her exam, and provide her with information about flexibly scheduled certification preparation sessions. Certification preparation sessions are offered in the day and evening throughout the year, with the number of sessions determined based on student needs. Since CHEC is a certification testing center, Natasha will be able to take her test on-site in the space and with the equipment with which she was trained, which helps to reduce her anxiety about her exam.

Finally, her test date arrives, and, fewer than three weeks after completing her Nursing Assistant program, Natasha successfully passes Florida's Certified Nursing Assistant exam and becomes a

CNA. The exam takes the entirety of the morning. She is exhausted but proud and exhilarated.

Equipped with her CNA certification, Natasha meets with her career services advisor, "Christina," whose role it is to assist CHEC students through the process of finding a job in their field. Over the next few weeks, they will work together to identify jobs to which she is interested in applying, develop her resume, complete applications, and prepare for interviews. Natasha has never held a position outside of retail and is not sure what to expect. Over the next few weeks, her advisor will review opportunities close to Natasha's residence and schedule and prepare her for interviews. Before her first interview, Natasha selects two interview outfits from a career closet containing gently used, donated professional clothing. Following each job interview, Christina reaches out to the hiring manager to inquire about Natasha and whether the agency plans to hire her. She uses feedback to coach Natasha and to strengthen her interview skills.

Over the next two weeks, Natasha goes on six interviews and is offered three positions. She meets with Christina to discuss the pros and cons of each position. Finally, Natasha makes her decision. Christina assists Natasha in completing the employment paperwork required by Angela's home health agency.

Six weeks after being hired, Natasha returns to CHEC, along with a small group of other CNAs, to complete a certification training that will expand her scope of practice. Angela, Natasha's employer, intends to cover the cost for all her CNAs to go through this training to expand the services her agency can provide to its clients.

Career Technical Education Finds Its Seat at the Table

Overall, the student population served by CHEC's Clearwater campus is not unlike that of many other healthcare training schools. Healthcare CTE schools tend to serve a higher percentage of students who are female, black, low-income, disabled, and first-generation college students than traditional academic programs—demographics that are negatively associated with CTE program completion (Carnevale et al., 2018). These data suggest that CTE programs, particularly those delivered in an accelerated fashion (e.g., boot camps), should include a full range of student service supports that remove barriers to program completion and ease graduates' transition through certification and into employment.

A longtime member of the educational community, CTE has struggled in recent decades to find its place in the higher education conversation. While high school students have been encouraged and coaxed into four-year programs and informed of the lifetime earning differential between bachelor's and associate's degree earners, millions of critical positions in various trades, including healthcare, have been left unfilled—positions that require more than a high school diploma and less than a bachelor's degree (Carnevale et al., 2018).

Because of the level of credential awarded to many CTE students (i.e., more than a high school diploma and less than a bachelor's degree), it has heretofore been easy to marginalize CTE institutions as being "less than" those offering bachelor's and other advanced degrees. At the same time, accelerated, industry-aligned CTE programs are attractive to non-traditional students,

provide a viable solution for addressing critical healthcare staffing shortages, and allow individuals balancing work and family to engage in continuing education and career progression.

Fortunately, as decision-makers have begun to look more closely at the skills gap and critical staffing shortages that exist in most communities, the national dialogue around educational pathways has begun to shift. As CTE becomes a focal point within educational dialogue and funding priorities, new CTE providers will begin to emerge in response to community needs. Many states are responding to the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which reauthorizes the Perkins Act and provides grant funding while giving states more autonomy (i.e., less regulation) in the formulation of CTE programs (Passarella, 2018). Florida has made career education a priority; the state is challenging itself to jump from 24th in the nation to first in workforce preparation (Solochek, 2019). With funding available, it is anticipated that new CTE providers will emerge (Kreighbaum, 2019), including educational organizations that may be less equipped to respond to the needs of the traditional CTE student. The real focus, in the end, must remain on the needs of students—all students—to ensure they have the support they need to complete training programs and the talents and skills to fill workforce needs.

Bringing It All Together

As educators and critics of higher education seek to adopt elements of the boot camp model to expand the availability of efficient, cost-effective educational pathways that address critical workforce shortages in industries beyond technology, including healthcare, they should do so while recognizing that students like Natasha will likely require more than access to accelerated curricula. Without robust student service support, students with demographics typical of CTE schools may find keeping up with and completing their programs difficult, if not impossible.

While the "streamlined approach" to education offers opportunities to keep costs down for consumers and increase the availability of middle-skilled workers for employers, the boot camp model may need to be adapted as it looks to serve sectors outside of technology and students who have not previously earned an academic degree. In order to ensure program completion, CTE boot camp programs will need to incorporate rigorous student services and support.

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Money-Driven Choices: A Disruptor of Learning

Jacquelynne Anne Boivin

Abstract: Public education in the United States is often run like a business—driven by money. A school's decisions, like which textbooks to use, how many paraprofessionals to hire to support teachers, and the technology offered throughout the school, are all contingent upon a budget. In the field of education, while administrators encourage life-long learning, this message neglects to acknowledge a sad reality reflected by the practices of public school districts. The more education a teacher receives, the more expensive they are to the district. While such continuing education benefits instruction, and thus student learning, the increased pay commonly outlined in school districts' collective bargaining agreements shows that at the highest ranking of doctorate, teachers are too expensive. This narrative depicts my journey of pursuing a doctorate while teaching but hiding it out of this fear.

***Keywords*:** budget, doctorate, education, life-long learning, public education, teaching

Introduction

Careers based on compassion for others often pose particular challenges for their practitioners. Whether it be social work and the mental health toll of supporting children in non-nurturing homes, or nursing and the dauntingly long shifts with limited breaks, occupations focused on caring for others have their obstacles. Teaching, an occupation I chose out of my love for children, posed a challenge for me that I did not anticipate. Low pay, spending my own money on classroom supplies, unfair labeling as a "glorified babysitter," and large class sizes without in-class support were all obstacles I knew were part of the profession. However, I did not expect school funding concerns to be a hindrance to my students' and my own learning.

"Become a life-long learner!" Ever hear or give that advice? It's a mantra that our culture has been perpetuating for decades. As a teacher, I preached this long-term goal to my students routinely with the hopes that later in life they would go to college, graduate with a bachelor's or master's, and even go on to get their doctorates. But what if I told you that getting a doctorate was looked down upon—that it is something that should be kept private, a secret? Would you think I'm crazy? Quite possibly, but my story is one that reflects these exact sentiments. Public education's prioritization of finances has disrupted my own learning and my students' learning as I served as a fifth-grade teacher for three years. From students concerned I'd lose my job due to budget cuts, to me fearing my continuing education was too evident to administrators, concerns about money had overtaken much of the time meant to be dedicated to learning. A paradox became evident: In a place where learning should be encouraged and nurtured in countless ways, the focus on educational funding may be the largest hindrance.

One Teacher's Story of a Secret Doctorate

Growing up in a small town in western Massachusetts, my mother, a high school special education teacher, dreamt of getting her doctorate. That title of "Dr. Chase" was something she

desired deeply. However, before she could celebrate getting accepted into a program, she had to turn them down. She had just found out she was pregnant with my older brother and had decided to make motherhood her focus. I respect her for that choice, but she later admitted to me that her greatest career aspiration was to get her doctorate in special education—and that was why she constantly reminded me that a doctoral degree was within my reach. In high school and college, I would scoff at her and insist that once I had my BA, I was going to be done with school. Then, when I started my education major in college, I found I needed to get a master's anyway. I decided that another year of school would not be so bad and, so, I pursued an MEd in elementary education. But in graduate school, I grew to truly love the process of learning.

Once I graduated, I took a year off from being a student to focus on my first year of teaching, which was overwhelming in itself. With a class of 26 students, a high proportion of them receiving special education services, my plate was full. But I was missing the structure of coursework, reading empirical articles, and pushing myself academically. What could possibly fill this void? When I explained to my mother how I was feeling, she was quick to respond with one single word: "Doctorate." I laughed at first, for she had been harping on that idea since I was a mere five years old (or earlier, because knowing her, she probably said it to me in utero). I then realized she was right.

I wanted to reach a higher level, and as much as I was enjoying teaching, I wanted something more. I wanted to teach prospective teachers in an educator preparation program. I saw myself as a college professor, climbing the ladder of academia, getting published, researching in the field, and through this work having an even greater impact on the field of education. I felt like I understood excellence in teaching practice, and reviews from parents and students ensured me that I understood what it took to be a life-changing teacher. With my PhD in education leadership, research showed me that I could help inspire other teachers.

As you could imagine, my mother was thrilled with this news that I wanted a PhD for the betterment of the field of education. When I was accepted to Lesley University, she started absolutely bawling with excitement, joy, and pride. Unfortunately, three weeks before I would leave for my first residency to officially start my PhD program, my mother passed away from cancer, only three weeks after being diagnosed.

Heartbroken, confused, and deflated, I held onto the dream of my PhD to pick myself back up. I needed a focus, an outlet, and some meaning to my life, and I hoped that re-entering academia would provide the structure I needed to function. I went out to Cambridge, MA, to begin a journey that has brought me close to some of the most amazing, inspirational people I have ever met, and I have been pushed intellectually to a level I would have never thought possible. While it has been a challenging program, the supports that have surrounded me have made it all possible.

Upon beginning this program, however, I learned something quite interesting from my fellow cohort members. Not all schools support teachers getting their doctoral degrees. I was very surprised at this news. Not supportive of furthering one's education? Isn't that what we advocate to our students daily by preaching a love of learning for life? But why?

The answer was quite simple: More education means a higher salary. A higher salary means more money out of the school district's pocket. I learned that school districts that were struggling to make ends meet financially, like my school district, were known to cut teachers who decided to go for higher degrees if those teachers did not have professional status. A teacher achieves professional status after three years of teaching at a single school and it becomes much harder for that teacher to lose their job, similar to tenure.

Since I had just entered my second year of teaching and needed three years to qualify for professional status, I became incredibly scared of my school district discovering that I was pursuing this endeavor. What if they found out? Would I be fired? Would any school district want me? How come some places celebrated teachers learning more, but others condemned it? I felt lost and frightened. When paying for a pricey degree out of pocket, I could have used the funds more than ever and technically could have reported course credits to climb the salary scale, but it was too much of a risk to ask. Were a few thousand dollars in pay raise worth potentially getting laid off? I decided to keep my continuing education to myself.

In a world where I originally thought earning more education was a positive, I saw an ugly underbelly—one that revolved around money and budgets. I decided to keep my PhD a secret so that my school would not have a reason to fire me; I really enjoyed the small, rural school where I was teaching. A year after making that choice, something convinced me further that I made the right decision.

In May of 2017, I was preparing for my students like any other day. I was putting up the morning message and schedule after photocopying some exit tickets for the day's reading lesson. Everything was normal, until the principal opened my door and asked me to come see him when I got a chance. His tone was less upbeat than usual, so I had the sense that something was awry. Once I walked into his office, he asked me to take a seat. He then proceeded to tell me something that seemed unreal at the time—I was being laid off.

To save money, the school was combining fifth and sixth grade. I was the most recent hire out of the two grades, so I was the one being laid off. This did not go over well with the community. Yes, they did not like the idea of students of different ages forced into the same class, but it had also turned personal. They were more upset about me being let go than the act of merging. Students showed up to school committee meetings with protest signs and news crews even waited outside my car for commentary. As humbling of an experience as this was to have so many fight to have me stay, it was also quite nerve-wracking. "Teachers get cut all the time," people would say to me, to try and normalize the scenario. My students did not see it that way. As one student told me, "It's just not fair. You're the best teacher we have ever had and you do so much for us. Why should you be cut?" I was shocked with her rationale and all I could respond with was, "It's just how life goes sometimes."

In the end, due to this large disruption from the community, the superintendent rescinded his decision to reduce faculty numbers and did not merge the two grades. Many of my students' parents had threatened to remove their children from the district if faculty numbers were cut. My students felt validated for their undying efforts to keep me at their school, even though I would

not be their teacher anymore as they had moved up to sixth grade. While they gained a great deal of satisfaction and skills of perseverance and optimism, they lost time learning academics and felt a huge amount of pressure that they put on themselves to answer the call of saving my job. While there were pros to this experience, it was a huge disruptor to their education and to my teaching, as it was all that was on their minds.

The whole experience highlighted to me what money means for a public school district whose funds are already tight. They were willing to cut me in a heartbeat, without a second look. Suddenly, it became clear to me that I was lucky to have a job at all. For me to suddenly report my PhD course credits to the district to increase my salary could potentially inspire the administrators to look for any reason to cut me.

It was an emotionally taxing process. I usually got into school one to one-and-a-half hours prior to students' arrival, and not even other staff were there yet. I did this because once I had materials prepared for my students for the day, I would use any extra time to work on PhD homework—I needed any spare time I had. Every time another teacher or an administrator walked into my classroom, I felt paranoid that maybe something from my coursework got left out. What if they saw a book on qualitative research methods or my course program outline? It was as if I feared that they could smell the academia emitting through my pores. I could not even talk to my principal without thinking about him finding out about my PhD. I even had nightmares of the district finding out and firing me. The focus on my fear kept me from fully seeing the extent to which my doctoral studies were actually improving my teaching, since so much of my coursework revolved around trying out new strategies and material with my students.

I *was* able to see, however, that student engagement was vastly improved, student test scores were on the rise, and the new quality of conversations that were taking place was inspiring, all thanks to my PhD work. The results I was seeing in my students due to my improved practice made me satisfied with my choice to pursue my PhD, and I deeply wished I could share it with those above me administratively. However, to the school district, a better, more expensive teacher was simply not worth the cost.

Flash forward two years later, and I had defended my dissertation after teaching in a temporary position in an educator preparation program. I had become a tenure-track assistant professor of education at a state university. The clouds had parted in my professional world and the largest weight had been lifted from my shoulders. The fear that once made me second-guess every action I made from the moment I stepped on school grounds had suddenly vanished faster than candy in front of a fifth grader. This meant that upon leaving to work in higher education, I told my principal what I had been up to for the past two years in secrecy. His reply was that I should not have worried about it and should have let them know so that I could get more pay—but when I told our union representatives and colleagues of my choice, they affirmed that I made the correct decision. Everyone else I spoke with agreed that it was likely that the district would have cut me had they discovered my continuing education. I think that my principal denied that is what would have happened because it is not something that he would have openly admitted, or because it would not have been his choice; rather, it was the superintendent's choice who was in

charge of the decision to almost cut me previously. Either way, keeping my education a secret was the smartest choice for me. Taking a pay cut of about $4,000 was worth not risking losing my job.

What do all of these experiences say about the mantra "life-long learning"? Is it a lie that we tell students? My situation is more common than I originally thought. By attending academic conferences, I have met several other practicing teachers who were also keeping their continuing education "undercover." Less than two percent of the population holds a doctorate, and less than one percent hold a doctorate and are women (Scientific American, 2014). Something that should evoke pride and support has, greatly, brought me fear and reluctance. So, I pose a question to the those in the field of education: Are school administrators passing along a double standard that their students should get as much education as possible, but their employees should not? In a country where teachers are touted as role models for their students, are we putting a cap on their potential and then, by extension, a cap on their students' potential?

Call me a rebel, call me a flight risk, or call me an over-achiever, but one thing no one could ever call me is impassionate and lazy. Working on my PhD has pushed me to work harder and think deeper, and it has made me a more reflective and effective teacher. In the midst of writing lessons, grading papers, applying for grants, and scheduling fundraisers and fieldtrips, I had been hiding in the shadows writing essays, reading countless academic journals, and completing course after course.

A Macro Perspective

In the end, I guess that it is not worth the cost to some administrators to have teachers continue their education. This is not the case everywhere, but the scenario I described does occur widespread in our nation, according to Leachman et al. (2017). Increased school funding, Leachman et al. argue, could help schools hire and retain high-quality teachers and reduce class sizes, yet 29 states provided less state funding per student in 2015 than in 2008. On average, 47 percent of public school funding comes from the state, 45 percent comes from local revenue, and only about 8 percent comes from the federal government. Such large discrepancies in state funding were not matched by federal aid, leaving school districts losing funding over time (Leachman et al., 2017). The less money in a school district, the higher the discouragement for teachers to climb in the salary scale, thus less continued learning.

The lack of money in public education means less money for teacher salaries. The national Report Card stated that the U.S. only has six states that offer wages deemed "competitive" when compared to other career options; the rest fall below, thus making it more difficult for schools in those states to retain high-quality teachers (Baker et al., 2014). Teachers, as a result, are paid less and asked to teach more children at a single time. The profession of teaching has become even more challenging, but not more rewarding—at least monetarily. To make matters worse, there has been a decrease in education jobs across the nation. Between 2008 and 2015, there have been about 135,000 education jobs cut, whereas the student enrollment has increased by over 1.4 million (Leachman et al., 2017). This leaves students with lower-quality instruction due to less individualized attention. Communities suffer because they then become populated with

graduates who did not receive a high-quality education and lack skills to contribute toward the economy as effectively as they could had they received a better education.

Communities that are deemed "rougher" for teachers to teach do not supply increased resources for those teachers, where they need it most (Levy, 2018). The struggling communities then suffer further because the students are not receiving the support they need in their schools. Lack of funding and prioritization has hindered schools from helping students transfer taught skills to their future careers. In a nation that prides itself on its status as an economic superpower, the concern about education is lacking. Without a focus on improving the supports in the U.S. public education system, it is inevitable that the U.S. economic status will decline, similar to how its place in education has already dropped internationally (Levy, 2018).

Could life-long learning be the answer to concerns of our nation's future? If teachers continue to learn and improve their practice, while concurrently increasing their salaries, students will develop twenty-first century skills to be economically competitive in the future (Levy, 2018). This would result in economic benefits for the nation for years to come. If students have all the resources needed to ensure they are learning the necessary skills, and decisions of school offerings are not based on money, the nation benefits. In all, money should never be the deciding factor as to whether teachers or students are learning.

There is a long-standing controversy between whether *more* money or *better-used* money is the answer to the woes that public schools face. If money did not matter, then it wouldn't be challenging to teach a child who didn't eat breakfast or come to school with a snack. Turner et al. (2016) of National Public Radio (NPR) report that when increased funding is specifically allocated to recruiting adept teachers and decreasing class sizes, the quality of the education is vastly improved. The main take-aways from the studies presented in Turner et al.'s article were that a) the money must be directed toward the students who need it the most, b) the monetary increases must come at a steady rate over multiple years, c) the money should remain in the classroom by supporting teachers' salaries, training, and continuing education, and d) the money should be applied to the public schools with a distinct definition of the desired result—i.e., how do they define success? Money for schools alone, Turner et al. conclude, isn't the simplest answer for better experiences for both teachers and students: Instead, thoughtful use of funds (still increased) could more reliably boost student achievement.

Conclusion

As I left my job as a public school teacher, my secret came out—and I'm now using it as a lesson to all around me to bring to light a hidden conundrum that deserves attention. No teachers should ever have to hide achieving more for themselves. Consider this a request for all school administrators: Encourage your teachers to receive more education past their requirements, even if it costs the district more money. The benefits are too bountiful to pass up. More educated teachers mean more educated students.

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A Holistic Continuing Education Approach for Social Services Development: Promoting Partnerships Between Universities and Social Service Agencies

Andrea De Ott

Abstract: This article proposes that a dynamic, two-way collaboration between social service agencies and universities would advance the cause of social service and its impact on those most at risk. I believe this alliance would provide mutual benefit: student interns gain real-world job skills to prepare them for a career, while social service professionals gain improved access to continuing education. We cannot have graduate students in internships without supervisors, and we cannot become supervisors without continuing our education—education whose access' limiting factors could be mitigated by university resources. This collaboration creates a sustainable healing cycle where the more knowledgeable and capable the practicing social worker or psychotherapist becomes, the more effective they are at treating patients and, by extension, providing productive mentoring for interns. To exemplify success of this idea, I reflect on my own experience creating training programs for an agency with several community clinics in suburban New York.

***Keywords*:** education, clinical supervision, program development, continuing education, universities, social service agencies, partnerships, skills development, training

Introduction

Continuing education for social service practitioners is not a linear process; it is, rather, a continual process requiring a lifelong commitment to learning. This process integrates theory and practice, starting at a student's level (as an intern) and continuing through other career phases, including leadership roles. In the social service field, the continuation of education from the classroom into the field can benefit from a partnership between universities and social service agencies, particularly because of the financial limitations social service professionals face paying for continuing education credits (CEUs). Clinical supervisors who are training students in internship programs could be provided CEUs in exchange for their service to universities, resulting in a higher quality of education for their graduates.

To exemplify success in this type of collaboration, I reflect on my own experience creating training programs for an agency with several community clinics in suburban New York. I accomplished this in my former role as an internship coordinator by utilizing training tools provided in my role as an adjunct professor for Fordham University located also in suburban New York. I created two training programs for the "W agency" using my relationship and training with Fordham University: 1) a training program for all fieldwork students in the entire W agency and 2) a specialized training program for bilingual interns implemented with a systemic approach (school-based with a task supervisor and clinic-based with a clinical supervisor). The first program also included a training for clinical supervisors and was developed with the help of my supervisor, who had over 30 years of clinical experience. The

programs proved to be effective in training students for attaining a job. It was also useful for supporting clinical supervisors. However, the only benefits for clinical supervisors were emotional rewards for mentoring students—it did not address their need for continuing education. It would be more gratifying if universities provided CEUs for this contribution.

I believe that a collaboration between universities and social service agencies is beneficial for the field of social services; not only can it increase competencies, it can also decrease financial struggles among service providers. Universities should support social service agencies because social service agencies support universities by training their students and employing their graduates. Continuing education is extremely relevant; due to the high demand in social service professions, universities have lowered their admission requirements. In 2018, admission to a master's program at Fordham University (2019) only required a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college; this implies no Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and no Grade Point Average (GPA). In addition, with a larger number of graduates, salaries are lower. With lower salaries, there is less capacity to finance courses for continuing education. Thus exists a perpetual cycle of low-income practitioners delivering services of suboptimal quality.

The agency I had worked for had serious financial challenges, limiting its ability to afford staff development. If more field educators had access to advanced training provided by a university as a benefit for training their students, not only would it improve the quality of internships, it would also improve the quality of social services, potentially increasing the agencies' revenue when more graduate students can join agencies and more clients can be served.

Challenges Affecting Social Service Practitioners' Ability to Pay for CEUs

Access to continuing education is particularly important for the social service field. The demand for occupations in social services has increased. In 2012, there were 2.4 million job openings, with 2.8 million projected by 2022, according to the National Center for Education Statistics [Center] (2018). The Center refers to social services occupations as consisting of two groups: 1) counselors, social workers, and other community and social service specialists and 2) religious workers. Although there are more jobs in occupations that typically require a bachelor's degree, faster growth and more new jobs are projected for occupations that typically require a master's degree (Torpey, 2018).

Since the demand for social service practitioners has increased, universities have increased their number of programs, incorporating online training and even cutting admission requirements such as the GRE, as seen with Fordham University. Therefore, more students graduate each year; in 2010 there were about 700,000 masters-level degrees, and there will be over 900,000 in 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics [Center], 2019). This represents a dramatic increase. The Center stated that from 2015 to 2016, nearly 50,000 students graduated in the public administration and social services field.

Continuing education becomes even more relevant when schools decrease their admission requirements. However, there are serious challenges for social service practitioners to attain continuing education because student loans have increased. Between 1999-2000 and 2015-2016,

average student loan balances for graduate school completers increased for all degree types: Average student loan balances increased by 90 percent for those who completed professional doctorate degrees, from $98,200 to $186,600, and by 57 percent for those who completed master's degrees, from $42,100 to $66,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

There are several professions in the social service field and social work is only one of those professions. Social work is *my* profession, and to illustrate our struggle I will use employment characteristics from this field related to the ability to afford continuing education.

According to the United States Department of Labor [Department] (2018), in 2016, there were more than 680,000 social workers employed in the United States; by 2026, the number of social workers is projected to increase to more than 790,000. Over the decade, the Department states that the occupation of child, family, and school social workers is projected to add about 45,000 more jobs. In 2017, the hourly wage for social workers in the state of New York was $29.28, and the annual wage was $61,980; nearly 8,000 social workers were employed (United States Department of Labor, 2018). It is worthy to note that New York requires master's degrees for social workers.

Continuing education credits are required for licensing renewal. In New York, there are two licenses: the Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW) and the Licensed Clinical Social Work (LCSW). To gain a LCSW in the state of New York, the requirement per the New York State Department of Labor [NYS Department] (2019) is at least three years of post-MSW supervised experience in diagnosis, psychotherapy, and assessment-based treatment planning, and in most cases one must be licensed and currently registered to practice as a LMSW. In 2016, the NYS Department reported 1,167 licenses issued for this occupation. In 2017, the NYS Department reported 1,357 licenses issued for this occupation. As of July 1, 2018, in the state of New York there were, in total, 27,730 registered licenses for this occupation (NYS Department of Labor, 2019). Social service agencies face the demand of providing clinical supervision and continuing education for their staff to help them become licensed clinicians. However, agencies are constrained by financial limitations. Allard (2009) claimed that in times of economic recessions, sufficient budget for staff development is not common in social service agencies.

Considering all these facts—lower standards to enter graduate programs, large numbers of graduates, large amounts of debt, low salaries, lack of funding in social service agencies for staff development—we can conclude that although continuing education is extremely important, it is difficult to afford.

While I was training students, I was facing challenges affording my own continuing education, which was fundamental to sustaining my role as a clinical supervisor. I had to pay for my student loans, I was (and am) a single mother, and the cost of my living was approximately 80 percent of my income. Typically, CEUs would cost approximately $2000 every three years.

I was not alone in this struggle; the agency I worked for was facing budget cuts and other clinical supervisors were facing financial difficulty. But what really moved me were the challenges I noticed in my students. They showed up tired and rushed by the hardships of life—a

lot of them were single parents, some with full-time jobs and internships, and they were coming to a field already stressed after, in some cases, commuting long distances.

During the process, I thought it was unfair for me to bear this burden alone while universities were mass-producing a workforce that in some cases was unlikely to be employable. It was a conflicting feeling because I was also an adjunct professor and I was supported by a university. I inevitably thought, "If I am feeling this way in my current situation, which is relatively privileged in comparison to most clinical supervisors, this is a worse scenario for field instructors who are not receiving any benefit from the universities for training students."

I believe that universities should support field instructors who are training their students; it would increase their motivation and decrease their financial burden. Furthermore, licensing requirements for practitioners include educational targets that require social service agencies to support their practitioners. Social service agencies must provide clinical supervision and staff development to maintain employee motivation, decrease burnout, and sustain best practices. However, most agencies face financial limitations that make it particularly challenging to meet these demands. This was evident in the case of the agency I worked for; the agency had a limited budget of approximately $18 million dollars to serve more than 30,000 people and pay more than 500 employees (GuideStar, 2018). The vice president mentioned the agency had a very small budget for staff development (F., personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Social service agencies depend on evidence-based practices to serve their clients with quality standards and to be able to survive financially, especially when payments are value-based. But when the resources to provide a valuable necessity are not allocated due to lack of funding, it is difficult for an agency to be healthy and to provide quality services. Therefore, partnerships between universities and social service institutions can help to decrease these limitations by ensuring that social service practitioners have easier access to continuing education.

The Training Programs and Their Success

The training programs I created teach key tasks required for today's challenges in the mental health field: electronic medical records (EMR) management, electronic documentation, assessment, integrating clinical interviews and assessments, suicide assessment, suicide clinical interviewing, safety plan interviewing, addressing issues of safety and risk within family systems, giving trauma systems therapy (TST), bilingual clinical interviewing, and so on. The main objective of these programs was to make my students employable faster so they could see a return on their educational investment sooner.

The training programs proved to be successful. Most of the students were able to get involved in the required work activities at a faster rate. They learned how to document using the EMR more quickly than in previous years; they learned to integrate clinical interviews with clinical assessments, particularly suicide assessments; they learned TST (a training in implementation process for over five years agency-wide); and they were able to perform TST case presentations during their internship.

Here are some testimonials from students engaged in the training program:

> Throughout my experience as a student intern with the internship program Andrea created at [W agency], I got to not only learn and practice clinical skills but also grow as a professional and individual. The program was well organized and facilitated. From the start of the program, we were allowed the tools necessary to begin our journey as interns. Aside from [one-on-one] weekly supervision sessions, interns had weekly group guidance. Each session provided us with knowledge, feedback, and an opportunity to practice skills together guiding the interns through the entire experience. Sessions were facilitated by clinicians with different areas of expertise who provided us with their skills and guidance. As well, these sessions allowed interns to share their experiences with clients and also find some assistance [on] particularly complex cases. Personally, this experience allowed me to discover my strengths and weaknesses. I also discovered my passion for working with the Spanish speaking community and doing family therapy which the program focuses on. Part of the program was to assist interns on how to work with the Spanish speaking community which entailed learning about cultural sensitivity and immigration. Overall, what I found extremely helpful about this internship program was always feeling supported which I am extremely grateful for. I finished the intern program feeling more confident in myself and my skills. (E., personal communication, July 14, 2020)

> The Training Program has been one of the most life-changing experiences in terms of self-growth. I had the pleasure of working with Andrea during my last year in the School of Social Service Master Program at [W agency]. Going into the program, Andrea explained that although it would be an arduous process, it would be very rewarding in the end. Andrea was quick to set a safe environment in which we were able to discuss and debrief our experiences in our assigned internships. The program integrated a variety of components. One that sticks out for me in particular, were [*sic*] the guest speakers. These guests taught and shared their knowledge on specific specializations, including: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Grounding Techniques, Clinical Bilingualism, and many more. Andrea did a wonderful job of including a diverse group of speakers from different backgrounds that we were each able to identify with. The program also encouraged us all to step out of our comfort zones. We role played in order to be in the position of both the clinician and the client. By the end, we knew very well what it was like to be either party. This aided in putting our newly learned techniques into effect. The program also put a much-needed emphasis on minorities, which schools and other programs do not focus on or prioritize. These aspects of the program prepared and provided all of us with tools we would apply to our future professions. The program pushed us past our limits, but Andrea made it so comfortable and inviting that everyone enjoyed participating and wanted to continue to grow. At the start of the program, I was very quiet and shy, however, Andrea and the program led me to allow myself to grow and feel confident in my skills. Andrea's passion and love for her profession can be seen throughout the program and I am very grateful that it helped me bloom into the Social Worker I am today. (V., personal communication, July 21, 2020)

> The training program allowed me to flourish as a professional in ways that I did not expect. With an interdisciplinary curriculum, I was able to explore aspects of myself as a professional that I was not aware of and develop a strong sense of self as a therapist. With a multitude of training provided, I have been able to determine both my strengths and weaknesses as a clinician. The strong emphasis on the development and improvement of bilingual clinical services enabled me to cherish a skill that I had yet to use in my career. Since the training program, I have been able to connect with a predominantly Latino population that I was and will continue to serve. Additionally, the hands-on experience in a therapeutic setting enhanced my skills toward family therapy specifically. With a strong foundation provided via varying therapeutic modalities, I feel very well prepared to enter the workforce as a social worker. The emphasis on Trauma Systems Therapy enabled me to develop the skills needed for the current events that we find ourselves in and helped me approach therapy using a respectable theory. The training program incorporates theory, hands-on experience, and a look into the business aspect of careers in the mental health field often not provided by larger institutions. As a recent graduate, I am very grateful for the experiences I have had via the [W university] training program and will forever cherish the memories and relationships I have developed as a result. The [W university] training program changed me. (M., personal communication, July 21, 2020)

How a Partnership Between University and Social Service Agency Benefited My Career Development

I was born in Esmeraldas, Ecuador, raised by my extended African-Latino American family. I migrated to Greenwich, Connecticut, USA, with my one-year-old daughter after my American husband was killed. As anyone could imagine, I faced several struggles to develop my career. But I was able to advance and set quality standards in my clinical practice through the holistic style of education I propose in this article: classroom and field education over the entire path of a practitioner's career.

I currently own a mental health center—"S.P. Center"—with locations in a wealthy town in Connecticut and a new migrant town in New York. Both locations, in a way, integrate together my life path and my service to my communities. One location is predominantly Latino-American while the other is a nearby affluent community, mostly Caucasian. I am not affluent nor Caucasian, but as any other person who migrates knows, I had to learn to join the local system and community. This cultural integration enriched my identity and helped me provide a more inclusive practice.

In the S.P. Center, I continue with the mission of educating psychotherapists that I started at the "W agency." My motivation is a belief that this style of education (classroom and field) can transform the lives of others, just as my life has been transformed. I received substantial training by my professors and my clinical supervisors, and this dynamic education is the cornerstone of my professional development. I strongly believe that a permanent alliance between university and social service institutions would help with the evolution of a new generation of workers. Ultimately, the social service field's success depends on increasing access to a lifelong experience of education in a multisystemic dimension.

My clinical practice has also benefited from this type of education, as most of my clients achieved successful outcomes, such as experiencing a decrease in post-traumatic symptoms, greater self-sufficiency, increased parenting skills, and enhanced emotional regulation. I have been able to educate psychotherapists because of the collaboration with my mentors, in both the field and the classroom. And it is to all of them that I dedicate my career. I hope that my experience can be expanded to benefit other clinical supervisors who could use the support of universities in training students in the field of social service. We cannot have graduate students in internships without supervisors, and we cannot become supervisors without continuing our education.

Benefits for a Collaboration between Universities and Social Service Agencies

Benefits for Universities

- Strengthens field education
- Supports students' job training
- Markets for educational programs; enhances students' employability
- Helps recruit staff in areas such as: field instruction, teaching, program development, international social program development, research, etc.
- Collects data for research-based initiatives
- Increases content for grant development
- Builds a network with social service agencies for work opportunities for faculty

Benefits for Social Service Agencies

- Free CEUs for supervisors
- Training support in staff meetings
- Increase in service quality by implementation of evidence-based practices
- Increase in professional development
- Networking with universities, an avenue for staff who is interested in academia
- Increase in supervision knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Increase in future salaries for staff
- Decrease in staff development expense
- Increase in staff motivation
- Stronger transference between student and supervisor

Conclusion

Continuing education is a lifetime enhancement for a practitioner. But it is also a lifetime enhancement for social service institutions and for universities. It is the joint responsibility of all parties in the social service field to promote possibilities for continuing education.

A stronger collaboration between universities and social service institutions is more than a demand—it is a compassionate approach to a growing challenge affecting our field. The field is facing limitations to achieve continual education. Therefore, an internship program is a starting point for a beneficial transaction between universities and social service institutions. On one hand, universities benefit from clinical supervisors training their students and, on the other,

social service institutions benefit from universities educating their staff. It would increase universities' motivation to provide relevant CEUs to field instructors if agencies offered preferential placement of students to schools that provide relevant CEU training.

The truth is this: A value-based arrangement is needed to lift us all from the growing financial challenges in our field.

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Reflections of Early Intervention Certificate Program (EICP)

Beth Elenko

Abstract: This paper shows the development of an Early Intervention Certificate Program (EICP) for licensed occupational therapists (OTs). This is a reflection on my transition from practicing OT to doctoral student to academic professor providing continuing education to other providers about early intervention (EI) services for infants and young children under the age of three and their families. This specialized area of practice uses family-centered best practice strategies, which many providers are not prepared for, while simultaneously, there is a shortage of providers to work in this area, especially in New York. EI in the state and program overviews, including strengths and successes as well as challenges of the continuing education program, are discussed.

***Keywords*:** early intervention, occupational therapists, continuing education, family-centered best practices

After practicing as an occupational therapist (OT) for over thirty years and completing my doctoral studies, I found myself looking to connect these roles, including what to build on from my dissertation (Elenko, 2000). My research concentrated incorporating family-centered best practice strategies for infants and young children (under the age of three) and their families in early intervention (EI). I wanted to know how EI providers worked with families.

Providers, I knew, were taught to focus on the child, not the child within the context of the family. The Division of Early Childhood and Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments, OSEP TA Community of Practice: Part C Settings, 2008) developed the following key EI principles and practices:

- First, infants and toddlers learn best through everyday functional and enjoyable activities and interactions with familiar people in familiar contexts.
- The second and third key principles spell out that all families are able to enhance their children's learning and development with the proper support from EI providers who work with the family members.
- The fourth principle describes the process of EI as a dynamic, individualized process that should depict the child and family member's interests.
- The fifth and sixth principles describe that the Individualized Family Service Plan should contain goals that are functional and based on the children's and family's priorities.
- The seventh and final key principle is that interventions must be based on principles, practices and best research, and relevant laws and regulations.

I knew from my observations and interviews of families and OTs (Elenko, 2000) and my own provider education that these principles were not taught in entry-level education. They needed to be integrated into practice and taught to providers so that they understand how to work with the child within the context of their family and focus more on the family as a unit. EI providers lack the knowledge of these competencies to relate these principles to their EI practice with infants and young children and their families (Bruder et al., 2019; Bruder & Dunst, 2005).

Flash forward to an alumni luncheon after I completed my doctoral work: I'm sitting next to the chair of an occupational therapy program at State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate Health Sciences University. The conversation is about what I am doing with my career and how I am incorporating my doctoral dissertation research professionally. We talk about how I work in EI and about my qualitative research.

I share stories of the families I work with and my frustrations regarding the lack of preparedness of providers in our profession to work with infants and young children and their families, such as the "Lopezes" and "Wus." The Lopez family lived in a relatively large apartment building in the city. Both parents worked, but alternated shifts to care for their two children, ages six months and six years. "Juan," the six-month-old, was born with Down Syndrome and had many medical complications. Juan received EI services from various professionals (including myself), and Juan's mom was the primary caregiver we met with. It was a struggle to communicate with her: Juan's parents spoke English better than they understood it, but their speech was still broken, and much of the time she did not understand what the therapists were telling her to do. During the sessions, she was often cooking and cleaning her home or resting since this was her only break. She often did not engage in the sessions provided. I, along with the other EI providers, felt unprepared and encountered resistance when trying to collaborate with the mom or the non-EI team members. The others just came into the home and worked with Juan since that was their expertise. I knew this was wrong and struggled with how to best engage Juan's mom.

The Wu family lived in a multifamily household with both the parents and grandparents present. Both parents were full-time professionals; the grandparents, who only spoke Chinese, cared for the premature 10-month-old quadruplets. Two of them were healthy and developing well, the third had medical issues, and the fourth was developmentally delayed and received EI services. The grandparents focused on feeding and carrying them. All the EI providers struggled with working with this family and felt ill-prepared; there were cultural barriers we did not know how to overcome. The child was easy, but the adults were a different story.

In that luncheon, the discussion at first was two colleagues chatting and networking, sharing with one another what we had been doing over the years. Honestly, I never thought it would lead me to where I am today. I was just sharing my frustrations with practice, with transitioning my career at the point when I have this advanced degree and then moving forward to what that next step might be. I took my passion and frustration and let it shine about the potential of the topic and lack of education for providers. I saw myself as a potential person to do something innovative and bring this to fruition. I was able to do this without knowing it and spark a lightbulb which would lead to a collaboration to educate providers to work more effectively with families. I cannot tell you how excited I was to have someone value me and have the vision for

this education to better the future of our profession. She hired me to write a grant to do just that and allowed me to create my dream job from scratch. The rest, as they say, is history, and is provided for you in this reflection.

EI in New York

EI has grown over the years to the point where there is a shortage of qualified EI OTs to meet the demands of families in need—in my years as one, I felt like I was entering unchartered territory. There was not only a shortage of providers in the state, but little continuing education for them to grow in this specialized area of practice. This was scary for me, as it must have been for the providers going into homes not feeling prepared. I pushed myself to do a lot of research and my work began. In my gut, I knew I had found my place where I could express what I knew deep down was right. I spent long hours trying to formulate the right words to express what I was so passionate about. I wondered a lot whether others shared my passion or if it was just me. I was fortunate to attend the alumni luncheon so that I could be hired to write a grant. I wrote and obtained a U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) grant to provide a comprehensive continuing education curriculum to OTs with the goal to increase the numbers of qualified OTs in the New York EI workforce.

Let me share some background on New York. There is no specialty certification in EI in New York. Providers need to become approved providers in the state, but they can only be approved if they have two-plus years' experience in EI. The only way to obtain this type of experience is to work in a preschool setting with an EI classroom under an approved EI agency—but most providers in New York work as independent providers in the home, the natural environment for families receiving EI.

New York's provider approval process includes a notarized application verifying the applicant's number of hours worked with infants and young children for a minimum of two years, and hours attending continuing education regarding working with infants and young children under the age of three. These continuing education courses are few and far between. The state provides courses on policies and guidelines, and many provide intervention strategies for young children, but there is no specific continuing education for how to provide effective family-centered best practice strategies. The state provides information to therapists interested in becoming approved New York EI Service Providers through the state's department of health website (New York State Department of Health, 2016). Again, for an EI provider to become approved, they must work with infants and young children for two years but are limited in achieving these hours. Hence the dilemma in EI practice: How are OTs in New York who are interested in working with infants, young children, and their families in the state supposed to meet requirements? This was beyond incomprehensible.

EICP Program Overview

This continuing education program was an answer: Start focusing on educating a select group of OTs to work with this population and address the needs of this specialty area. Once OTs completed our program, we worked to get each one a contingency-approved provider status with

the state so they could begin to work with infants and toddlers and their families in their natural environments as independent providers. The key principles and competencies were incorporated into the coursework as fundamental to OTs' understanding of EI at its core philosophy.

My passion to educate OTs on EI and family-centered best practices was ignited. I knew there were more Lopez and Wu families—we could support them through better education to providers on the forefront. We were funded by an OSEP personnel preparation grant (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP] [2003-2009] grant #H325A030062, for the program: Early Intervention Certificate Program [EICP]). EICP was designed for working OTs in a continuing education hybrid/live weekend format so that they could get the additional training in EI while they continued to work as providers in whatever area of practice they were currently in.

The program was created as a hybrid program consisting of online background courses followed by on-site courses on the topics *assessment*, *intervention*, *feeding*, and *motor and sensory processing*. The students also participated in a family partnership experience and clinical mentoring. An overview of each course and experience is provided in Table 1.

The OTs who applied to the program worked in a variety of practice areas. The goal of my program was to prepare these providers to work in the specialty area of EI and receive their approved provider status in New York so they could be independent providers in the home and natural environments. They were given a certificate at the end to send to the state to fast-track their approved provider status. Over the five years of the grant, 48 licensed, registered OTs were trained as EI providers—many of whom are continuing to provide EI and supervising future EI therapists. Students often stated before training that they did not think they would be working with adults when they went into EI. They only thought it would be working with the babies. They felt that their entry-level education had taught them how to work with the child as their client, but not the family as a whole. Following the program, they expressed their understanding of the family as a unit with the child within the context of that family. They felt more confident and had more strategies to understand the relationship between the parent and child so they could engage this relationship to improve outcomes for the family rather than just focusing on the child's deficits. Hearing these comments was so gratifying. I understood that I was "getting to them," molding and changing their perspectives so that they could provide family-centered best practice and be more prepared for the unknown challenges ahead of them.

Successes and Strengths of EICP

The EICP program had many successes and strengths. I think the key was establishing funding. Funding not only gave me a part-time job in the academic arena, but was able to be distributed to the student, families, clinical mentoring supervisors, and guest lecturers as part of the EICP program. The working OTs received a stipend that offset personal or work time missed, transportation to school, and costs to purchase assessment tools or resources necessary for EI practice. This is a major advantage for working professionals to lessen the burden of receiving continuing education. Funds were given to each family who had participated in the family partnership experience to thank them for their time and willingness to open their lives to our

students. Clinical mentoring supervisors who typically supervise providers as part of their professional responsibility and to obtain professional development units were given a small stipend for their extra time and expertise. This made the process doable and successful for everyone for five years.

Throughout the EICP, we built a collaboration with the state for approved provider status. Typically, EI providers would apply with the necessary hours and continuing education and hope it was enough to become a state-approved provider. Students who graduated from the EICP were given a fast-track to approved provider status by completing our certificate program, which was contingent on them working in EI and reapplying after two years to demonstrate their commitment.

Through many of the courses, we collaborated with families who were receiving EI, and with the city EI technology department, to enhance our students' learning experiences. Representatives came to class to teach or interact live with the students. This was a very exciting collaboration and personalized each aspect for the OTs, the city representatives, and me, as it contributed to building future relationships for said therapists once they were in practice.

We had one mother come to class to tell her story of life with her young, severely developmentally disabled child. It was remarkable to hear her express herself and the pain she went through accepting her child's disability. She wanted to do everything in her power to help her child, but the EI providers who came took him from her and worked with him separately. Hearing this made me so angry and frustrated. How could the providers not see that she needed to learn to function in her daily life with her child? They did not. They came and they went. This was her life 24-7. She was crying out for their help and they were not meeting her needs, which is worse than them not knowing how to engage a parent. She was begging for this engagement. I knew that her story resonated with me and the students. I hoped it empowered them to think about families more in their practice. Hopefully, stories like this made them better able to see the critical impact of involving families and building their capacity to function as a group through family-centered best practices.

Not only did they have in-class experiences with real families, but they were also sent to spend time in placements with young families receiving EI services in the community for practical experiences. They participated in a family partnership experience (Elenko, 2019) and a clinical mentorship with a supervisor providing EI services. I was very proud of these aspects, although they were a lot of work to coordinate. I knew that I needed to open students' eyes to the importance of working with families. I had that "aha" moment during my doctoral work when I realized that to learn about families, students needed to spend time with families in their natural environments doing their daily routines. The richness of these experiences was by far the best part of the program for many of them. Spending time with a family helped them understand the experience from the family's perspective, and it improved their interactions and empathy for what these families were going through. The mentoring concept was also a unique and enriching experience for both the mentor and the mentee. The time for supervision in daily work is lacking and this gave an experienced provider the opportunity to gain new experiences with an EI expert. It really worked well for all involved.

Students were evaluated on self-assessed pre- and post-competencies for each course and clinical experience based on early Division of Early Childhood (DEC) practices. I may be biased, but they always improved on their self-ratings. Students were able to practice what I was preaching and were educating other colleagues. It was gratifying to hear when the student would have an epiphany with their "wow" moment. They realized that they should have always been practicing this way and were surprised they had not already known what they learned. This realization was very powerful for me and for them. Even though it was obvious to me, I also realized that my progression and experiences were not theirs, and this was part of the issue. The more providers gained experience with infants, young children, and their families, the more they understood the importance of building the capacity of the family unit in a basic component of EI.

The program was a hybrid, partially online and partially live in continuing education format on weekends. For the working OTs, the weekend courses were ideal. This allowed them to work during the week and come on campus when travel and parking were lighter during the daytime. They could continue their weekday job responsibilities without disruption. The online component was an innovative phenomenon at that time. This was a challenging experiment for me, but a fun one. There were no standards and, for the students, it enabled flexibility in completing the educational components on their own time.

Challenges of EICP

There were also many challenges to the EICP. The program, as discussed, was a hybrid. The online component, although innovative and fun for me, did not have the support systems that we have today for online technology. This made it challenging. There were no guidelines or rules to follow. I was new to creating this, while the OTs were new to participating in it. These were challenges, but I have to say that I learned many lessons that now are commonplace to online learning. These providers were working and returning to receive education. I needed to incorporate adult learning models, and this was a new way for students to learn and for me to teach. This was an opportunity to engage them with the principles of adult learning (Collins, 2004). The on-site classes were on weekends in a continuing education model. This meant long days for faculty and students. We managed to bring in outside faculty and resources. It was exhausting for me to organize and juggle to balance out the days. There were so many ups-and-downs trying to get it right, whatever that was. Realizing that there was no perfect or right way also was important for me. I had to let go of that and know I was doing the best I could as I charted these new waters. It was also crucial to get feedback from the students to improve the continuing education model. The students knew best what worked and what did not for their learning needs. Although this was a challenge, it has proven to be a strength of the foundation for subsequent programs.

The family practicum experiences were hard for me to coordinate between students' difficulties in scheduling or things like families' transitions to preschool in the middle of the program, causing their EI services to end. Some families told me that they were overwhelmed and wanted to quit in the middle of the program (Elenko, 2019). Talk about pulling your hair out. I was dealing with both ends—my administrative side and my family-centered side. I knew it was critical for the students to engage in this experience. I was trying to help the students with

logistics while being empathetic to the families' needs. It was and still is a struggle. I found that framing "coordinating the family practicum experience" as a teachable moment worked. We discussed as a group what the issues were with the individual family so that we as a group could help one another problem-solve scheduling. Sometimes it was the student's own schedule that was the issue, while other times the student was not hearing what the family was saying about their daily routines. Through these discussions, students could incorporate family-centered best practice strategies. This gave me some relief in organizing and in my approach with not only the families, but the students as well.

It became increasingly difficult to find clinical mentors who did home-based EI and were experienced themselves in providing EI under the DEC principles. This made me think that further continuing education would be beneficial for the mentors as well, since there seemed to be this disconnect between providers and supervisors. There was a need for EI supervisors in all disciplines to feel and be confident. These supervisors needed to work on their own reflective practice as well as being engaged in working with families. It is a frustrating cycle that continues now in our professional program.

Many of the graduates of the EICP became EI supervisors and continue even now in advanced programs, but many were hard to track after. They moved, changed practice areas, and lost touch with us—therefore making it difficult to gauge if this was an effective program or not in the long run. The subsequent EI preservice education programs have learned from the EICP, and many things were built on this foundation, but the need for continuing education courses continues for those who are practicing or want to practice in EI settings.

Conclusions

Overall, this experience was beneficial for not only the continued education of OTs in EI, but for me as a novice educator. There were times when it was easy, and I felt that I was making a positive contribution to my field; there were other frustrating times when I felt I was getting nowhere. I would be happy one day and disappointed the next as I navigated this new terrain, but most importantly I kept an open mind and tried to incorporate any possibility. The worst response we had was to try something else if our current approach was not working. I don't think there is one model of continuing education that works for everything—we have to think outside the box to enhance how we provide continuing education, especially in this case where practice philosophy, skill, and knowledge are being interwoven into a new area of practice for the person learning. For me personally, doors opened for continued work in academia so that I could further train future providers on this unique practice area. The EICP far surpassed the goals of increasing quality OTs in EI in New York. It encompassed the DEC principles, which have been expanded on over the years since and collaborated on by multiple professionals in early childhood to further develop competencies for all early interventionists (Bruder et al., 2019; Bruder & Dunst, 2005). I feel that there is still more in this area to be learned at all levels from continuing education of the practicing EI providers to preservice education of the entry-level provider. From this program, more programs have been developed and many professions are working on expanding the knowledge of this specialty area of practice whether preservice or as continuing education for providers in early childhood. Most importantly, as we provide ongoing

education at all levels, we are contributing to improving the quality of family-centered best practice for families like the Lopezes and Wus. Building families' capacities through our understanding of their daily routines, multi-cultural, bilingual, and overall family needs is the key to EI, and our intervention needs to be with them, not for them.

Table 1: Overview of Course Experiences

Course Name	**Format**
Introduction to Early Intervention	Online
Assessment	Onsite on weekends (2 days)
Intervention: Neuromuscular	Onsite on weekends (2 days)
Intervention: Sensory Processing	Onsite on weekends (2 days)
Intervention: Feeding	Onsite on weekends (2 days)
Family Partnership Experience	Mutually exclusive times with families (over 50 hours)
Fieldwork	Mutually exclusive times with supervising provider in EI (over 2 months)

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Continuing Education: Integrating Practice Paradigms

Sarah Emily Faubert

Abstract: This paper reflects on a continuing education opportunity that involved mental health professionals and law enforcement officers for mental health crisis training. In this manuscript, I reflect on the benefits and opportunities presented during the session and the various implications for practice.

***Keywords*:** continuing education, integrative practice, paradigms, training, mental health

Recently, I participated in a continuing education opportunity with a crisis response unit within the police services designed to respond to and support individuals experiencing a mental health emergency. Though I have previously participated in many crisis intervention courses for mental health professionals, this opportunity was unique, as it involved integration with law enforcement officers who have, historically, been ill-equipped and unprepared to deal with mental health crises. Crisis training courses have been developed and implemented to address this gap and police and first responders have participated in training nationally. One such training program is based on the Memphis Model of Crisis Intervention, which was developed after an individual with a serious mental illness was fatally wounded during an interaction with the police (Dupont & Cochran, 2000).

The training was 40 hours in duration and involved approximately 20 law enforcement officers. Initially, I was nervous as I was outnumbered by many officers, some of them armed, who quite evidently shared a similar "police culture" much different than my own. Many of these officers were members of the critical incident response team (CIRT) and had responded to situations in which individuals with serious mental illnesses were themselves armed and perhaps "dangerous." Some shared stories of interactions where they had used force to respond to those deemed a threat. Some officers shared harrowing stories in which they had had to use "less-than-lethal ammunition" (pepper spray, rubber bullets, beanbag projectiles, and tasers) to subdue those in crisis who were thought to be a threat. These tactics were obviously much different than the supportive listening and validation strategies I have used on the front lines.

During the training, I learned how officers respond to mental health emergencies in the community and the policies and procedures that govern this practice. I learned about the gaps in current training and the areas in which officers feel they could benefit from more training (for example, specific diagnoses and eligibility criteria for various community services). I had the opportunity to ask many questions related to police response to community crisis calls, and I was eager to answer any questions the officers had related to my experience as a mental health crisis worker. I feel that this opportunity advanced my knowledge of the role officers play in these situations—and, as a result, I feel better equipped to respond to mental health crisis calls that may involve an officer.

This opportunity was among the most enlightening and informative continuing education programs I have attended. This was largely due to the importance of the topic and the differences

in paradigms between the two professions. As a social worker, I am passionate about effective and anti-oppressive approaches to mental health supports, including crisis services. While I am certain many officers are eager to respond safely to those experiencing a crisis, their education and training are much different than the training of a social worker (and vice-versa). As a social worker, I could not ignore the subtle biases that underlined some views toward those with serious mental illness. While I do not believe this was done consciously, we must be careful when linking forms of violence to people with serious mental illness.

Individuals with serious mental illness are often portrayed as dangerous in the media and linking violence and mental illness has the potential to perpetuate discrimination against this population. People with mental illness are not more violent than the general population and, in my own experience as a provider of mental health crisis services, their crises (more often than not) do not require the use of force or any other physical intervention (while I do recognize this may not always be the case whether mental illness is present or not). Thus, it is important that we are mindful of competing paradigms among differing professions, and we must provide alternative points of view for those who work outside of our professional domain. While I was unaware of the different approaches to police intervention for those with serious mental illness, the other participants may not have been aware of the societal and structural issues that impact views and subsequent supports available to those with serious mental illness.

Continuing education programs are often closely aligned with the professional domain in which they occur. For example, in mental health disciplines, it would not be uncommon to attend suicide intervention training and crisis intervention skills training. I believe attending these opportunities is important to develop critical awareness and is a duty we have to our clients and to the profession. Staying up to date with current events and issues in the professional domain is essential to ensure the best outcomes for clients. These sentiments are not new and are likely shared by many social work practitioners.

I expand on this to add that agencies should promote—and practitioners should seek—continuing education opportunities that offer integrative, multi-interdisciplinary teams. Within the biopsychosocial approach to social work practice, practitioners would understandably attend continuing education in nursing, psychiatry, law enforcement, and more. I encourage social work practitioners to get creative and seek opportunities outside of their practice domain and comfort zone. Embracing different paradigms may be challenging for those who are passionate about their value stance, but these crossovers of thought offer the opportunity for growth and development and a better understanding of the functions of various teams.

In summary, historically, continuing education has remained relatively practice specific; however, integrating multiple perspectives and practice domains allows for new opportunities, including collaboration and insight that has the potential to better serve others. While this may be challenging, it provides an excellent opportunity for professionals to critically evaluate their own value stance and the implications of the paradigms they operate from.

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Continuing Education:
A Place Where Micro and Macro Social Work Practice Reside

Patricia Antionette Gray

Abstract: Leading the Continuing Education (CE) Department situated within a method-based public social work school required that I align the values, vision, and mission of the school and the department. The school's mission speaks to the notion of providing social work education of the highest quality at the lowest possible cost while preparing its graduates to become social workers committed to lifelong learning. In this narrative, I reflect on the offerings of workshops that created spaces for micro and macro practitioners using program funds to offset the cost for participants and infused continuing education contact hours in faculty-championed end-of-year workshops which included field instructors. I also explore the benefits of using different organization lenses to assess, develop, and expand the CE program.

***Keywords*:** continuing education, life-long learning, micro, macro, social work practice

Continuing education (CE) is the centerpiece by which social workers renew their licenses to practice. Kurzman (2016) shared that with the passage of mandatory CE requirements in all 50 states, social workers now face the need to renew their licenses. Halton et al. (2014) define CE "as an ongoing process of education and development that continues throughout one's professional career" (p. 1). Similarly, the National Association of Social Workers (2011) shared as one of its preambles that social workers must commit to lifelong learning, as working with individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations requires continued competent professionals. Likewise, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015) stated in its *Educational Policy Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) that social workers must demonstrate competency in their practice.

One of the ways for social workers to meet the demands and live up to the expectation of lifelong learning and attain professional competency is to partake in courses and workshops offered by CE providers. Because there is no uniformity amongst the states regarding CE requirements for social workers to renew their licenses, there is an avalanche of providers offering courses to social workers in each state. With no clear guidelines of course provisions, every institution offers workshops they believe will enhance social workers' skills, knowledge, and aptitude. Academic institutions are part of the foray of CE providers yet also have no clear formula and, as such, leave the directors to figure it out. In this narrative, I reflect on my role becoming the CE director in a method-based social work academic institution. I use an organization theory lens to assess programmatic needs while offering workshops to enable micro and macro practitioners' opportunities to enrich discussions and skill-building.

On Becoming a CE Director

I must admit that I at first knew very little about the CE program, the role, and responsibilities of a director of CE in an academic institution. However, I had done staff training and program development and had extensive social work experience both as a direct practice and macro

practitioner. As a matter of fact, after working as the director of social services in community-based organizations and wanting to continue to develop and hone my administrative skills, I took a post-masters advance certificate course in administration. Although it was not called CE then, it was my first post-MSW educational experience which provided me the skills necessary for my professional growth.

More recently, I enrolled in and graduated from the doctoral program at St. John Fisher College in Education and Leadership in New York. The program was rigorous as I attended classes every other weekend and simultaneously concentrated on the dissertation process. In so doing, I felt that I was continuing to live up to the profession's preamble of lifelong learning. The knowledge and skills honed during this process created space to understand leadership styles, organization culture, challenges to program design, program evaluation, and the importance of working collaboratively.

Becoming the director of CE in this school, I wanted to lead an active, responsive, and sustainable program with both micro and macro programming. The challenge of operating a CE program situated in the school of social work seemed difficult, as I had questions that needed answers: What is the vision and mission of the program? How do I develop a program situated within an academic environment where the increase in clinical students reflects the domination of micro practice in the field? How do I infuse my vision to integrate CE workshops where micro and macro social workers can hone and develop skills relevant to practice? How do I ensure that the appropriate documentation is collected consistently in an environment where silo thinking is prevalent? Given that there are numerous CE providers in the New York area, what is this program's niche? These and other questions kept me searching for answers. The one decision I made that emerged from the questions was that the workshops offered must provide a space where social workers would find a deeper understanding of the relationship between micro and macro practice.

The courses offered to micro and macro practitioners provided opportunities to discuss issues affecting individuals but also to understand the broader implications of how the environment affects people. Mosley (2017) supports this notion when she posits that "students must understand how micro and macro practice work together and how each area is needed to achieve real and lasting change" (p. 10). Based on this view, I created a niche for CE to include an integrated approach to programming where social workers (micro and macro practitioners) would have spaces to continue to learn from each other and connect systems to serve individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. I offered macro and micro workshops and used Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frames to assess and fix problems encountered within the program.

Situating Macro and Micro Offerings

It is my experience that most program directors recognize the importance of meeting programmatic goals and objectives to renew contracts and secure funding given that research shows that CE programs are the most underfunded (Cochran & Landuyt, 2011). As such, directors' knowledge and ability to meet program goals and outcomes is critical. It becomes their responsibility to assess their programs, identify gaps, and circumvent barriers to program

outcomes. Overcoming obstacles for program success calls for the leaders' understanding of organizational nuances, resource allocations, the competition to service, and the life within one's organization. Bolman and Deal's (2003) four lenses—*structural, human resource, political, and symbolic*—assisted me in assessing my program to examine how I was doing in situating workshops using the micro-macro philosophy.

The *structural frame* (Bolman & Deal, 2003), with its metaphor of a factory, views organizations as rational systems where goals, specialized roles, and formal relationships exist. I realized that I needed to develop a strong relationship with the instructors, the dean, and the funders to redesign a fledging program where social workers; physical, occupational, and speech and language therapists; and educators all needed to attend because of the interdisciplinary approach to early intervention service delivery. The program was not meeting its goal and objectives, and I needed to make drastic changes. Because we had a grant, there was money to absorb the cost of running the program—but changing the structure, I knew, would not have been smooth sailing. The feedback from the instructors included statements like, "Anything free is not necessarily good," "No one will attend because it is free," and "You will never get permission to offer the workshop for free." I knew that without the involvement of these instructors, I would not have a program to implement any change. The instructors were the ones who designed and implemented the curriculum and were the experts in the program area—they needed to be a part of the process. While they were not optimistic, they agreed to move forward if I obtained permission. I received approval from the dean and the funders because of the impact of my understanding of the structural framework suggested by Bolman and Deal (2003) on my case for change.

Once I obtained permission, I combed through the email list and created a listserv. I sent out hundreds of emails to social workers, speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, educators, and other allied professionals informing them of the workshops. With a colleague's support, we created the brochure, provided information on the five workshops, included the biography of the instructors, inserted the number of CE contact hours per workshop, highlighted the days and hours (evening and weekends), and noted that there was no cost. Through emails and meetings, I kept the instructors, funders, and dean abreast of the progress with registration. The response was remarkable, as every workshop increased in enrollment and attendance.

After the workshops, the evaluations from the participants (including social workers, speech and language and physical therapists, educators, administrators, and policymakers) stated that they enjoyed the workshops. The feedback included statements like the following: "I received an e-blast from Patricia Gray...I appreciated [that] this course is FREE. Most importantly, it is training necessary for growth in my career...I'm an HCSSW alum, a supervisor, and I need CEU's...It allowed me to take a different approach to how I coach my parents/teachers to support the child."

Although I could only provide the allied CE professionals a certificate of completion, the positive feedback from the CE workshops demonstrated that with planning, ingenuity, inclusion, and support, the tide was turned and resulted in positive outcomes for micro and macro practitioners to learn together.

While the above showed how I utilized the structural frame to secure changes, the need to work with faculty who offered end-of-year programming to field instructors was also critical. As a one-person department, human resources are scarce. To expand my reach, developing relationships with faculty became critically important to the success of the program offerings. The workshops offered by faculty provided new and seasoned field instructors the opportunity to learn and hone their skills with support through the field education department. Working with professors to establish programming, though, takes a lot of time and requires organization, thoughtfulness, flexibility, and patience. Recalling the *human resource frame* (Bolman & Deal, 2003), with its metaphor of organizations as family, which captures the relationships between individuals and the organization, kept me focused and grounded in the knowledge that relationships are about trust, support, mutual respect, teamwork, collaboration, and communication (Covey & Merrill, 2006). Keeping the lines of communication open saved the day many times.

In one instance, I recalled that two weeks before a scheduled training, the registration was zero. The professor and I met and began discussing the lack of registration for the workshop. We talked about whether the date we launched the advertisement had been suboptimal, whether the cost was too high, and whether the email notification had possibly missed its audience. Initially, I could feel the hair on my neck standing up as the line of questions felt more like blaming than figuring out what caused or affected the registration numbers. However, as the conversation went on and I began to think about the need for success, I listened and offered solutions. The flow and tone of the conversation changed. We reviewed what was different in the first year, and we realized that we had not charged the previous year. We discussed the possibility of changing the advertisement to say *free of cost*. The professor expressed concerns about the actions now needed to change the promotional events already sent. I reassured her that it was doable and went to work. I quickly made the changes, sent out the information via Constant Contact, and had the website updated. Within the first day, we had twenty registrants. By the day of the actual workshop, we had over 125 participants registered. We had 100 participants in attendance.

The workshops supported the vision of having both micro and macro social workers discussing issues and concerns relevant to supervision, individuals, populations, and the need for ongoing advocacy work. The field instructors were social workers providing supervision to our students but held various positions within their respective agencies—"clinical social worker," "supervisor," "team leader," and "director" were all titles I heard from students.

The professors whom I provided support to expressed gratitude and praise for a job well done. They thanked me for a seamless workshop and shared that they could not have done it without me and my organizational skills. As the director, recognizing the importance of building relationships with faculty to effectuate change for individuals, organizations, and communities utilizing the CE program supports the vision and mission of the program—a concept where micro and macro professionals must live harmoniously and passionately.

The passion I feel for holding both together makes the profession different from other allied professional groups. Situating the workshops using the macro-micro lens assists me in reminding social workers why we chose the profession. Bolman and Deal (2003) discuss the *symbolic frame* or theater metaphor that captures the life of the organization. The presence of this CE

program featured programming set to restore, replenish, and sustain. If social work professionals are to remain current because of changes to the environment, fill many nonprofit social service administration jobs, and prepare for leadership positions in organizations, then they must have access to workshops that bridge the micro-macro divide (Rothman, 2012; Goldkind & Pardasani, 2013; Fogel & Ersing, 2016; Mosley, 2017).

Micro and macro practice work are critical to the profession of social work. The Hartford Center of Excellence in Diverse Aging hosts its annual conference at the end of each academic year, demonstrating how micro and macro practitioners flourish together and capture the life of organizations because of their thinking. The conference brings together community-based organizations, administrators, social workers, providers, advocates, and consumers to discuss topics affecting the elderly population, share programming, and discuss best practices when engaging and working with the elderly community. Participating in the committee meant that I could also use the CE listserv to invite participants to the upcoming conferences.

While communicating with Ms. T, a retired social worker seeking continuing education to remain active, I mentioned the upcoming conference to her. Her immediate question was whether she could attend and bring her friends. I told her yes, and Ms. T registered and brought 10 of her social worker friends, all retirees living in the same community, and all also micro and macro practitioners. Ms. T and her friends demonstrate real commitment to the profession and to lifelong learning, as they are retirees but still want to learn, engage, and share their knowledge. Evaluation documents stated things like "I enjoyed the conference, was happy for the opportunity and wanted ongoing access to workshops offered by the school," and others expressed that they "especially liked hearing about the new assisted living program in Brooklyn," or "enjoyed seeing the movements used to engaged seniors." Attendees also noted the lack of knowledge they had about grants before the workshop and the refreshingly strong activism for seniors recently in social work.

While building relationships with faculty was essential to the life of the CE program and to situating the micro and macro workshops within it, the community also needed my attention. This area created and still creates the most pressure for me; within the New York City area there are numerous CE providers, both private and within academic institutions, and as New York is very diverse and social media continues to shrink our world, faculty and staff receive postings about other institutions' CE offerings regularly—and soon compare them. Bolman and Deal's (2003) *political frame*, with its metaphor of a jungle, represents the arena where competition, power, and scarce resources reside. As the program director, I needed to understand the competing forces, the power dynamics of the competitors, and, most of all, my program's lack of resources.

The CE program does not have the personnel nor the financial resources to be a powerhouse in all three aspects of the political frame—to ward off the competition, to wield the power of being the biggest and best, nor to charge at the higher end for CE hours. I recognized early on that I needed to build support to navigate and learn about how other programs met their goals and objectives. I thought about how to create additional support and resources to learn and explore how other providers function and to collaborate rather than compete, since we emphasize different focuses and workshops based on what other programs are offering.

My belief system feeds on a community-based, collaborative approach in doing business. As such, I reached out to a colleague and began the discussion, and soon we learned that we had similar issues and wanted the opportunity to learn, share, and grow. These conversations gave birth to the New York City Continuing Education Consortium (NYCCEC).

The NYCCEC had several CE directors and program personnel attempting to find our niche in an overcrowded environment. Out of a willingness to learn and support each other, we began discussing issues and concerns about CE in New York State (NYS). We were concerned about the numerous CE providers, the quality of providers, and having a space to review and understand the regulations around CE. Kleiner and Krueger (2013) wrote that, in total, about 25 percent of today's US workforce is in an occupation licensed at the state level, up from less than 5 percent in the early 1950s. This share is higher when local and federal licenses are included.

The NYCCEC was helpful as, out of our meetings, new CE directors found a place where they could learn about CE rules and regulations. For example, one new assistant director who attended our meetings was applying for her agency to become a CE provider. The group coached her through the process, answered her questions, and guided her to the right persons at New York State Education Department (NYSED). Additionally, we focused on administrative tasks such as workshop goals and objectives. We shared ideas on what works and the pitfalls to avoid within CE. In one conversation about pitfalls, the discussion about the CE documentation took precedence. The conversation began when I asked each person to share the required documentation needed from participants to support their CE hours—while I answered "a pre- and post-test, then an evaluation," another member shared that their pre-test and evaluation are done online, and another wasn't privy to such information because their program documentation was handled by an internal entity online.

What I learned from this exchange was that how you submit your application to NYSED governs the documents you must collect from your program users.

As it relates to formulating the NYCCEC, it was a blessing as I found support but also, and more importantly, developed relationships with other CE providers doing similar work. I also recognized that with the approximately 58,578 social workers in NYS and the NYC area, there are more than enough opportunities to serve social workers, especially if the program incorporates micro and macro practice.

Creating and providing spaces for micro and macro workshops for social workers in CE aligns with my idea of social work practice. I feel alive as I engage in discussions with potential instructors about their workshop ideas and make sure that social workers will hone and develop their skills while meeting the demands for licensure renewal. I wanted to create a space where social workers would come and learn about new intervention strategies but simultaneously link it to the structural reform work we must engage with to meet the demands of providing services.

Conclusion

As I write this reflection manuscript, I realize that I internalized and demonstrated my commitment to lifelong learning as a social worker working as an administrator. Still and more

importantly, though, the question is whether this manuscript provides readers with tools to re-think their programs, create spaces for broader thinking, and/or generate discussions about how to address issues affecting CE programs. I believe it does—and here are some implications for future use:

1. CE provides an opportunity for helping professionals from various disciplines/fields to come together in an interdisciplinary learning environment, whereas we are often educated in silos in professional programs.

2. Social work can join with other disciplines that have a macro focus. For example, public health is an excellent example of a field that is heavily macro-focused. We can create workshops to build an interdisciplinary approach to service delivery like what occurred in the Early Intervention program design.

3. Directing a CE program allows one to view academic programs from four metaphorical frames, which is an excellent way to examine the culture of academe and learn what will and will not work in terms of engaging faculty in CE work.

4. Opportunities to collaborate across schools and disciplines (universities and colleges) are encouraged in CE, and there are lessons learned here about how to form and develop those collaborations.

5. The ability to obtain funding offers new opportunities for curricular development and outreach.

6. Ways to span the divide between macro and micro work are wide open in CE, and creativity can make a difference for helping professionals in the community.

Despite the challenges, my worldview about social work provided the impetus in taking on the responsibility of becoming the CE director as it suited my vision and offered unlimited opportunities to build a program. I hoped to model exemplary leadership skills in developing the CE program by following Kouzes and Posner's (2012) modeling. To me, their models served as a reminder to all CE directors within and outside academic institutions that you must believe in the values you express, but those values must not be merely your principles, they must also represent what the organization stands for (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

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The Teacher Becomes the Student: An Example of Lifelong Learning

Sarah Louise Hessenauer

Abstract: Lifelong learning is required for many professions. Lifelong learning is "proven" through engaging in continuing education. Continuing education can take many forms; however, many state licensing boards only look at continuing education in a narrowly defined way. In this narrative, I reflect on my continuing education experience of auditing a class at the university where I teach. I discuss learning about class concepts and, more importantly, myself through this opportunity.

***Keywords*:** continuing education, lifelong learning

I arrived early, nervous but excited to start. I pulled out my new, colorfully designed spiral notebook and blue folder from Target. My folder held the syllabus for my new class called Advanced Multivariate Analysis. I had anxiously studied the syllabus ahead of time in order to be prepared. Data analysis had never been my strength; I'd taken several statistics courses over the progression of my multiple degrees and still felt uncomfortable walking into this one. I glanced around the room. I could not tell if students were happy to be there or if it was just another required class. You could tell the other students knew each other or had been in classes together based on the ease of their conversations. None of them talked to me. Nonetheless, I was eager and could not wait to begin.

Introductions began. Students talked about enrolling in the course in order to enhance their portfolios for graduate school or in order to meet university requirements. It was then my turn. I introduced myself as a social work faculty member at the university…who was taking this class to learn more. This was not a class social work students enrolled in, so no students knew me. The students could tell I was different from the "traditional" students on our campus. They had never seen me as a student in prior classes. I was older and dressed up. This class was at the end of my normal class schedule, so I usually looked tired, but I had my soda to keep me going. When I walked into the room, no one initiated conversation with me. I would initiate conversations when I walked into the room. If I said "hi" the other students said "hi" back, but I was never asked the questions that I heard them ask each other, such as "How was your weekend?" or "Did you get your homework done?" They would answer me if I asked general questions, but they kept their responses brief. When I would see them on campus or in the community, they might say "hi," but it was a quick response before they would turn and walk away. I never talked to my professor about my relationship with my classmates, but I think she could see it. She tried to get them to respond to my questions and encouraged them to find someone new to work with when we broke up into groups—similar things I had tried in my classrooms when I wanted students to get to know each other.

I had a large amount of respect for my professor. She had agreed to allow me, a colleague, to audit the class at no cost. She graded all of my homework and spent time with me during office hours. I could have paid for the course so it would show up on my transcript but chose not to in

order to take the pressure off myself to get an "A." This challenged me to learn—just to learn—without having to focus on the outcome. I felt blessed for the learning opportunity. The students shook their heads when I told them I was not taking the course due to any requirement, but in order to learn new material so I could develop my research skills. For most of them, this was not a class they would take if not required.

As a professor in social work classes, I always encourage students to be "lifelong learners." But what does this mean? According to Jivanjee et al. (2016), lifelong learning means "the continuous learning and transformation needed to be an effective social worker in the changing social, economic, and political environment" (p. 260). Does this mean attending the state required boundaries and ethics courses or taking another class about the basics of substance use to fulfill licensing requirements? Or does it mean more, such as reading a book to enhance your skills or taking a class that will allow you to grow personally? According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015), social workers recognize the "importance of life-long learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective" (p. 7). At times, I feel that state statutes related to lifelong learning and continuing education limit my ability to see the many options of learning as I get overly focused on using my extra free time to complete the required licensing requirements. As a professor, am I exploring and sharing the multitude of ways in which students can engage in lifelong learning? Do I limit the definition when I talk with them about expectations?

In Wisconsin, where I practice, I must have 30 hours of continuing education every two years to maintain my clinical licensure. Four of these hours must be in the approved area of "Ethics and Professional Boundaries" (Wis. Admin. Code, 2015). The state statutes say continuing education credits can be granted "if relevant to the professional practice of marriage and family therapy, professional counseling, or social work" and offered by "any continuing education program approved, sponsored, provided, endorsed, or authorized by" specified state boards (Wis. Admin. Code, 2015). It also states that continuing education hours are awarded for professional activities, such as providing a training, writing an article, writing a book, or creating electronic media or software. However, who is examining what I am doing to ensure my success in these endeavors? Who is evaluating what I do? Does someone need to evaluate me? Do the statutes allow for out-of-the-box learning leading to professional growth? Should I be required to pay to get learning? With these state requirements of continuing education, it has historically meant signing up for those trainings about concepts I am familiar with—especially after 25 years of attending trainings—and taking one or two new pieces of information back to the office with me. At other times it has meant showing up for a training I was familiar with that would allow me to check emails during the training, or going with a friend so I could pass the time more quickly. No one would critique which classes I would sign up for or how much (or little) I participated, as long as the classes were from one of the "approved lists" of providers by the state in which I held my license.

In surrounding states, there are similar requirements. In Illinois, the state statute related to continuing education for social work is the following:

> Every licensee who applies for renewal of a license as a Licensed Social Worker or Licensed Clinical Social Worker shall complete 30 hours of continuing education (CE)

> relevant to the practice of social work or clinical social work. At least 3 of the 30 hours must include content related to the ethical practice of social work and, effective December 1, 2013, at least 3 of the 30 hours must include content related to cultural competence in the practice of social work. (Ill. Admin. Code, 2013)

Illinois administrative code also specifies that:

> CE hours shall be earned by verified attendance (e.g., certificate of attendance or certificate of completion) at or participation in a program or course ("program") that is offered or sponsored by an approved CE sponsor who meets the requirements set forth in subsection (c)…CE credit also may be earned for completion of a self-study, computer, or Internet-based course that is offered by an approved sponsor who meets the requirements set forth in subsection (c). Each self-study course shall include an examination. (Ill. Admin. Code, 2013)

At the time of this writing, Minnesota's continuing education is defined by statutes as "academic coursework obtained after licensure (1 semester credit = 15 CE hours), including educational workshops or conferences, staff training offered by an employer" or independent study ("independent study must be for publication, public presentation, or professional development and includes, but is not limited to, electronic study"). To qualify as "electronic study" independent study, CE programs are not live or interactive (Min. Admin. Code, 2019). Although all the above states are similar, they all require continuing education to be proved through verified attendance or completed through an "approved" provider, a self-study, or an examination.

This class I enrolled in was something new, totally out of line with what I had done in the past in relation to continuing education. Even though it was offered at the bachelor level, it was overwhelming. I thought about how insecure my students might feel when starting a new class, especially a class viewed as more complicated. Because the students were not talking to me, I did not know how they felt. Looking through the textbook ahead of class starting, I knew I was in for something more complex and involved. The chapters covered areas such as introduction to the general linear model and assumptions, factorial analysis of variance, repeated measures analysis of variance, analysis of covariance, multivariate analysis of variance and of covariance, and multiple regression and path analysis (what does this even mean?). Even though I have my PhD and had successfully completed three statistics classes, none of my classes covered these concepts as thoroughly as I wanted, and more importantly, as I needed. I had been a qualitative researcher. I was better at analyzing words; numbers were a foreign language. I had difficulty reading scientific articles and understanding the research methods described in the articles based on my limited knowledge. To truly be the educator I wanted to be, I knew this was one class on my education bucket list that I needed in order to feel more confident in my research skills, to continue my education, and to be a lifelong learner.

My student peers did not know what to do about me and, honestly, I was unsure how to engage with them. Although there were no social work students in the class, I did run into a social work student when I was asking for help during the professor's office hours. She had my professor for a statistics course. I got up to let the student get the help she needed (feeling guilty about taking

up time she needed) when she said, "No, Dr. Hessenauer, do not leave. I will wait." I struggled with this. In class and during office hours, was I a fellow classmate or was I a campus professor who should be treated differently? I told the other students to call me by my first name. I raised my hand in class, although I was hesitant to raise my hand too much to take care away from those students who paid for the experience. I shared my fears and frustrations, but only two of my fellow classmates, those who sat closest to me, ever truly accepted me as an equal. Those two students worked on class projects with me when we were told to break up into groups. They worked on solving problems with me. They would joke with me: "You do not know the answer?" Or, "Thank goodness you know how to do this; I do not feel like thinking that hard." For that, I was saddened others did not get to know me, but grateful to the two that did because I truly needed those students' help. I wondered what students of mine had felt this way in the past. One of my classmates worked on in-class assignments with me and emailed me about group projects. Interestingly, he was a returning student. He was younger than me, but still talked openly with me about balancing his family, work, and classes. It appeared he knew I could relate. Another student emailed me notes when I had to miss class due to a death in my family; this was a reciprocal relationship that developed after I had emailed her notes on a date when she said she would be gone. It was a give-and-take relationship. I tried to engage casually with the other students, but it remained superficial. Exchanges included a "hi" when we walked into the room or "have a nice weekend" as we were exiting the class. It made me question the expectations students have in the classroom related to relationships with peers. Do we examine these expectations when we are leading a class? Should we? Are classroom/workshop relationships important for learning?

Each week, we explored new concepts. At times it felt like I was studying a new language, and at times, I was. It was a language that I had heard, but not one that I had studied in depth. As each week went by, my confidence grew. The students who had befriended me started to engage more with me, asking me what answers I had arrived at and how. Still, it was never really more than conversations about class. I continued to fight through the concepts, took the quizzes, and anxiously waited for feedback on my homework. Even though I was not taking the class for a grade, my grade was still important to me. As an educator, I can get frustrated about students' focus on grades, but here I was, doing the same thing: My potential grade weighed heavily on me and influenced how I engaged in the class. I read and re-read the feedback on my homework with the goal of reaching competence with the material. I attended office hours to further support my learning, all the while receiving glances from a fellow colleague wondering what I was doing so frequently visiting a colleague in another department—as well as from students who appeared to question why I would need to go to office hours. I perceived the students as questioning why I would need additional support, as if my PhD gave me advanced knowledge in every area. Yet despite these assumptions I was making about their perceptions of my learning, I chose not to have a conversation about it or clear the air; I was already an outsider in this learning environment.

My professor continued to encourage me. We discussed my struggles, my lack of confidence, and my accomplishments. At one point, she said, "You got this. Soon you will be publishing your own multivariate studies." She was just as encouraging to the other students. As much as I was learning about new concepts, I was also learning about how a colleague, someone who was my equal in the eyes of the university, approached classroom learning. I appreciated her

completely case-based assignments and her willingness to let students earn the grade they wanted. If you analyzed five cases, you received an A, four cases a B, and so on. It helped me rethink my approach to grading. It is rare that professors get opportunities to really experience another colleague's teaching style in depth.

The last day of class came. Our assignment was to present to our peers. We needed to share independent research required for the class. This assignment included collecting data, data analysis, and thoughts on the results. I was ready. I completed my PowerPoint ahead of time, double-checked my data and analysis, and went over my results with my professor. It had to be good. I was not only doing this for myself, but I was showing other students the importance of "never being too old to learn" and, ultimately, I wanted to make my professor and myself proud. I shared my presentation. I was excited. The other students asked questions about my presentation and told me they found my results surprising. It was the most interaction I had with many of them the entire semester. However, my professor was watching them and encouraging them to interact with each presentation. My professor informed me that I had a great research project I should expand in order to improve the field of social work. Although I elected to not get a grade in the class, I would give myself an A. An A for taking a risk, an A for effort, A for engaging in and demonstrating lifelong learning to students, and an A for following through with something I had always wanted to do.

My class does not count for continuing education in my state as I did not pay for it; therefore, I do not have a grade on a transcript or a CEU to "prove" my learning. I still question who I am proving my learning to. Is a grade or a CEU certificate the only way to prove that learning occurred? Despite the lack of an official grade or certificate, I learned. I engaged in what *I* call "lifelong learning." I picked an area I wanted to grow in and sought out a way to do so that I felt would be beneficial to me. Honestly, I learned more in this semester than I ever learned taking a CEU class. I was focused on the material, I revisited what it felt like to be the "student" in the classroom, and I watched a peer teach a class and learned new classroom activities. I especially learned more about myself. I pushed myself, I grew, and I now have new skills that will enhance my work professionally and, ultimately, enhance me. Isn't that what continuing education and lifelong learning should be about? Is it time to revisit what is meant by *continuing education*?

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Social Work is Not Rocket Science

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Abstract: This paper reflects on a three-day continuing education experience. Advancing continuing education can be challenging for the field of social work because there is much diversity in who social workers are and what social workers do. However, if social workers could rally behind a unifying, organizing principle, such as social justice, then continuing education could have a starting point from which to branch out into the different practice areas. Because social work is malleable, molded by the times, continuing education must shape social workers and their practice to remain current with contemporary knowledge and skills. A commitment to lifelong learning supports efforts to meet the demands of society and the needs of clients. This paper explores the question: If continuing education mirrors the field of social work, is social justice reflected? If not, what are strategies for moving social justice from the margins of social work to front and center?

***Keywords*:** continuing education, social justice, social work

This paper is quite timely, since, as I write, I am attending several social work continuing education (CE) events and am able to reflect on my three-day experience. CE events should mirror and support who we are and what we do as social workers. So, who are we and what do we do? There are gaps in the literature about social worker demographics. However, Master's level social workers are predominantly white (86 percent) women (85 percent) (NASW, 2017). From the Lane and Humphreys (2015) study sample, the majority (72 percent) were married or partnered and 84 percent had children. These demographics are limited in detail, but they provide a sense of who is in the social work profession. As for what we do, I have called or have heard social workers be called "wounded healers" (Straussner et al., 2018), "unfaithful angels" (Specht & Courtney, 1994), "social problem-solvers," and "social justice warriors." Supposedly, social work is an interdisciplinary profession that has social justice at its core (inherent in social work knowledge and practice); serves communities at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Kaul, 2016); and addresses racism, social injustice, and other forms of oppression and human rights violations (Varghese, 2013). To do this work, social workers promote culturally competent research methodologies and interventions in the areas of health, well-being, and social justice (Varghese, 2013). Social workers also develop programs that address injustice by taking on a more preventative approach (Kaul, 2016). For the purposes of this paper, "social work practice" includes everything a social worker may do—for example, research, community organizing, clinical practice, management, advocacy, etc. The many professional tasks and roles that social workers do and can do are important to keep in mind because that list should provide key information to determine continuing education content.

The social work profession is diverse and eclectic in duties, roles, and service provision. At times, there seems to be tension between these duties (e.g., calling the police on a client of color vs. fighting racial disparity in the criminal justice system), roles (e.g., the researcher vs. the service provider), and service provision (e.g., clinical treatment vs. community organizing), such that a power struggle emerges—and within the context of capitalism, a hierarchy takes shape

around which way is better, has more value, or is more cost-effective. This division within the field of social work is oppressive and, like all oppression, prevents social workers and the field itself from reaching their full potential. As a consequence, we limit ourselves and all the ways in which we can facilitate creative problem-solving. Continuing education can ease these tensions by filling in gaps in understanding and building connections between skills, content, and people who could become meaningful collaborators. Moreover, continuing education can promote the centering of social justice within the field. Since social justice is a social worker's professional and ethical mandate, it can be the organizing principle or the hub of the wheel that connects the various spokes of social work practice. Continuing education could bring social justice to the core of social work practice, such that the field is organized around the many intersections within our identities, knowledge, and areas of practice. Some critiques of continuing education that I will highlight stem from what I consider to be issues in the field; these can be addressed via continuing education. The critiques or gaps I perceive are greatly influenced by my lived intersections pertaining to who I am as a social worker.

Who Am I?

I am an African American woman who is licensed to practice law in two states. I am licensed as a clinical social worker (LCSW) and as a clinical alcohol and drug counselor (LCADC). I am currently studying for my master's in applied theatre. Boldly and proudly claiming the title of "artivist," I consider myself to be a critical social worker who integrates the creative arts and activism. Anti-racism and humanizing action are my professional and personal goals. I use participatory action research methods to develop and test multi-level (e.g., micro, mezzo, macro) and multi-systemic (e.g., criminal justice, housing) socio-health interventions. These interventions are grounded in critical and radical theories and liberation health models—wherein, naturally, multi-level and multi-system organizing is the clinical intervention. My work is usually with system-involved persons (e.g., criminal justice, child welfare) to reduce racial criminal justice and health disparities. I am a daughter, a mother of two daughters, and a wife in an interracial marriage. As an assistant professor of social work aiming to be a social entrepreneur and creative writer of works that center the voices of marginalized populations, I teach to transgress capitalist, oppressive systems and to provide transformative learning opportunities, hopefully. And, to my surprise and content, I am still considered a young adult according to Erik Erikson's stages of human development.

My intersecting identities at various social locations attached to differing degrees of power definitely influence my perspectives on continuing education—mainly by determining what gaps I perceive and solutions I offer. Most of my work, whether professional or personal, institutional or community, research or theatre, community organizing or clinical practice, involves bridging divides, filling in gaps, and finding hidden connections between seemingly unrelated topics, people, or ideas. As evident by my background, I do not fit within a box. When asked, "Are you a lawyer or a social worker? Researcher or clinician? Educator or community organizer?" I say, "Yes, and...." My goal with this reflection on continuing education is to find areas in which continuing education for social work can fill gaps in knowledge; bridge divides between areas, specialties, and/or disciplines; and find ways to connect potential collaborators in order to center social justice-oriented practice within social work. Intersectional identities and practice are our strengths to be leveraged by continuing education to elevate the field and enable the

advancement of creative and holistic solutions to complex social conundrums. It is in this spirit that I offer a reflection on potential learning opportunities and suggestions for building new paradigms to connect social workers across the spectrum. While reflecting on continuing education, I will disclose and consider more specifically who I am and what I do as a social worker. These two factors greatly influence my perspective on continuing education, the ways I was impacted by the CE events I attended, the strengths and issues I encountered, and my proposals for intervention. Moreover, all proposed interventions incorporate an intersectional structure for advancing anti-oppression/privilege practice. As such, the reflection highlights how intersectionality applies to self and practice as well as what the field may gain from meaningful interactions through CE programs.

Day One Reflection

On the first day of my three-day social work CE journey, I attended a four-hour workshop about the intersection of justice and clinical practice. Workshops like these tend to be hot topics. The justice system is a main provider of mental health services and many clients/communities are impacted indirectly, if not directly, by the criminal justice system. I was particularly interested in this workshop because of the racial disparities that persist within the criminal justice and health systems. Because I have a JD and MSW, I am constantly approached by lawyers who want to be social workers and social workers who want to be lawyers. I imagine that the number of dually credentialed professionals has increased in recent years, especially with the growing number of MSW-JD joint degree programs offered. Regardless of the first number, some content that lawyers and social workers must take for professional development overlaps, such as content in the areas of cultural competency, diversity, inclusion, and elimination of bias. Thus, the shared content areas could fulfill the continuing education requirements for both licenses. A continuing education session such as today's would work well as continuing education credit for dually licensed professionals. Moreover, if lawyers and social workers were able to take some continuing education classes together, the fields could cross-pollinate, build connections, and develop potential collaborations for implementing complex solutions.

Central to the workshop was the concept of "just clinical practice," a very important topic to me as a non-practicing attorney and social worker with an LCSW. Just clinical practice means, to me, clinical practice done using an anti-oppressive and anti-privilege framework. However, within the first thirty minutes of the session, it became immediately apparent that my definition was not the common understanding. Listening to the workshop participants, I heard three distinct categories: social work and the law, forensic social work, and social justice-oriented practice.

In this session, someone commented that clinical social workers are not "unfaithful angels" (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The gist of the comment was that clinical social workers do just clinical practice and, thus, have not failed the mission of social work pertaining to the ethical and professional mandate for social justice. These practitioners work with clients so they can advocate for themselves. Although I think this is one way to do just clinical practice—and it is certainly true of my work (which uses community organizing as the clinical intervention and develops a sense of community, self-efficacy, and identity)—there is a difference between indirectly engaging in justice practice as a consequence of your work versus justice work being the main objective. In other words, social work and justice have multiple intersections, which,

for continuing education organizing purposes, should be clarified because focus, content, and skills will differ accordingly.

There are at least three intersections for justice and social work. "Forensic social workers" do social work practice (e.g., sentence mitigation, evaluations of court-involved people, victim rights advocacy) within legal systems as indicated by the location of where they work (e.g., office of the public defender, juvenile justice detention center, prison, police precinct), on legal matters (e.g., custody hearing, termination of parental rights). For forensic social workers, the legal issue is the primary focus that dictates the work. For example, a social worker may refer a client to substance use treatment because they have a drug charge. The social worker is working with the client because they are involved with the court system. As such, a forensic social worker could carry out their job duties with no anti-oppressive thought or action.

At the intersection of "social work and the law," a social worker's practice may be indirectly affected by legal matters or the justice issue may otherwise be secondary. For example, a school social worker may have a student who is truant or involved in the child welfare system. Similarly, a social worker in private practice may work with a client who has a restraining order and is involved in a domestic violence case. And, here again, the social worker could work with clients on presenting issues without addressing power, oppression, or privilege.

"Social justice-oriented practice" pertains to issues of privilege and oppression rather than or in addition to legal issues. Of course, there is overlap because there is injustice within the justice system. Forensic social workers may fight against inequity (i.e., oppression and privilege) within the justice system that is exhibited through exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and violence. However, it is quite possible to be a social worker, forensic or otherwise, and not address issues of oppression and/or privilege. Now, the question is: Should that be possible? Addressing issues of inequity is part of our field's DNA and should be done by all social workers as part of what we do regardless of our practice area (Stewart, 2013). Rather than adding a sprinkle of social justice as seasoning to flavor our work, social justice should be the main course of our work, such that it is completely integrated with all social work knowledge and practice.

With the idea in mind that social justice-oriented practice should be integrated throughout social work practice rather than having it as a standalone category, effectively suggesting that social work could be practiced *without* centering social justice, I recommend that continuing education create one category for law and social work and a second category for forensic social work. The knowledge social workers may want to receive from continuing education would vary depending on which of these categories a social worker considers to be their area of practice. Because social workers work with people (whether they identify as micro or macro social workers) and the law is about people and affects all people, continuing education courses have the opportunity to help social workers obtain a basic understanding of the law. Forensic social work CE could then focus on the work in forensic settings and/or with specific justice-involved populations. Both categories should subsequently aspire to have social justice integrated within their content and practice.

There is just cause for having social justice-oriented practice be the unifying or organizing

component of all social work practice. Support for this idea comes from another incident in this four-hour session. When a good number of social workers in the room had not heard the term "intersectionality" before, I was a bit surprised. I do not support shaming anyone for what they do not know. We cannot be afraid to say, "I don't know," or to ask questions for fear of being labeled "stupid." In this time and in this society, we need more room for error and redemption so we can be honest and authentic with each other, creating the supportive environment needed for genuine relationship-building. However, this kind of knowledge gap may indicate what can happen when professionals are out of school for some time and thus supports the need for continuing education. There are terms, ideas, practices, and practitioners that inform social work practice. For example, I would like to know more about the pioneers of social work who are women of color. Continuing education can fill these gaps in knowledge. Certain professional fields, like social work, should have continuing education requirements because social workers are people, and we work with people. People are not static or simple. We are in a continuous process of change and a constant state of growth. Thus, the field of social work needs to change with the times and grow with the people. Professional fields that work with inanimate objects do not need continuing education. The number one will always be a number, and water will always be H_2O.

The brief discussion about intersectionality signaled to me that there is a need for social workers to be continually educated on the differences between cultural competency, diversity, and anti-oppression/privilege. I wonder if or how the "clinical social worker" distinction hinders the continuing education process around issues of white supremacy, racism, and oppression. Having obtained my LCSW, I understand that LCSW is a designation for someone who has undergone a training process. However, I wonder if this designation or identity serves to reinforce the micro-macro divide. I noticed most of the room identified verbally as clinical social workers. Why do we not identify as social workers who do clinical or micro practice? Similar to the movement to change language around calling someone "a schizophrenic" versus "a person with schizophrenia," we seem to allow the "clinical social worker" label to define us rather than clinical social work being something we do. Is it about convenience—is it easier to say "clinical social worker"?—or is it about prestige and status? When we identify as clinical social workers, are we saying we're not *just* social workers? This brings into question the false micro, mezzo, macro divide that has been created within the field and accentuated within social work education and continuing education. When there is a divide, there are boundaries that enclose territory. Macro practitioners are the ones who are concerned with racism and systemic inequities while clinical social workers work with individuals, not systems. However, individuals do not live in vacuums—their lives are directly and indirectly affected by family, community, institutions, and policies—yet we tend to silo our education and our work with people. Continuing education can help bridge the false divide and unite us as social workers under the common banner of social justice and equity. Fighting matrices of dominance and dominant ideology (e.g., racism, sexism) would not be reserved for those macro social workers over there; instead, it would be the professional and moral responsibility of all social workers. Understanding intersecting identities (e.g., woman, cisgender, gay, poor) and the way in which these identities have meaning for privilege and oppression is key to social work practice in multiple dimensions from relationships to experiences.

At the very least, continuing education can facilitate collaborations between social workers. For

example, in this workshop, the clinical social workers discussed how certain clinical issues caused their clients to be ineligible for different services and how some policies posed barriers to clients' treatment. These issues presented perfect working spaces for clinical, community organizing, and policy social workers to collaborate. Continuing education can highlight the false divide between micro, mezzo, and macro practice and encourage social workers to return to their social problem-solving roots as social activists and advocates featured in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics preamble. Through meaningful interaction offered by CE programs, social workers will gain new insights, competencies, and skills to apply in practice with individuals, communities, institutions, and systems.

The need for social justice-oriented continuous education was also supported by a participant discussing the child welfare and juvenile justice disparities between black and white youth, stating that black youth are suspended and/or arrested more often than white youth for doing the same behaviors. The participant characterized the disproportionate number of incarcerated black youth as issues of diversity rather than manifestations of racism. This inability to discuss the R-word brought to mind an experience from summer 2016. I was a member of a listserv of social work professionals. One social worker asked the astute question: "How can we, as social workers, join in support of Black Lives Matter?" Before this conversation, I would not have guessed that this was a risky or potentially explosive subject among social workers; but, to my horror and surprise, the person's question received vitriolic responses and was confronted with "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter." I never knew what it felt like to have my chin hit the floor so fast until that moment. I was outraged, to say the least, that social workers who have the professional and ethical mission to fight oppression did not understand the importance of the "Black Lives Matter" campaign and the racist implications of "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter." Did they not understand that although all lives *should* matter—or, maybe, all lives matter to *you*—there is concrete evidence in every U.S. system and institution (e.g., education, housing, welfare, health, justice, employment) that black lives do not matter or matter less than white lives? White lives have always mattered. What evidence do we have that police officers' lives do not matter? Are they disproportionately poor; in failing schools; targeted by the criminal justice system; repeatedly victimized by violent attackers who are not prosecuted for crimes they committed against you, your family, or community; or discriminated against for employment because of their police status? No, they're not. In fact, NYPD police cars have a message that stipulates there's a $10,000 reward for arrest and conviction of anyone shooting an NYC police officer. Blue lives already matter in this country. It is black lives, black bodies, black people's rights which have been violated repeatedly throughout our history and that precedent continues today. There's a lyric from "Ella's Song: We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest Until It Comes" by Sweet Honey in the Rock (1988) which quotes Ella Baker: "Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother's son, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until this happens" (Moyers, 2007). We do not need to be reminded that white people's lives matter. That point is declared and upheld in every way and in every U.S. institution. I also think it is important to note that advocating for Black Lives Matter does not mean you are anti-police. You can be pro-police and anti-police brutality, state-sanctioned murder, and modern-day lynching.

Social workers should be working to transform systems and institutions so black lives can matter too. Not only is continuing education needed to clarify these issues, but perhaps a person's

license to practice as a social worker should be revoked if you do not get the distinction *and* you don't want to get it. Social work is a rights-based field, but it is not the right field for everyone, and that's okay. The silence within our profession on issues of racism speaks volumes to those on the outside. We promote the racist status quo when we do not speak up and act out against it (Lorde, 1977). In essence, what we permit, we promote. Continuing education programming can provide tools for social workers to break the silence. Some social workers do not want to get their hands dirty with "political" issues. However, "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969) and addressing issues of racism is not a matter of politics, but a matter of justice and equity. In addition to racism being a culturally taboo topic to discuss, some people attempt to politicize race and racism by stating that even discussing it or admitting that it exists means you're a far left-leaning liberal. Again, this is a divisive and silencing tactic, similar to the micro-macro divide or the soft-hard science divide; the conservative-liberal divide has made it the business of liberals to be "woke." This is damaging in two ways: 1) those who identify as liberals may think they get an automatic pass and, thus, do not have to examine their ways of moving through this world that are oppressive; and, 2) those who identify as conservatives think racism is not their issue. If neither side takes responsibility in examining, interrogating, and acting against racism, then the oppressive status quo of white supremacy continues its unhindered agenda. Social workers need to be political—not in terms of Democrat, Republican, or other political affiliation, but in terms of understanding that the personal is political and that justice is personal and political (Boal, 1985; Hanisch, 1969). Politics affect people's identities, lives, families, and communities—gerrymandering and redlining communities, voter ID laws, human rights (e.g., right to marry), drug laws—and there is no way to work with only part of a person. There is also the job of challenging stereotypes (e.g., the welfare queen) and debunking myths (e.g., the poor take advantage of welfare) that grow out of gendered racism and underlying policies (Pinder, 2018). Probably, many social workers have good intentions, but intent does not negate impact; and, critical awareness without critical action is insufficient to uproot systems of inequity. Thus, continuing education can help enlighten social workers on how to engage in political and social activism and integrate activism into their social work practice.

After the four-hour session, I attended a keynote session that demonstrated the use of story-telling and the performative arts as a strategy to connect with others and to find oneself. Another intersection of my professional identity is that I am a social worker who uses the creative arts for healing, restorative, and transformative justice interventions. Unfortunately, I had to leave this session early because the sitter that I hired for my five-month-old baby had not arrived. This made me think—why are there no childcare options/services available, especially since many social workers have children? We research barriers to personal development and treatment for our clients and note that childcare is a major issue. Don't we know that the lack of childcare is a barrier for us, too? A potential solution for CE is to better utilize technology to allow people to attend sessions remotely. More online options may reduce overhead costs, which could also reduce the costs of continuing education courses for participants.

Day Two Reflection

On day two, I considered attending a session about opioid dependence. The previous night I had a conversation with the babysitter. She told me about her experience with her foster son's father who died of a drug overdose near the location of this CE event. Listening to her story

highlighted my lack of awareness. I had forgotten about the community. Hundreds of social workers have descended upon this seemingly under-resourced and disadvantaged community of color to participate in knowledge and skill-building workshops, sheltered in this hotel, not seeing the light of day or breathing fresh air for three days. Continuing education can help social workers identify ways to collaborate with community partners to promote social justice. Potential continuing education ideas include 1) education about community partnerships; 2) strategies for learning in the community; and 3) ways for the community members to be involved in continuing education as presenters and/or participants. For education about community partners, social workers can explore how to find community partners and how to build mutually beneficial relationships with community partners. For strategies for learning in the community, continuing education courses could include learning about the community-based resources that are available and how services are offered to community members. Also, social workers can share information with the community. Lastly, community members can be part of presentations. For example, a presentation on opioid dependence may be more informative if taught by a person with lived experience in collaboration with a social worker with that area of expertise. However, if I'm being honest, the main reason I did not attend that session was that the session started too early for me. I had an unrestful night with my five-month-old, who slept on me peacefully. Plus, the session only offered one continuing education unit (CEU). This demonstrates how my personal experience influences my professional decision-making and my attempt at self-care. I think it is the norm for social workers to be overworked and overwhelmed by the competing demands of their professional and personal lives. We often discuss self-care in passing, but that is one category that I have never seen explored for continuing education.

The main session that I attended on the second day was about clinical work with African American clients. This session made me remember a time when I was practicing in a co-occurring disorder treatment setting. My client was a black, adolescent male who had been identified as a difficult case by treatment staff. He had visited the caseload of every social worker in the facility and was now passed to me (a new hire) as the organization's final Hail Mary. I come from the school of thought that there is no such thing as a resistant client and that I bear the responsibility to figure out how the client works best and how to best work with the client. He didn't talk much, but in the few words he said—and more in what he refused to discuss—I learned a lot. Probably most telling was that he was about 19, sucked his thumb, and was still highly respected/feared in the adolescent male house. During our sessions, he mostly slept, which I interpreted as him feeling safe enough to close his eyes and rest. Most of our discussions were about being a black parent. He cared for his girlfriend's toddler. We discussed the significance of "claiming" a non-biological child as your own and being a black father in a society that reverberates the message that black men are not good fathers, protectors, providers, or role models. Between his naps, I managed to conduct a few assessments. I took his assessment results and my observations to my clinical supervision. After reporting a few details—client scored a certain number of points on an anger assessment; client reported having no one in his life that he trusts; client is always on guard and is suspicious of most, if not every person—my supervisor, a white male with a history of substance use who had come up through the ranks to be a director in the agency, diagnosed my client with paranoid personality disorder.

Here is an example that demonstrates the need for continuous education in power, privilege, oppression, and cultural competency. The first rule of paranoia is that it cannot be paranoia if it's

real or justified. In other words, from the data I had collected, my client's thoughts, feelings, and behavior were appropriate when considering his identity, experiences, community, and circumstances. Continuing education could provide more training for supervisors. I don't think it's a secret or unfair to say that a good supervisor is a unicorn in the field of social work. Students and licensed social workers constantly joke about how the supervision they receive is either non-existent or worse than receiving no supervision. In addition to the supervision basics, continuing education for supervision should include how to discuss issues and contexts of power, privilege, and oppression that occur within supervision between supervisor and supervisee and, in practice, between the social worker and the client (Graham, 2017).

I mentioned that my last supervisor had an open history of problematic drug use. For sure, continuing education can allow social workers to share their stories so we may learn from our colleagues who are leaders in their profession and have knowledge rooted in lived experience, my definition of a credible messenger. Social workers sharing from their own experience bridge the gap between the social worker as a professional and the clients we serve. One of the main questions students ask is how and when to appropriately self-disclose. The self-disclosure topic is always a lively discussion fraught with fear of being unethical. On the topic of self-disclosure, my colleague once disseminated an article they published about their personal experience and journey coming to identify with they/them pronouns. They asked colleagues to share the article with others who could possibly learn from their experience. In response to my dissemination efforts, I received an email stating that I should have included a trigger warning because of the offensive, anti-LGBTIA language that was used against my colleague.

Another area to explore for continuous education could be on the use of trigger warnings—when are they needed and for whom? Personally, I think we have blurred the lines between safety and comfort, and thus trigger warnings are overused to make people comfortable with challenging content rather than supporting a person's agency to protect themselves from retraumatization. Material that may be potentially upsetting or produce discomfort does not deserve a trigger warning. Trigger warnings are needed when the content of the material is both of a traumatizing nature and unexpected. For example, a clear case for a trigger warning would be the following: A student is in a business class and all of a sudden the teacher strays from what's on the syllabus and presents a video on sexual assault or suicide or another traumatic situation. We are in the field of social work where much of the work is with oppressed populations and traumatic events. In fact, oppression is violence and can be extremely traumatizing, especially when it involves domestic terrorism (Helms et al., 2012). Thus, knowing the article is about the identity of an individual from an oppressed population is the trigger warning. This is especially relevant for people who are supposedly coming to an educational space to deal with oppression and social justice. When you sign up to do this work, that's the agreement. You've been warned, and you're asserting that the work won't break you. In sum, my view on trigger warnings is that trigger warnings act as an opt-in system, granting agency to traumatized individuals by informing them about what they might encounter and allowing them to attend to their trauma as they see fit (Manne, 2015). However, trigger warnings are not needed for discussing oppression or in spaces dedicated to dealing with oppression/social justice because it can be assumed that you will encounter traumatic/violent scenarios. For me, giving a trigger warning in these contexts is as unnecessary as giving a trigger warning for a dead body to a detective when investigating a murder case. Lastly, discomfort is to be expected when discussing issues of

power, oppression, and privilege. Discomfort is a sign that deeply held beliefs are being challenged, which is necessary for learning and personal growth. Safety and discomfort are not mutually exclusive; and, most likely, both are needed to create the brave spaces that facilitate transformative potential (Jemal, 2017; Jemal & Bussey, 2018). Continuing education can help create spaces for challenging dialogue and can educate social workers on how to create these types of spaces for their clients, colleagues, and students (Jemal & Bussey, 2018).

Day Three Reflection

From day three, I received the message that social workers should be the change we want to see in the world. The idea of "visibility" was presented. Continuing education can help social workers learn how to be visible. We need to take our rightful place at the head of the table when discussing matters of racism, social injustice, and social problems that plague our nation (Jemal & Bussey, 2018). We certainly need to be leading the teams tasked with making change. I was a bit saddened when I heard some social workers complaining that bail reform makes their jobs harder because arrested individuals are not in jail long enough for them to do their reentry plans. Certainly, having clients languish in jail for a perfect reentry plan is not the answer.

I heard terms used such as "change agents," "seekers of social justice," and "protectors of human rights." All the above sound great; however, continuing education can facilitate social work's efforts to turn sounds into action. Continuing education can provide social workers with the tools to throw their collective weight around to better serve society. Social workers require a strong identity and presence because the complexity and the gravity of the issues—e.g., police brutality; targeted incarceration; the Orthodox Jewish community monopolizing the school board in East Ramapo, NY; immigrant families being separated and caged; poor people working for unlivable wages—weighs heavily on all parties involved. It is my hope that when people see a social worker coming their way, they know something is going to happen that moves everyone toward a more just and equitable outcome. Oppression limits possibilities. The field of social work reveals possibility, which is the foundation of hope. As such, social workers are in the business of creating hope for change, a purpose and mission to be respected and that should make all social workers proud.

Overall Experience

One observation about the three-day CE event pertains to organization. Continuing education can be organized by practice area (e.g., community organizing, social entrepreneurship), population (e.g., LGBTQ, Aging), and problem (e.g., substance use, borderline personality disorder). Those categories seem to work well. In addition to those categories, another possible structure is to organize according to the Transformative Potential Development Model: Critical Consciousness, Responsibility/Accountability, Efficacy, and Action (Bussey et al., 2020; Jemal & Bussey, 2018). Critical consciousness would include trainings on anti-oppression/privilege theory in practice. The primary purpose of consciousness sessions is to identify gaps in knowledge that allow inequitable socio-structural factors to continue unchallenged. A major task of critical consciousness development is to make the invisible *visible* and the implicit *explicit*. Addressing knowledge gaps gives the practitioner tools to perceive problems from multiple perspectives so they are better able to envision and develop holistic and creative solutions.

The responsibility prong calls for social workers to identify their role in maintaining and perpetuating problems rooted in oppression and finding solutions. We are accountable for centering the voices of those most impacted, learning from those with lived experience, and creating responses that acknowledge how the past lives in the present. There's no more hiding behind the excuse, "I'm just doing my job," or "That's not my job." Social workers may not be responsible for causing all the problems, but we've chosen a profession that has accepted the challenge of solving these problems anyway.

Continuing education that is focused on efficacy provides skill-building seminars to better equip us to address knowledge gaps and apply our skills to social problems. For example, all social workers should be well-versed in how to discuss oppression, privilege, cultural competency, equity, and social justice. Additionally, continuing education focused on action would allow social workers to be involved at the micro, mezzo, or macro levels for social justice. Consequently, continuing education can capitalize on the many diverse and potential connections between identities, knowledge, experience, skills, and areas of practice to provide holistic care that is humanizing. This way, continuing education can help ensure that social work practice will always center anti-oppression/privilege theory and transform consciousness into action.

Conclusion

I often say to my students and colleagues that social work is not rocket science—many people nod while giving the knowing look of agreement—and that look turns to shock and deep reflection when I say *it's harder*. I truly believe that social work is a more difficult field of study and practice than rocket science because for the "hard" sciences you can memorize formulas or utilize algorithms. The rules generally do not change. However, for social workers, we can follow the same plan of action in two different scenarios and, for one of those cases, be accused of unethical practice. It is difficult to exist in the gray area, and yet, social work has very few black or white spaces. For this reason, it is important for continuing education to meet the field where it's at, but not leave it there. From there, we can determine where we want to go (based on who we are and what we do) and how to move toward our destination, which will always be a moving target. Particularly, continuing education can change the culture of the field. Since social work is a multifaceted field that works with people, who are complex and ever-changing, social work practitioners in all manifestations of practice require lifelong learning. If you prefer an easier field, a field that does not require CEUs, then by all means... go to rocket science.

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Teaching for Retention through the Lens of Inclusion

Shakira A. Kennedy and Joan M. Groessl

Abstract: As we interface with a diverse world, it is inevitable that we will use our cultural lens to adapt information. Continuing education material must be developed through the lens of inclusive practice. Therefore, teaching for retention requires a deliberate commitment to an anti-oppressive framework while being mindful of the theoretical perspectives that exclude or marginalize. Providing a holistic approach to teaching will help to develop a diverse group of lifelong learners who mirror the population. This paper will reflect the changing landscape of how we, two professors teaching pedagogy, have been shaped by the deliberate intentions of incorporating inclusion into the academic and continuing education platforms.

***Keywords*:** lifelong learning, practice competency, experiential learning

As the profession of social work continues to evolve, the manner we as trainers and educators expand adult learning should be humanizing. For this to happen, we must first understand that we cannot separate the person from their experiences, as our experiences are culturally framed and shaped. How we experience events may change according to the language and categories of analysis we use, and according to the cultural, moral, and ideological vantage points from which they are viewed (Brookfield, 1996). Therefore, our experiences and lenses through which we view the world shape how we receive and integrate information for learning. Invaluable teaching moments can be lost if we do not carefully examine the varying cultural lenses adult learners bring with them.

The authors of this article include a Black woman and a White middle-aged woman. Each life experience has had influences on how we approach continuing education. As one who develops training, I (Joan) as a White woman must be cognizant of my worldview and privilege so that I can see when my training is neglecting to address others' identities and the life experiences that influence their work. This was evident in a training I recently completed when participants questioned the characterization of an individual within a scenario. As a result, I changed the scenario to exclude information that could appear stereotypical.

The need to examine the best methods to teach in ways that are equitable continues to be an area for further research. Presently, the application of learning is influenced by both predisposing factors, such as environment and one's motivation toward training and learning (Smith et al., 2006). In a study of psychologists, Taylor and Neimeyer (2015) found lifelong learning positively related to competence and linked to a desire for professional skill enhancement. The additional step of having learners reflect on what they learned can enhance future application in practice; because of this, Fletcher et al. (2010) highlighted a model of reflection that incorporated consideration of learning and training development before, during, and after training opportunities. Reflecting on my own actions, I (Joan) did not ignore differences, but instead I recognized and affirmed differences by being open to learn and correct my error.

Fostering a learning environment that gives learners a sense of belonging and makes them feel

safe to share their cultural stories can enhance the quality of their learning. I (Shakira) often allow participants to incorporate their experiences into the session for a more meaningful discussion and higher learning retention. Teater (2011) emphasized incorporating teaching and learning theory into curricular development to promote positive learning outcomes. Attending to the needs of the learner is one way to increase the relevance of the course material to that learner. These needs can be captured using a range of teaching and learning strategies; training and development that includes a clear vision of future application—application beyond the training environment—can enhance the relevance of material to students. Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy can be helpful in determining the learning outcomes with progressively higher levels of learning, from simply understanding to synthesis of ideas, as training content becomes more advanced.

Interdisciplinary training benefits from heterogeneous groups that allow transfer of learning in complex situations using real-world scenarios and scaffolded learning (Vandenhouten, et al., 2017). Use of problem-based scenarios, case studies, and active learning strategies apply the andragogical principles to the training curriculum.

I (Joan) have applied adult learning concepts to training development, including opportunities for participants to work on a loosely defined problem in small groups. In an evaluation of a training that focused on ethics concerns, a respondent noted that this method "gives an opportunity to actually discuss issues that [they had] previously thought about," and another shared that such activities "ensure that [they are] making ethical decisions that protect the rights [of their] clients." These small group activities allow differing perspectives to be highlighted. Comments from one attendee demonstrated this concept, stating the content learned "[made them] more aware of personal biases and what [they] do when in the workplace." The same outcomes have been noted by graduate students in the classroom. A student explained on the final evaluation for a required ethics course that "the group discussion brought in perspectives and sides [they] wouldn't have considered[,] which was good." A student in an online psychopathology course further noted that the "use of case studies [was] challenging at first[,] but [they] believe [the case studies] ultimately encouraged [their] learning of the material the most."

Experiential Learning

> Experiential learning can allow space for excluded voices and perspectives in adult education as it requires a permissive atmosphere in which [adult learners] feel free to put forth their ideas and their questions without the instructor's reacting in the form of rejection, derision, blame, or authoritarian injunctions to think along certain other lines preferred by the instructor. (Glover & Hower, 1956, p. 14)

I (Joan) have encouraged participatory learning in continuing education sessions. This includes placing the participants in the role of consultant whereby they review material completed by earlier groups of trainees and then provide alternative solutions. This proved particularly useful when a modified World Café (World Café Community Foundation, n.d.) model was used in the training. The solutions developed often take a course of action I as the trainer would not

necessarily have identified but that is equally effective. I also often require a peer review process with large classroom projects. When providing feedback on a group project, each group member assesses the participation of group members.

Consequently, unlike more traditional teaching techniques such as lecturing, experiential learning involves the adult learners (and not only the instructor) in actively shaping the learning process (Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005). As an instructor (Shakira), my participants have taught me that the learning process is not only a hands-on process, but one that is fluid, where connections to participants' lived experiences increase their knowledge and potentially their retention of the material. An example of this can be seen in students who have gone through this process and return years later to tell me, "I still remember what we learned and I am using it as a professional social worker," or "I never thought about a group of people this way and because of shared experiences, my thinking has changed for the better."

A process of critical reflection allows the individual to link cognitive dimensions to experiences in practice (Jordi, 2011). In developing online continuing education, I (Joan) require participant reflections on content presented. As feedback on one training, a participant noted, "I thought it was helpful to learn the materials and be given the chance to write about what we learned and how to apply it to our daily lives." Consideration of integrative learning allows intentional development of activities—activities which incorporate active means of applying the information taught. Both of us have utilized case studies, problem-based learning, and application through role-playing in training to foster engagement with the material. Following the activity, dialogue about the key learning reinforces concepts and allows discussion for broader application. In further development of ethical practice specifically, attention to this kind of reflection is important to increasing ethical sensitivity and encouraging ethical practice.

There are several ways we as educators can learn from others and ourselves through critical reflection: Kisfalvi and Oliver (2015) suggest taking part, whenever possible, in seminars on leading discussions and handling difficult situations that may arise when teaching with experiential methods. Alternatively, we can identify colleagues whose teaching approaches we admire, sit in on their classes, and discuss observations and reactions. Collaborative team teaching is another way to develop our pedagogy, using the experience to observe each other and to provide feedback. Finally, if adult learners consent, educators can benefit from recording class sessions for self-evaluation or feedback from our peers.

Our experiences with both recording and collaborative team teaching have changed the way we view our teaching and enhanced our knowledge of the benefits of feedback. Continuing education is now being offered in multiple modalities, including digital means. Using learners' existing knowledge structures, encouraging deep learning, increasing question-asking by the learner, developing critical thinking skills, enhancing reading skills, improving comprehension monitoring, and creating a supportive learning environment are just some of the approaches to assess learning. These approaches speak mainly to developing "skills," although the final item addresses developing motivation for learning (Joshi et al., 2001).

In the world of distance learning, recording sessions is not uncommon. Use of recordings is

helpful for adult learners who must acquire the training but have multiple time demands, or for adult learners who need to refresh the training materials later. Feedback to the developer/trainer regardless of modality can include discussion of pace, handling of challenging topics, comfort with silence to allow adult learners to gather their thoughts, use of topic-relevant polling questions to set the session tone, and assignment of responsibilities in breakout groups, including in the online forum. In one instance, I (Shakira) observed how feedback outlined a positive reaction to the approach to policy through the lens of power, privilege, and oppression which concretely demonstrated how policies have impacted various groups of people differently. Such feedback and dialogue enhance my training and online presence and promote subject area inclusion. My (Joan) graduate ethics course is taught as a hybrid mix of face-to-face and online. I have received comments from students in their final course evaluations noting that recorded lectures were helpful, as students could go back to them to ensure understanding of the material.

A collaborative training experience can provide the opportunity for trainers to model for participants. Individually, trainers are dynamic—but collectively, working as a team, trainers are able to model respect for differences, interdependence, and de-escalation skills for training environment management. The process can be a humbling one for the trainers but also allow them to provide mentorship for each other. Sinclair (2007) suggests finding a mentor well-versed in experiential teaching and reaching out to them both before teaching, to discuss the approaches, and after teaching, to debrief. The benefit of following through with these recommendations is that over time one can gauge one's own growth and take confidence from improved abilities to deal not only with challenging adult learners but also with one's own emotions and reactions (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015).

Since many jurisdictions require continuing education on ethics and boundaries on an ongoing basis for licensure, incorporating opportunities for reflection allows the participant to contemplate materials presented and construct appropriate responses using a framework presented by the trainer. I (Joan) have used Congress' ETHIC model (Congress, 2000) applied to a range of case scenarios; adding complicating factors to the scenarios allows a range of skill levels to address ethical issues. Since the scenarios are discussed in small groups, participants gain multiple perspectives when examining these issues. Feedback from participants demonstrates the benefits of scenario work. Discussions expand from the initial scenario to related experiences of the participants, thus expanding conceptual understanding. This strategy is consistent with those supported in the literature as promoting lifelong learning (Laal & Laal, 2012; Scales et al., 2011).

Assessing Effectiveness

A multicultural assessment would address the needs of those with cultural lenses that are different from their counterparts within the learning environment. Adult learners are diverse and learn in a variety of ways; however, the ability to demonstrate what they have learned in specific ways is essential to assessing effectiveness. Different approaches may be used to engage adult learners in the material, but demonstration of an adult learner's knowledge, skills, and abilities is done uniformly in the same assignment or approach (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). I (Shakira) have learned that when I consider culture, race, ethnicity, the adult learner experience,

and self-awareness in the overall learning experience, I must also take into account how learners demonstrate knowledge in their daily lives and with the people around them.

An evidence-based strategy for assessing effectiveness of continuing education includes a pre- and post-test as well as follow-up several months after the training (Parrish & Rubin, 2011). In most instances, however, evaluation is completed immediately following training completion. The Association of Social Work Boards' (ASWB, 2018) continuing education approval requires evaluation of each of the learning objectives as well as evaluation of practice relevancy, currency, and effective presentation of the material. For example, I (Joan) recently completed evaluation of a training curriculum for adult protective services workers. The evaluations—following each of the three days of training—asked respondents to assess their degree of knowledge prior to and after the training of each learning objective for the day. There was a statistically significant difference between perceptions of learning as an outcome of the training by participants. Additional questions included what the participants felt was new learning and what they were most likely to use in future practice. These responses can be assessed for thematic patterns outlining material that is needed in future offerings of the training curriculum. A pre- and post-test score also demonstrated statistically significant improvement in knowledge of the material presented (Groessl, 2018). While not completed due to a variety of factors, a later follow-up to participants could have provided evidence that materials from the training were utilized in practice.

Conclusion

Whether classes are online or in-person, attention to the needs of the learner using andragogical principles is imperative. Models may not address issues related to inclusion, so it is up to trainers to become aware of themselves and their privilege in order to truly incorporate best practices to address the deficiencies in their training. The use of a mentor to improve practice and feedback from the learners themselves will enhance the training as well as inform the implicit messages given to training participants. There is minimal research around critical reflection related to inclusive practices in the training environment. It is through the voices of those impacted by exclusionary practice that the profession can best serve practitioners and the individuals they interact with.

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A Chicana's Perspective on Navigating and Plugging Leaks in the Educational Pipeline

Stephanie Lechuga-Peña

Abstract: This narrative provides an overview of my educational journey as a young, Chicana student mother and now assistant professor in a large public research university in the Southwest. It documents the leakage points in my educational pipeline as well as the pivotal moments that contributed to my success, as only .2% of Chicanx earn a PhD. I offer recommendations for supporting underrepresented students in higher education and, particularly, in social work.

***Keywords*:** Chicanx, Chicana, educational pipeline, underrepresented students

I grew up in the North Side of Denver, Colorado, in the 1980s. This meant my family lived in a predominately working-class Latinx neighborhood where families stayed for generations. It also meant schools that served this area were low-performing and had high push-out rates. Only when I was much older did I learn that the place I grew up was not a safe place to live. My parents had always dreamt of moving to a neighborhood with more opportunities for their children.

My parents were both young when they met and married; my father was 21 years old and my mother was just 16 years old. My father was fortunate to access higher education through an Equal Opportunities Program which was intended to recruit Chicana/o students into higher education, and he was the first person in his family to graduate from college. My mother graduated from high school and enrolled in college but had to leave to care for my older brother and sister when they were born. Both of my parents were involved in the Chicano Movement during the 1970s, which created opportunities to build group identity, provided access to education, and reclaimed Mexican American history in schools, which was often excluded in traditional school curricula (Lechuga-Peña & Lechuga, 2018). The Chicano Movement and the educational capital they gained helped my parents become advocates for themselves and their communities, a skill they would pass on to their children.

My educational experience began at a small private Lutheran school, just up the street from our house. We were not very religious, but my parents wanted us to attend a school with small class sizes and academic rigor, something that the local public schools could not offer. I was the youngest of four children and we were fortunate to attend this private school through a tuition assistance program. Most of the other children in the neighborhood attended the local public school. I went to school with nearly 200—predominately white—students. I knew that I was different from the other students, but at the time, I did not realize it was because of the color of my skin. Unfortunately, after my first year there, the school closed due to low enrollment, and my siblings and I were sent to another Lutheran school in the North Side. I attended this second school through the fourth grade and, once again, it was obvious that I was different. After three years at this school, my parents withdrew me as the tuition for four children became a barrier and we were asked to leave. Choosing a school with the same educational expectations for their

children was a priority for my parents. Fortunately, they found a small private Catholic school for us within the North Side. Research shows that Latina/o parents being involved in their children's education, including by making personal sacrifices for quality education, has a significant positive association with academic outcomes (Ceballo et al., 2014). It was at this third school where I finally began to feel like I had found my place. The difference at this school was that there were other students who looked like me and had families like mine—and while the school was still in the North Side, our new home was not. Things were also going well at home. My parents were doing better financially and their dream of moving us out of the North Side had become a reality.

During this time, my parents seemed happier than they had ever been. However, this did not last very long. Just as I started to feel like nothing could go wrong, our lives took a drastic turn. It was toward the end of my fifth-grade year when my school told me that I had to leave. At the time, I did not realize why. I just knew it was one of the hardest things that I had ever had to do, as I was finally in a school where I felt accepted. Having attended three different elementary schools by this time, it never occurred to me that I would have to attend another. I said goodbye to my friends and enrolled in the neighborhood public school by my new house. Later in life, I found out it was because my parents could not afford to continue paying our tuition and the school was not willing to let us finish out the school year there. This fourth elementary school would be my introduction to *public* education in a predominately white school and neighborhood. Although my parents had moved us out of the North Side, the school had connected me there—once I moved to this public school, I completely lost that connection and entered a whole new world.

At this new school, I wanted to belong so badly that I started hanging out with the "wrong" crowd. We were a group of girls and boys of color, some of the only ones in the school. The familiarity of this group and shared identities initially attracted me to these students. I began to make some poor choices and immediately my parents stepped in. They spoke to my teacher, Mr. Gonzales, and he saved my sixth-grade year. I had bought into the idea that I was not smart and began to disengage—and in retrospect, I think all of us students of color bought into this idea and so these "prophecies" had begun to self-fulfill. Mr. Gonzales saw something in me that I could not see at the time, and he pushed me in ways other teachers had not. He encouraged me to read, asked my opinion on topics, and even put me in leadership roles as often as possible. I truly believe he saved me that year and steered me back on the right path. He would be one of my first mentors, which research says can be critical for Latina/o students (Ramirez, 2012; Lechuga-Peña & Lechuga, 2018). Unfortunately, this was my last year at this school before I moved on to middle school. By the time I finished the eighth grade, I had attended five schools during my primary school years.

I began my freshman year at a large middle- to upper-class white public school. This new school was a huge culture shock from the schools I had previously attended. Here, students wore designer clothes and shoes. Their parents drove them to school in new cars and their homes were twice the size of mine. Every day at lunch was a new challenge. It was a good day if I had money to buy something to eat, while my friends spent money on whatever they felt like eating that day. It was clear from my first day there that not only did I look different from them, but they also had a very different lifestyle than mine, where money was never an issue. It was here

where I first experienced overt racism and when I was first tracked into remedial courses, a common occurrence for Latino and African American students (Muller et al., 2010). I was placed in lower-level science and math courses even though my previous grades and standardized tests indicated I was on grade level. My parents did not question the school and I never let them know how easy the classes were for me. It was not a coincidence that most of the other students in these classes were students of color.

My first experience with overt racism occurred this same year. On a weekly basis, my sister and I received hate notes in our lockers with racist messages telling us to go back to where we came from. Our peers made it clear that my sister and I did not belong because we were Mexican. My parents immediately went to the principal and demanded a swift response to this treatment. My father was the president of our local League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) chapter at the time, and he had extensive experience addressing issues of discrimination. He made it clear that his children should not have to experience hate. However, even with my father's knowledge and advocacy, the principal made light of the situation, treating it like it was just kids acting out. I found out later that many of the students of color experienced racism, but the school and staff either simply failed to acknowledge it or dismissed it outright. While this was happening at my school, it was also a stressful time for my parents: My father was laid off from work, and they could no longer afford to pay the rent for the small apartment we lived in. My parents decided to move back to the North Side because they could not afford to pay the housing prices in our neighborhood—but backing this decision was their desire to remove us from the hostile school environment we were experiencing.

Once again, I moved schools. I started my tenth-grade year at North High School, the seventh school I had attended at this point. At the time, my school was one of the lowest-performing high schools in Denver Public Schools and had a very low graduation rate; it has since increased to 64.5% (Colorado Department of Education, 2017). Gangs, violence, drugs, and teen pregnancy were commonplace. I was now in a predominately low-income Mexican and Chicana/o school. Here, students were very outspoken about who their friends were, the pride they had in their culture, and their willingness to die for the "hood" they represented. This was the life my parents had tried so hard to shelter us from. Although I was surrounded by students who identified as I did, it was a different type of "culture shock." I did not dress or talk like these students; I felt like an outsider within my own community.

When I registered for classes, I was fortunate to be placed in higher-level courses on the accelerated track because my parents advocated for me, and this time the school administrators listened to them. Upon reflection later in life, I realized all my advanced placement classes were with the white students that attended North and only a few other Latina/o students. This was the opposite of my experience in remedial classes at my previous school, but it was still a form of tracking. In these classes, I was challenged daily and asked to think critically. I felt like I belonged in these classes and in these spaces, as I could keep up academically, but everywhere else I was just another brown student trying to find acceptance. I started to distance myself from the other Latina/o students, and I began to experience internalized oppression, which Marsiglia and Kulis (2009) define as a state of self-hate that can be experienced as stress, guilt, stigma, and shame. I wanted to be like the white students in my classes, so I began to reject my culture. This was a result of the negative messages that were ingrained in me while attending predominately

white schools and the continued messages I received from the students that surrounded me. At North, I was one of the top-performing students, but I would find out later that this was not nearly enough to succeed in college, and my peers in secondary education had vastly better prior educational capital.

During my junior year in high school, I became pregnant. Early motherhood would set the tone for how others treated me and shape the negative internalized messages I began to believe about myself. In my mind, I had become another stereotype at North: a young uneducated Latina mother. Becoming a teen mother had many consequences. For example, I was not encouraged to apply to college, and when I approached the college counselor, she refused to give me applications for universities—she instead told me it would be best to apply to community colleges. Additionally, I stopped participating in extracurricular activities, set my school schedule to end by 11:00 a.m. in order to work part-time, and enrolled in low-level classes to reduce my workload outside of class. I began to believe that I was not worthy of continuing my higher education and that my new role was to be a mother. Fortunately, during my last semester of high school, I took a Chicano studies course with Mr. Salazar. This was my first experience where I was pushed to think about what it meant to be a Chicana and how this influenced my identity. He was another teacher that believed in my potential and didn't see me as just a stereotypical teen mother, but a student with aspirations. It was also at this time that I was introduced to a student group, Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA), the largest organization of Raza Youth in the United States that promotes higher education, cultura, and historia (MEChA, 2020). In Mr. Salazar's class and with this student group, I found a place where I felt fully accepted. I began to embrace who I was. I pushed through my senior year, going to school during the day and working in the afternoons and evenings, and eventually graduated. I was finally on my way to Metropolitan State College of Denver. I was so excited because I thought that I had beaten the odds. I was a Latina teen mom, yes, but a teen mom with a high school diploma. Little did I know that the next five years would be the hardest years of my educational experience. I had made it through what Sólorzano et al. (2005) call the "first point in the pipeline" for Chicana/o students.

When I began my first year as an undergrad, I thought that I was academically prepared, but found out quickly that this was not the case. I found myself in remedial math and struggled to get through my English, public speaking, and history classes, which is often the case for Latina/o students (Melguizo et al., 2008). The one class that I did well in was Chicano studies, as I was most engaged in this content. I read everything on the syllabus and found that the stories and experiences of other Chicanas/os were just like mine. Just like I had in the sixth grade and my last semester of high school, I began to regain my confidence and believe that I could be successful. However, during my first year, I failed two of my classes, barely managed to stay enrolled, and was placed on academic probation, affecting my financial aid. By this time, most of my friends that had managed to graduate from high school and continue onto college had dropped out, another "leakage point in the educational pipeline" for Chicana/o students (Sólorzano et al., 2005, p. 277). I was still chugging away, though barely getting through. Two years later, during my third year in school, I took a course titled Introduction to Human Services and was exposed to the helping profession of social work. I was immediately drawn to the content and realized I wanted to help other youth that struggled in school, particularly young mothers. In my courses, I learned that it was not only individual-level factors that influence

academic outcomes, but also systemic forces that contribute to school failure. As cliché as it sounds, I had found my calling. I believed that I could make a difference in a youth's life and show them what was possible.

Before I knew it, five and a half years had gone by and I was finally graduating. I could not believe that, after all the struggles that I had gone through, I had made it. Completing a college degree meant that I had beaten the odds. I was not another Chicana who had fallen through the cracks—or, as one of my mentors says, "been pushed" through the cracks. I was now the one out of eight Chicana/o students that graduates from college (Sólorzano et al., 2005). During my last semester of college, one of my human services professors approached me and encouraged me to apply to an MSW program. My understanding of graduate school was that it was not for students like me, but for others who were intelligent, had the financial means, and were white. I did not see myself continuing on to such a rigorous academic career—I was done. However, after some considerable thought, soul-searching, and gentle nudges from mentors, I applied to two MSW programs, one in my hometown and one on the East Coast. I was fortunate that my professor and mentors believed in my abilities and saw something in me that I could not see in myself. My professor also connected me to financial support in the programs, which was critical to continue my education. According to Ramirez (2012), two of the main reasons Latina/o students choose their graduate programs are faculty influences and financial considerations. These two factors were instrumental in my decision to pursue a graduate degree.

After applying to and being accepted into both programs, I decided to attend the School for Social Work at Smith College since they provided a full-tuition scholarship. I was very fortunate that my parents were so supportive and encouraged me to make the decision that was best for my education. Having never traveled east of Kansas, I made the difficult decision to leave my son behind with my parents and head to what might as well have been another country: Northampton, Massachusetts. Leaving my child was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made in my life. I grappled with taking him with me, but I had to consider where we were going to live and how I would provide childcare for him, manage my coursework, and still be a "good" mother. I felt very conflicted about my decision. In the short-term, he would be growing up without his mother, but in the long-term, I would be in a better position financially to provide for him. With a heavy heart, I packed my bags and traveled across the country to pursue my MSW.

At Smith College, I was confronted with the level of inequitable education I had received and the privilege that other students lived with. Many of the students were very wealthy and well-traveled and had received an excellent education prior to their graduate program. During my first year, I was exposed to a completely new culture and way of life. My peers talked about their international travel and wrote and spoke using words that I had to look up in a dictionary. I was often told how surprised they were that Mexicans live in Colorado. They had an idea of what a Coloradan was—"a white ski bum." Little did they know what my lived experience really entailed. I was one of a few students of color, and, naturally, we gravitated toward each other. This was essential to my success in the program. However, although I had several shared identities with these students, none were parents. I often felt alone and guilty for having made the decision to leave my son behind. This weighed heavily on me and affected the time and effort I put into my coursework. The culture shock, high academic expectation, and distance from my son and family took its toll. I decided to go home and transfer to the Graduate School

of Social Work at the University of Denver to complete my MSW. Financially it was not a wise move, but emotionally it was the best decision for me at the time. It took me two years, but I earned a master's degree. This was the highlight of my life. I had an advanced degree and had surpassed my parents' education level. This was something that I had never thought was possible. Considering the education pipeline for Chicana/o students, I was now one of two students that completes a graduate degree (Sólorzano et al., 2005). I had made it; I was a success! I could now walk around with my head up high and speak with confidence. I was "liberated," a state Freire (1970) argues is achieved when oppressed individuals lead their own struggle for freedom. Education, he states, is the key to human transformation.

Seven years later, in 2012, I attended a sociology conference and was in a room full of Latina/o scholars who all held a PhD, including my older sister. I was so inspired by what I saw, and as I listened to them talk, I began to reflect on my own educational journey and wondered if it was over. It was at this time that I developed a new mentor/mentee relationship with a Chicana faculty member, Dr. Debora Ortega at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. Every time I met with her, I gained more confidence, and she helped me see my potential contributions to the social work field. Seeing Latinas with a PhD, my sister showing me a PhD was possible, and finding a mentor that supported me all influenced my decision to apply to doctoral programs. I knew that if I earned a PhD, I could make an impact on education for low-income, marginalized youth. I struggled through the GRE exam, spent weeks writing my personal statement, and hesitantly submitted my PhD applications on the morning of the due dates. I realized I had put off applying to programs to the last minute because I did not believe I was smart enough to be or deserved to be in a program with some of the brightest minds in social work. All of my negative schooling experiences, including attending multiple schools, being one of a few students of color, and the stigma of being a young Latina mother, tested my confidence. I was afraid of rejection, a reoccurring theme throughout my education.

Eight weeks later, I was notified that I was accepted to both of the PhD programs I applied to. I read the letters out loud and asked my mentor to confirm that this was not a mistake—"Did they mean to accept someone else?" I asked. Of course, despite my disbelief, I was the one they wanted. I began my PhD program with the doubt that had always been there, but with a fighting spirit that never failed. Four years later, I completed the last of my coursework, passed comprehensive exams, and defended my dissertation proposal and final dissertation. I became Dr. Stephanie Lechuga-Peña. According to Sólorzano et al. (2005), only .2% of Chicanas/os will complete a doctoral degree; I was now one of them.

I am now in my fourth year as an assistant professor in social work, at a large public research university in the Southwest. My son graduated from college this past year and is the third generation in my family to pursue higher education. I have made several sacrifices as a young mother in academia; time away from my children being the biggest sacrifice of them all. However, I know that I set an example for my children and showed them that they belong in academia. The educational capital I passed down to them, along with family support and mentoring is essential in their educational success (Lechuga-Peña & Lechuga, 2018). I often reflect on my educational journey remembering young motherhood, academically and financially struggling as a college and graduate student, and the self-doubting first-generation graduate and doctoral student I was. As a new junior faculty member, I have realized that the

negative internal voices never leave me, and imposter syndrome still rears its ugly head. However, I have learned to quiet these voices when they are too loud, but also embrace my imposter syndrome as part of who I am and who I will become.

While I am grateful to be a faculty member in a school of social work, there are several challenges I still face. I am one of a few faculty members of color in my social work program and therefore I have additional expectations placed on me, including those from students of color seeking mentoring, those from service requests both from my school and from the community, and those from the constant need to validate my expertise in teaching and research. Although these challenges are present and exhausting at times, I know that I am fortunate to be in such a privileged position. I am tasked with training the next generation of social workers and ensuring they are competent, culturally responsive, and committed to our field. I have the honor of working with communities and families to support their children's educational experiences, and my research has the potential to influence policy and practice.

Latinas experience multiple barriers when pursuing higher education, including low socioeconomic status, the effects of cultural and gender-related stereotyping, social and familial obligations, and institutional marginalization (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Furthermore, González et al. (2003) note Latina students who do not have access to social and cultural capital from elementary school continuing into high school fail to receive college planning and preparation. In other words, academic ability and potential are never real barriers for Latinas, but enduring low and high volumes of institutional neglect and abuse throughout their K-12 public schooling limits their opportunities to access higher education. Considering all of these barriers, I understand the factors that were essential in my educational journey and that contributed to my role now as an assistant professor in social work. I offer the following recommendations to support underrepresented students. First, having someone believe in your potential and invest their time in your success is critical. As a junior faculty member, I understand the time constraints that exist and the sacrifices we make to mentor students, particularly those that are underrepresented. For example, when a student asks for a letter of recommendation or to meet with them because they are struggling in their program, although I may be overwhelmed with my own work, I make the time for them. This meeting may be the reason they stay or leave the program. Second, being exposed to social work and the helping professions early in a student's education may help them if they are struggling to stay in school. As faculty, it is important to connect social work content to a student's lived experience, as they bring a unique and critical perspective that should be acknowledged and honored. This content and these classes may be the only things that are keeping them engaged in school. Third, financial support is critical, especially for low-income students, to continue on to graduate school and ultimately doctoral programs. Often, students are working part-time or full-time jobs and have children or parents they are financially supporting in addition to required internships for their programs. Finally, representation is essential. When students see faculty and doctoral students that look like them, it shows them the possibilities and that a PhD is attainable.

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Two Sides of the Same Coin: The Pros and Cons of Continuing Education

Val Livingston and Dianne Davis-Wagner

Abstract: Upon our initial entry into the field of social work, Dianne and I possessed an enormous thirst for knowledge and interventions that could help us help our clients. As emerging professionals, we wanted to know everything. Continuing education quenched that thirst for us. Through workshops and conference attendance, we were able to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Professional development became a passion for a number of years as we both embraced an understanding of what it meant to be a lifelong learner. As developing professionals, we understood the need to keep our skills sharp and remain relevant, particularly for professions requiring continuing education credits in order to maintain licenses or certifications. Despite the intended value of continuing education, some professional development opportunities may not produce the expected return on investment. Identifying, affording, and authenticating valid opportunities to enhance our professional competence is becoming more difficult.

***Keywords*:** lifelong learning, research-informed practice, professional development, continuing education effectiveness, client outcomes

I (Val) have been in the field of social work for more than thirty years as a social worker, educator, trainer, and director. During this period, my engagement in various types of continuing education has waxed and waned. Upon my initial entry into the field, I hungered for new information and attended workshops and conferences routinely as my primary means for professional development.

Professional development refers to many types of educational experiences and is generally viewed as a "formal process such as a conference, seminar or workshop; collaborative learning among members of a work team; or a course offered at a college or university" (Mizell, 2010, p. 5). Not only was professional development a source of new information for me, but it was also an opportunity to network with other professionals. By attending conferences and workshops, I was able to make new connections and identify new resources for clients. And, there was the added benefit of self-care. Conferences and workshops provided an opportunity to focus on something in addition to providing services to my clients; it was an opportunity to mitigate some of the stress I experienced on an almost daily basis. There were no phone calls to answer and no crises to resolve, just information to gain and opportunities to mingle with colleagues. It was good to get away from the office and experience an opportunity for intellectual growth. When I returned to the office, I was always invigorated and overflowing with new ideas and techniques to try with my clients.

For a number of professions that require licensure or certification, mandatory continuing education has been deemed crucial to the continued development of professional competence (Ahmed et al., 2013; Casebeer et al., 1997; Cervero & Gaines, 2014; Smith, 2003). With this mandate comes the need to determine the most effective methods for ensuring continued

professional competence (Cervero & Gaines, 2014; Mansouri & Lockyer, 2007; Marinopoulos et al., 2007; Smith, 2003). Certainly, the act of attending a conference or workshop is no guarantee of the value or quality of knowledge gained or skills enhanced. Perhaps a more objective measure should be required if we are to ensure the enhancement of professional competence as a result of continuing education. Professional development is known by many names, including staff development, in-service training, and continuing education (CE). With so many iterations of CE, it would seem important to delineate which delivery methods, tools, and techniques are most effective as we seek to assess our return on investment (ROI). During the first 25 years of my professional life, I never held a position that required licensure or certification. This allowed my engrossment with CE to be solely for my benefit, not as a requirement to maintain a job, licensure, or certification. The absence of a mandatory CE requirement allowed me to be more self-centered in the type and frequency of continuing education I pursued.

As I think back to one of my earlier experiences with continuing education, I recall the awe of being able to participate in a workshop with Harry Aponte. During the pursuit of my master's degree, I was exposed to his work in several classes. To have the experience of actually meeting Harry and the opportunity to ask questions on a more personal level was mind-blowing for me. At the age of 24, everything was new to me and it felt like I was getting a fantastic gift just to meet him. As a new MSW graduate, I would have been unable to attend Harry's workshop based on my income—but I, along with a number of other graduates, was fortunate enough to have my university pay for Harry's workshop. It was a little frightening to have Harry provide feedback on my roleplay, but it was extremely beneficial to my professional development. When Harry critiqued my roleplay, it was done in such a manner that I did not feel ill-equipped or incompetent. That evaluation allowed me to feel comfortable making a mistake and receiving corrective feedback. Harry created a true learning environment that I will always remember.

Once I entered the world of work, conference and workshop attendance was available as long as the organization that I worked with had the funds to cover the cost. The salary from my first job was $10,512, which did not leave a lot for conferences and workshops. I had to be frugal in my requests for continuing education. The first 10 years after receiving my MSW were filled with the excitement of learning new techniques to use with my clients. I worked in teenage pregnancy prevention for several years and decided that I wanted to share my knowledge with others. I began planning conferences and workshops and then became a presenter at several national conferences. This was the best of both worlds. I was able to acquire new information from other presenters and share information I had obtained working with my clients. I can honestly say that it was my attendance at earlier conferences and workshops that provided me the skills I needed to plan and execute my own workshops. My exposure to adult learning theories provided the foundation for my growth as a presenter/trainer. I learned what adults wanted from CE and how to facilitate their learning. I discovered that a lecture-only format did not work for most. I realized that adults wanted to learn something beneficial to their work and needed to be engaged for learning to occur.

As the clinical coordinator for an outpatient drug treatment program, I had the opportunity to attend a three-day training at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic. I had read and heard so much about the clinic that I approached my agency director with the idea that attendance at the training would enhance my clinical skills and could lead to better client outcomes. The agency

director agreed with my assessment and spent several hundred dollars to ensure my attendance. There was so much information to be gained and the opportunity to witness the impact of the one-way mirror sessions and engage in roleplay scenarios was truly the pinnacle of my continuing education experience. I was so impressed with the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic that I considered participating in the externship program but eventually decided it was beyond my financial capability.

After several years of attending as many training opportunities as I could garner, I became a little jaded toward professional development. It seemed that there was very little new information and that presenters were simply taking old ideas and repackaging them with a new name. I realized that I was not acquiring new information or skills and decided that my time could be better utilized working with my clients. As time passed and my job duties became more demanding, I became more selective about the conferences and workshops that I attended. There were several years that I attended only one conference, primarily for networking purposes.

I managed several non-profits over a 25-year period and the demands on my time were excessive. Each program required a lot of grant writing, fundraising, and solicitation of donations from the various jurisdictions where my programs were located. I had to present requests in person to United Way panels and a number of city councils and/or boards of supervisors. I also coordinated site visits from different state agencies that provided funding for various components of my programs. During any month of the year, I was writing two to three grant requests simultaneously. Since none of my positions as executive director required a license or certification, there were no mandates for CE. The only trainings I attended were related to the one-day request for proposal (RFP) workshops available to anyone interested in applying for certain grants. It was during one of the RFP workshops that I discovered I had missed out on new trends as a result of my hiatus from continuing education. Several attendees mentioned terms that I was unfamiliar with and the workshop leaders used a classroom polling system to which I had not been exposed. I felt like a dinosaur. I wondered, “When did this happen?” Most everyone in attendance seemed familiar with the “new-to-me” terms and very few participants had difficulty using the classroom polling system. I was embarrassed. At that point, I realized that I needed to get back into the scheme of continuing education.

My return to CE began with attendance at a regional homeless conference, appropriate because I was the executive director of a domestic violence shelter. Homeless programs from around the country presented information on their programs, intervention models, new technologies, and success stories. This was what I wanted to hear and learn about. I needed to see foundational services infused with new ideas. It was great to see the levels of success some programs experienced with hard-to-serve populations. This conference reignited my desire to participate in continuing education opportunities. I attended the annual homeless conferences for 10 consecutive years and enjoyed each one. I learned something useful from every conference and returned to my office with renewed vigor and a greatly enhanced toolkit.

When I changed jobs and entered higher education, professional development was a requirement. As a college professor, I needed to be cognizant of the latest research, new technologies, research-informed interventions, practice and policy initiatives, and emerging conceptual frameworks. Wilkerson and Irby (1998) proffer an explanation for continuing

education requirements in higher education:

> Faculty development has a critical role to play in promoting academic excellence and innovation, and it is a tool for improving the educational vitality of our institutions through attention to the competencies needed by individual teachers and to the institutional policies required to promote academic excellence. (p. 388)

The expected return on investment for the institutions would be "improved teaching performance and better outcomes for students" (Hendricson et al., 2007, p. 1517). The expected ROI for faculty would be promotion, tenure, and pay decisions. As a tenure track professor, I was obligated to engage in continuing education, but as a social worker, my obligation was to myself as a lifelong learner.

My first conference as a tenure track professor was regional, with a cost of $405 for the three-day event. My hotel lodging was another $475, travel expenses were $125, and meals were $150, for a total of $1,155. I received 15.5 continuing education contact hours, which averaged out to $74 per contact hour. But how much did I learn? Ahmed et al. (2013) suggest it would be "an erroneous assumption to equate the number of continuing education hours with enhanced professional competence" (p. 270). I can honestly say that I enjoyed only two of the workshops and the awards luncheon. Most of the workshops I attended were not research-informed or evidence-based, but instead presented a lot of information on personal experiences. I did acquire information on the enneagram, a tool that was unfamiliar to me as my work had largely been with the genogram. The second workshop that I enjoyed was conducted by a therapist couple on the recovery path from a traumatic brain injury. It was very interesting to hear the process of recovery from someone in the helping profession and the many missed opportunities by paid professionals to help this couple move from trauma to well-being. This couple's experience supported the position that clients may need to get more than one professional opinion and that someone has to advocate for the appropriate level of services to ensure positive client outcomes. Prior to registering for this conference, I spoke with several university colleagues to determine if any were planning to attend. Three of four indicated that they were not planning to attend the conference because there was nothing interesting being presented. As a fairly new faculty member, I did not have the luxury of non-attendance, but I was excited to attend initially. Now, as I consider the cost and the knowledge gained from the various workshop presentations, I believe the cost did not produce the desired return on investment.

As I reflected on my experience with the regional conference, I wondered how other attendees evaluated their continuing education experiences. I stumbled across a dated research article regarding a cost-benefit analysis for continuing education. Casebeer et al.'s (1997) article indicates that, at the time of publication, there was "little evidence of measurement of return on investment for those participating in CE" (p. 225). Casebeer et al. advise that providers historically tended to focus "evaluation efforts on the quality of the speakers, perceptions of enhanced professional effectiveness, and overall participant satisfaction, as well as some testing of knowledge, attitudes, and skills" (p. 225). While this article addresses continuing *medical* education and is more than 20 years old, it seems clear that these types of evaluations continue to this day.

My most recent conference and workshop attendance concluded with a written evaluation of the workshops and the overall conference. My evaluation of the workshops appeared to mirror what was reported in 1997. Participant opinions about the speakers, satisfaction with the workshop, and perceptions of enhanced effectiveness are subjective measures that have not been shown to enhance client outcomes (Liao & Hsu, 2019). From a cost-benefit analysis perspective, Casebeer et al. (1997) indicated that "the true cost of an activity is the value of the alternative endeavors that might have been undertaken with the same resources" (p. 226). In other words, is there a true increase in professional competence as a result of continuing education participation? Is my knowledge, skill, or ability greater after continuing education or unchanged? More importantly, how does one measure the change in a participant's skill level and whether that change positively impacts client outcomes? The literature has provided mixed reviews on the effectiveness of continuing education with regard to client/patient outcomes (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2013; Cervero & Gaines, 2014; Hendricson et al., 2007; Liao & Hsu, 2019; Mansouri & Lockyer, 2007; Smith, 2003).

I attended a second three-day conference at a cost of $125. The fee was certainly better than my previously mentioned conference. Other than the opening remarks and a lunch panel discussion, the workshops were unremarkable, as 90 percent of the presenters read their papers about current social problems but provided no information about impactful interventions. A three-day presentation on problems that most of us in the helping profession are keenly aware of provides little opportunity for professional growth. This lecture format was not an effective delivery method for me. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2003) Standards for Continuing Professional Education, professional development methodologies must be "diverse and encourage the active participation of the learner in the educational process" (p. 17). Marinopoulos et al. (2007) conducted a systematic review of the literature on the effectiveness of continuing education and reported that "multimedia is more effective than single media; multiple exposures are more effective than a single exposure; interactive techniques are more effective than didactic techniques; and simulation methods are effective for improving psychomotor and procedural skills" (p. 57). If our professional goal is to engage in lifelong learning, the conferences and workshops we attend should facilitate more opportunities for learning rather than simply listening. I was, of course, extremely disappointed that I had committed to three days of training that provided little opportunity for growth. The one positive from this conference experience involved meeting the professional development requirement for tenure based solely on my attendance. I remember thinking that it would be nice if I could learn something new and useful for my position while also meeting tenure requirements.

If we consider any of the variations on adult learning theory, we find that adult learners are generally more focused about what they want to learn. Adult learners want to be able to solve problems they currently face, learn more about what they can do about an issue/problem, and/or develop mastery in a particular task or skill. The NASW (2003) Standards for Continuing Professional Education indicates that providers "should be able to demonstrate that the format and methods selected for continuing education were influenced by contemporary adult learning theory…" (pp. 16-17). I would also advise conference proposal reviewers to consider the true value and impact of research with delimited sample sizes as a conference presentation. New techniques and interventions with empirical data to support them would be more valuable for me than a few individuals' opinions and/or experiences. While required for certain professions, CE

can be costly and on occasion may produce very little in terms of practice or academic value. With that premise, participants in continuing education programs need more assurances they are receiving value commensurate with their time and fund expenditure.

CE Evaluation Models

The literature abounds with varied continuing education evaluation models. Some of the models elicit more subjective assessments, while others would seek and even require empirical data to support the effectiveness of CE. I reviewed three CE evaluation models that may provide a foundation for those providers interested in ensuring the value of their offerings. Since CE offerings can be pricey, I believe it prudent that providers exercise diligence in evaluating the effectiveness of these professional development opportunities.

Model I

A report produced by The Ohio State University Center on Education and Training for Employment offers four levels of evaluation (Satisfaction, Learning, Behavior, Evaluation) to consider when assessing CE opportunities (Mullins et al., 2010). This framework is an important component of the evaluation process for three reasons:

> 1) It can provide information on the effectiveness of specific professional development offerings, 2) it can help professional development facilitators improve their offerings, and 3) it can help inform professional development consumers in selecting appropriate trainings to improve their program's performance. (Mullins et al., 2010)

1. **Satisfaction**—Evaluation of participants' initial reaction to professional development activity.

I understand how a participant's reaction to the workshop presenter and the materials utilized can affect learning. If the workshop leader is not engaging and does not present the information in an interesting manner, attendees may tune out and fail to benefit from the training. While this level of evaluation is very subjective, participants must be open to what the presenter is providing in order to benefit from the information. Donnelly and Behan (n.d.) indicate that workshop leaders must get the attention of participants "in the first five minutes of the workshop… [or] you've lost them for the rest of the day" (p. 12).

2. **Learning**—Evaluation of the knowledge and skills that participants acquire through professional development.

Smith (2003) conducted a research study for the National Council on State Boards of Nursing to assess the value of continuing education mandates for nurses. Study results were mixed, but a majority of the nurses reported learning more from work experience, initial professional education, and mentors than participating in continuing education. The majority of the RNs, LPNs, and LVNs also reported that CE offerings were too expensive.

Additionally, a 2015 study regarding the development of more effective continuing education

and training identified several key elements, including "a pattern of workers being active learners, motivated mostly by personal goals for employability and advancement and less by certification requirements" (Billett et al., 2015, p. 27).

Donnelly and Behan (n.d.) also reported that CE "participants seek knowledge that goes beyond the nature of social problems; they seek solutions" (p. 6).

3. **Behavior**—Evaluation of participants' application of knowledge and skills learned and acquired through professional development.

I propose that learning new information is only part of the anticipated gain for continuing education. The knowledge we acquire should inform our practice behavior. If our behavior does not change as a result of new information, what is the benefit of continuing education? The real concern for me is whether or not that behavioral change also enhances client or patient outcomes.

4. **Evaluation**—Evaluation of the effect that professional development has had on participant and program performance.

The Ohio State model links learning, behavior change, and program outcomes as intentional targets for continuing education. I believe that an evaluation of program performance should be influenced by improvements in patient/client/student outcomes that ultimately function as indicators of program performance.

Model II

NASW (2003) asserts that CE program evaluation is essential and offers two distinct but related measures for CE managers and administrators. These measures include the following:

a. Assessment of the event based on content, format, methodology, instruction, and facilities.

b. Assessment of knowledge acquired by participants based on the following:

    1. Demonstration of targeted skill

    2. An oral or written test

    3. A project or report

    4. A self-assessment checklist

    5. Another instrument designed to collect data on changes in participant knowledge or performance attributed to the educational experience. (p.18)

The second measure of the NASW (2003) evaluation does extend beyond the parameters of a

purely subjective assessment. The demonstration of a "targeted skill" or "another instrument designed to collect data on changes in participant knowledge or performance attributed to the educational experience" could be representative of a change in behavior as well as enhanced practice outcomes (NASW, 2003, p. 18).

As the training coordinator for a local department of human services, I attended a four-day Train the Trainer workshop to become a Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) trainer for my agency. The cost of the training was well over $2,000, but it came highly recommended. This training allowed me to train my agency's direct service staff on effective non-violent crisis intervention techniques in order to meet their annual recertification requirements. The four-day training involved lecture presentations, discussions, demonstrations of techniques, and a considerable amount of physical activity. Attendees were advised in advance to dress casually due to the physical nature of the training. After each physical technique was demonstrated by workshop leaders, we were required to practice the technique and demonstrate mastery. At the end of each training day, I went home physically exhausted. My muscles ached and the only thing that helped was a warm bath and sleep. By the third day, neither the warm bath nor sleep alleviated the muscle aches. One of our assignments required us to develop a presentation connecting theory to crisis intervention practice and then present this to the entire class. Our presentations were rated. At the conclusion of the four-day training, the final evaluation included a demonstration of the physical techniques and a written exam indicating an understanding of the theoretical base for the training and the practice application. I acquired an enormous amount of information and useful crisis intervention techniques. This training reflected elements of the second level of NASW's (2003) CE evaluation model via the *written test*, a *project or report*, and *demonstration of a targeted skill*.

Model III

The New World Kirkpatrick Model (NWKM) identified four levels of evaluation for use in determining the effectiveness of educational programs:

a. L1 involved the trainee's Reaction to the training

b. L2 involved the trainee's Learning

c. L3 involved the trainee's Behavior, and

d. L4 involved Results or outcomes (Kirkpatrick Partners, n.d.)

Liao and Hsu (2019) conducted an evaluation of a continuing medical education program using the NWKM to assess the impact of CE on trainee performance and outcomes. L1 and L2 were more subjective and the researchers determined that "L1 (reaction) and L2 (learning) evaluation cannot necessarily predict trainees' performance and attitude changes, how trainees apply the learning to problem solving at work, or what influences the training program might bring to the institute" (Liao & Hsu, 2019, p. 268). The researchers concluded that only changes in behavior (L3) could directly predict positive results (L4). These findings suggest that behavioral changes as a result of CE are likely to result in positive client outcomes, unlike participant satisfaction or

learning alone. From a direct service perspective, this should be the desired outcome.

There are distinct similarities between The Ohio State University's framework and the NWKM. Elements of NASW's second evaluation measure are reflective of the behavior change and results identified in the NWKM. It would seem prudent for CE program managers and administrators to utilize the four levels of evaluation, to the degree possible, when developing and evaluating CE opportunities and assessing the impact of CE on patient/client outcomes. It is important to "emphasize learning that is applied and related to skill development or real-world application and practice" and to "support theory and practice by citing credible empirical research" (Donnelly & Behan, n.d., p. 6).

The Diversity of Professional Development Methodologies

Certainly, there are other means of continuing education, such as taking classes at local colleges and universities. There are also online trainings, occasionally at affordable rates. I found several online trainings for social workers starting at $39 and for healthcare professionals starting at $37. These rates were so low that I questioned their authenticity. The value and legitimacy of these trainings is unknown at this time. For those of us who are not solitary learners, online classes may provide limited opportunities for growth. For me, there is something transformative about the opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback that aids in my learning. These online trainings are taken at one's own pace and require the passage of an exam to obtain CEU credits. Alexander (2012) reports awareness that some companies simply allow students to pay their fee and then print their continuing education certificate. In such cases, reading the material is based on the honor system. As a nurse educator, Alexander (2012) believes in the value of continuing education but asserts that it is "extremely important to ensure that it is appropriately instituted, that companies are not using state requirements to make money without providing a quality service, and that participants use the opportunity to fill the gaps in their knowledge" (p. 3). Though I have been disappointed with my most recent attempts with professional development via conferences and workshops, I do believe in the value of continuing education. I do anticipate attending that one special conference or workshop that will reignite that flame.

In discussing my two conference experiences with Dianne, a university colleague, I was advised that she must obtain 60 continuing education hours over a three-year period in order to maintain her certification. Imagine paying roughly $74 an hour for 60 hours of continuing education for a total of $4,440! Dianne is a social worker and an assistant professor. Like me, she does not earn a six-figure income. Dianne and I first met at the Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work where we were pursuing masters' degrees in social work. She was a semester ahead of me and we encountered each other infrequently. Thirteen years later, we met again in the pursuit of doctorates in social work. We were the first two graduates of the social work PhD program at Norfolk State University. Over the years, our paths rarely crossed as she established her own business providing EAP services and I worked in the non-profit arena. Eighteen years later, we met again, but this time as new social work faculty at an HBCU. This time, our interactions were more frequent since we were both full-time faculty. In response to tenure requirements, we would meet frequently to discuss plans for publishing, research, professional development, and conference presentations. Our plans for professional development led to many discussions on the types of conferences we wanted to attend. As we reviewed different conferences, we calculated

which would produce the biggest return. We considered the cost of conferences inclusive of registration, lodging, transportation, and meal expenses. Based on our past professional development experiences, we decided to share our reflections about continuing education via this treatise. Dianne's past and current involvement with continuing education differ from my position since she has been obligated to engage in mandatory CE requirements for a considerable time. Her experiences reflect the other side of continuing education.

The Other Side of the Coin

To begin with, I (Dianne) consider myself a lifelong learner always in pursuit of learning new ideas, techniques, emerging conceptual frameworks, whatever the case may be. If there is something I need to learn or if I have an interest in enhancing my skill set personally or professionally, I am all in. My thirst for lifelong learning is part of my DNA and desire to constantly renew my mind to enrich my life and those around me.

> Lifelong learning relates to a set of values and principles regarding the role of ongoing acquisition, integration, and application of new knowledge throughout one's lifetime, and also includes the practices and structures that position professionals to be relevant, effective, and engaged in their careers. (Nissen et al., 2014, p. 386)

Nissen et al. (2014) definition of lifelong learning embraces my philosophy and response to the need to engage in continuing education and lifelong learning. Applying this definition to my early years in social work practice, the approach nearly thirty years ago was to integrate lifelong learning into what was then known as "practice wisdom." In fact, I can recall many of the well-known "gurus of social work" conducting in-service trainings for my agency and thus imparting valuable practice wisdom. During that time, in-service was considered the model for enhancing social workers' knowledge and skills. The agencies bore the cost of the training sessions and I came away with a feeling of being nourished by those practitioners whom I had often read about in social work journals and textbooks.

As my professional life developed and I began operating my own EAP business, the "in-service training model" evolved into what I describe as a "heavily mandated continuing education model" in response to increasing requirements for credentialing. Gianino et al. (2016) reported that the shift towards a concentrated continuing education focus occurred around the mid-twentieth century as a result of social work professionalization with emphasis on social work licensure. This new focus created a market for mandated continuing education credits. It also created, from my social work perspective, a growing emphasis on the need for social workers to obtain certifications in specialty practice arenas. For example, in my practice domain of employee assistance counseling, I am required to be a certified employee assistance professional (CEAP). And, because I sometimes teach human services courses, I was encouraged to become a human services-board certified professional (HS-BCP), a certification that I did obtain. Now, as a social work educator, I am required to engage in professional development seminars and workshops annually to enhance my competence as an assistant professor. Although many of the continuing education/professional development content requirements overlap, I often feel I am on the certifications "treadmill," trying to balance time and resources to participate in the required number of workshops and/or seminars to maintain

my practice credentials.

The challenge of satisfying the various credentialing requirements is one issue—the other "elephant in the room" is the cost. Some 20 or more years ago, the cost for attending a day-long continuing education workshop ranged from $59–$100, which my agency paid if funding was available (if not, I would pay out of pocket). Today, this practice has changed to me having to finance all of my continuing education/professional development costs, which may range from $500–$1,000 or more to obtain a total of 60 continuing education credits for renewal of my certifications. Conversations with a number of my colleagues who also consider themselves lifelong learners (and who would like to maintain their credentials) have ended with some feeling almost forced to relinquish their license or certifications due to the extraordinary registration fees for conferences and workshops. This was particularly evident with retirees. A review of the literature examining social workers' participation and engagement in continuing education activities identified the following CE participation barriers: limited funds due to low pay and limited time due to work demands (Cabiati, 2017; Gianino et al., 2016).

As the owner of a small employee assistance business, I always attempted to ensure that my employees remained up to date with regard to "best practices" in employee assistance counseling and training services. To that end, I covered the expenses for a three-day Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) training for my entire EAP staff. CISM training is a type of crisis intervention designed to provide support for those who have experienced traumatic events. The training included a number of small group activities, case studies, roleplays, and quizzes that assessed knowledge gained. This training was highly effective, as it empowered my staff with valuable tools and the step-by-step process for conducting critical incident stress management debriefings. The knowledge and skills acquired were long-lasting and continue to be utilized today. As a CE participant, I viewed this training as exceptional, affordable, and value-added. This refers to the value that is added at each stage of production.

It appears that the increasing demand for continuing education credits to satisfy licensure and/or certification requirements for social workers has created an opportunity for profit-making entities to monetize professional development by offering easy access to online CEU credits with a hefty price tag. These providers may or may not be legitimate or sanctioned by social work professional associations. Kurzman's (2016) review of the state of continuing education in social work noted the entrance of questionable providers focused on generating revenue by mass-producing CEU certificates. Personally, this poses a challenge and is something that really needs to be addressed because I have found that some of these workshops/seminars are substandard, providing limited or no value-added knowledge to my social work practice skills. Findings from a statewide qualitative study on social work continuing education in Massachusetts revealed social workers' dissatisfaction with the inferior quality of course offerings, incompetent workshop presenters, high cost, and lack of quality control (Gianino et al., 2016). There needs to be some type of vetting of these CEU providers and courses—I don't have hundreds of dollars to waste. Online course offerings are a viable option, but only if they meet NASW standards and Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) core competencies.

A noticeable gap in the continuing education market is the limited offerings of macro content. There are very few, if any, continuing education courses embracing macro social work practice

such as agency administration, research, policy, and community organization, to name a few. Macro practitioners such as myself also need affordable professional development and continuing education courses to stay current in this area of practice. This is an area where far too little attention has been paid with regard to advancing social work practice. The continuing education market appears to be laser-focused on providing clinical content areas in response to the mandated clinical licensure requirements. What is quite evident from my experiences and review of the literature is the absence of a regulatory clearinghouse, which could not only regulate the quality of social work continuing education offerings but also evaluate their effectiveness on the outcomes of social work practice (Gianino et al., 2016; Kurzman, 2016; Schachter, 2016). This process could ensure rigorous course requirements and would hopefully be less costly to practitioners and other lifelong learners. As one of those lifelong learners, I would welcome the opportunity to participate in legitimate, affordable professional development opportunities that permit me to maintain my credentials and enhance my social work practice knowledge and skills.

Is CE Effective?

As Dianne and I reviewed the literature on the effectiveness of continuing education, there appeared to be an obvious gap regarding the effectiveness of continuing education for social workers. There was, however, an abundance of research on the impact of continuing education for medical professionals. Since the 1960s, a plethora of research studies have been conducted for the purpose of understanding the link between continuing medical education (CME), physician performance, and patient health outcomes. There appears to be an enhanced focus for CME outcomes to go beyond increasing knowledge and skills to improving physician competence and performance in practice, ultimately leading to better patient health. I found this information on CME effectiveness fascinating, as it led me back to the Flexner Report of 1910 (Flexner, 2002), the standardization of medical training for the enhancement of patient outcomes.

Cervero and Gaines (2014) reviewed 31 studies conducted between 1977 and 2002 to delineate the link between CME and patient outcomes. The researchers arrived at the following conclusions:

a) CME does improve physician performance and patient health outcomes;

b) CME has a more reliably positive impact on physician performance than on patient health outcomes; and

c) CME leads to greater improvement in physician performance and patient health if it is more interactive, uses more methods, involves multiple exposures, is longer, and is focused on outcomes that are considered important by physicians. (p. 14)

Mansouri and Lockyer (2007) examined 31 studies involving 61 CME interventions and reported that the effect of CME on physician knowledge, physician performance, and patient outcome was small to moderate. The researchers also discovered that the “type of interventions [passive, active, or mixed], types and number of participants, the length of the intervention, and

holding multiple sessions over time were all found to mediate the effects of CME on its outcomes" (p. 12).

Marinopoulos et al. (2007) examined 136 articles and nine systematic reviews to determine the effectiveness of CME. The researchers concluded that "the literature overall supported the concept that CME was effective, at least to some degree, in achieving and maintaining the objectives studied, including knowledge…attitudes…skills…practice behavior…and clinical practice outcomes" (p. v).

Gianino et al. (2016) reported that there is a "lack of research on the effectiveness of different modes of CE, little understanding of how CE impacts social work outcomes over time, and uncertainty whether participation in CE actually achieves its goal of enhancing practice outcomes" (p. 343). Clearly, empirical data is needed to assess the true value of CE for social workers.

Recommendations for Continuing Education Programs

Available literature suggests that continuing education is important and does produce positive outcomes for participants and some patients/clients. My experience with several professional development workshops has shown me that CE can have a positive impact on professional competence. I believe the delivery method, tools, frequency, and techniques utilized have an impact on learning, behavior changes, and client outcomes. There is an ongoing need for continuing education if professionals are to remain cognizant of emerging trends, new iterations on theory, policy initiatives, and treatment options. "Best practices" continues to be a very popular buzz phrase in the practice arena and if we as helping professionals are to remain relevant, we need to absorb new information as it becomes available. We are obligated to provide the highest level of services humanly possible. Thus, the need for continuing education remains legitimate; the issue may occasionally be the quality of the training received in addition to the cost. The quality of the training provided and whether that training consistently produces positive client/patient outcomes presents as an issue for further research, especially in the field of social work.

As CE participants, Dianne and I would recommend that managers and administrators who oversee continuing education programs consider evaluating the effectiveness of their CE programs using the New World Kirkpatrick Model that includes participant reaction, participant learning, participant behavior, and results (outcomes). We see a need to develop objective measures for evaluating the impact of continuing education on patient/client outcomes and not rely solely on paper and pen evaluations conducted at the time of the training. We agree that the impact of continuing education should be long-term and should produce positive practice outcomes rather than just satisfy licensure, certification, or tenure requirements. As social work professionals, my colleague and I would be willing to pay more for a training that positively enhances our professional competence by producing positive outcomes for our various client populations.

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"When's the Lunch Break?": Group Interactions and Experiential Learning

Laura MacLeod

Abstract: When teaching continuing education, I promise students they will walk away with practical skills and tools. This reflection shows the reader how I keep my promise. Using what's right there in the classroom, I model, explain, and implement skills. This real-life example from one of my workshops demonstrates how and why my method is effective, making a strong case for experiential learning and practical application.

***Keywords*:** experiential learning, practical application, amplification, subtle message, risk-taking, gut instinct

When teaching continuing education, I focus on practical application and experiential learning. Skills and tools are modeled, practiced, and given a context that demonstrates how and why they are useful. Real-life examples are an excellent resource and I often find them right there in the classroom. In this reflection, I share one of those real-life examples. A group interaction provided a beautiful opportunity to teach and model a skill.

It's Saturday morning and I'm leading a continuing education workshop called "You're in Charge! How to Effectively Lead Meetings." The group—10 executive-level professionals—have gathered to increase and hone their team leadership skills. Today's work targets meetings: agenda, purpose, getting buy-in, time management. These professionals work in both nonprofit and for-profit organizations where meetings are a necessary piece of the routine and path to productivity for all.

We are sitting around a table and I begin with a short intro and explanation of the agenda and plans for the day. We'll be working together from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., so we'll need to schedule lunch. When do we take the break and how long should the break be? The group is leaning toward a later lunch—around 1:00 p.m.—and I agree. We can get the bulk of the work done early and then break. I suggest,

> Let's play it by ear—this way, if you're starving or need an earlier break, we can adjust.

Heads nod and we move on to how long lunch break should be. "Jane" asks,

> If we take half an hour for lunch, can we leave early?

This creates a stir; many are excited by the possibility of an early release. "Sure," I say. Most of the group begins chatting and making plans:

> *This is great—I can get some errands done.... I can beat the traffic going home.... Where should we eat? Need a place that is quick.*

I scan the group and prepare to wrap this up and move to the work. As I turn to my left I see "Joe"—sitting with his arms crossed, brows furrowed and a huge frown on his face. I say to the group:

> Joe's not on board with this.

They all turn to look at Joe. He says,

> Well, I just don't like to be rushed.

The group responds immediately,

> *Oh, okay—we can go an hour. That's fine. No problem. We didn't know.*

I suggest we shoot for 45 minutes. If everyone is back, we get started. If not, we wait the 15 minutes and start promptly after an hour. This is met with approval and we get started on the work.

Fast forward to post-lunch break. (We stick to the 1:00 p.m. time and take the full hour.) At this point we are talking about group roles and dynamics. What about negative or disengaged members? It occurs to me that Joe was exactly that this morning, so I take the opportunity to offer a real-life example.

I ask,

> Remember what happened this morning when we talked about how long the lunch break should be?

Group members nod, some saying,

> *Yes, uh-huh.*

They're not quite sure where I'm going. I recap—the group was happily chatting about a shorter lunch break and Joe was silent and frowning. Negative and disengaged group member. They say:

> *We didn't know Joe was upset.*

Joe says (to me),

> I made a face and I hoped you would see it.

Aha! I did see it and I shared with the group:

> Joe's not on board.

The skill I used—which I now teach—is called Amplify a Subtle Message. When a group

member's behavior is incongruous, or doesn't fit with the rest of the group (Joe's frown when all are happy), *and* the group doesn't notice, it is the leader's job to alert group members. To literally "amplify" the silent member's message. In this example, Joe was clearly sending a message that he wanted/needed me to notice and share with the group (Middleman & Wood, 1990).

As we discuss this, group members share their thoughts on how I handled the situation. Jane starts,

> I was surprised you did that. You called him out.

But then, from the other side, "Scott" says,

> No, she didn't. Well, actually, she did call him out, but it was okay. We had a rapport and so we were fine with it.

We talk more about the negative connotations of "calling out": unwanted spotlight, upsetting, and shaming. Group leaders often assume that the silent person doesn't want to be noticed. But as we so clearly saw with Joe—sometimes people actually *want* to be noticed.

The group takes this in and follows up with other possible scenarios:

> *What if Joe didn't want to be noticed?*

Well, then he could just say, "No, I'm fine," or shake his head and wave me off. I would acknowledge that, and we would move on. No spotlight, no interrogation.

> *What if we weren't kind to Joe when you told us he wasn't on board? What if we didn't care what he had to say?*

Well, then I would need to use another set of skills to manage the conflict and get the lunch break set so we could get to the work. The point is—I saw Joe and needed to amplify his message. I can't predict the response and I can't shy away from sharing the message because of fear for what might happen. I have to take the risk and amplify the message.

Now I ask,

> What would have happened if I didn't amplify Joe's message?

In other words, what if I had seen his face but felt uncomfortable calling him out? Joe says,

> I would have lost confidence in you and I probably would have checked out for the session.

The group takes this in and adds,

> *We would never have known Joe was unhappy.*

YES. Doing nothing is also a risk—lose Joe, deprive the group of the opportunity to hear and include Joe.

Group members now begin to connect the skill to their specific experience with team meetings. Scott shares,

> My staff is pretty unified, but "Debbie" can be resistant.

What does "resistant" look like?

> She's quiet, detached, doesn't weigh in when I ask for feedback and we make decisions.

The group sits with this. Joe breaks the silence:

> So, kind of like me this morning.

Aha! The conversation deepens as participants see Debbie's behavior in a new light.

> *Maybe she doesn't agree but can't go against her co-workers. She's the only one—not easy to speak up.*

Scott reflects,

> Never saw it this way. I wrote Debbie off as negative. Didn't want her attitude to impact the team, so I ignored her.

This resonates with many; they have seen their own "negative Debbie" and have made similar conclusions:

> *What if... Maybe Debbie needed... Team didn't see... Could I call her out like you did with Joe?*

All this—and more—was shared as we collectively brainstormed to help Scott amplify Debbie's message. Not only did members help Scott, they connected the specifics to their own unique situations and found ways to apply the skill to their team meetings.

I love this story. It is a real-life example of the skill Amplify a Subtle Message and demonstrates beautifully where and how the skill is effective. This is invaluable for continuing education students. They want and need practical application. Every time I tell this story, I can actually see the light going on, the "aha" moment, the "now I see" look on their faces. The story is also an excellent example of experiential learning—taking what is right there in the room and using it as a teaching tool. Totally practical and relatable; students were there in the moment. The skill was modeled, as was direct confrontation, risk-taking, and active investment in both individual and group. No better way to learn and retain long-term.

Learning is also enriched by the group's cohesion and investment. In this example, students strengthened their connection with Joe and each other when Joe's message was amplified and later when we revisited and discussed. Diverse views on what happened, how I handled it, how they reacted, "What if…." All this deepened the discussion and provided a level of expertise beyond mine as the instructor. Group members individually and collectively became a valuable resource as they challenged, responded, and shared their unique experience.

I enjoy teaching this way and find that it keeps me on my toes (never a dull moment!), keeps my skills fresh, and increases my confidence in what I am teaching. Every time I trust my instincts and take the risk to "call out" and name what I see, I model direct and authentic engagement. This raw use of self and willingness to confront whatever is there in the room goes a long way in demonstrating my investment in the group and commitment to all members. Amplify the message—however subtle it may be—and welcome the authentic response from the group. Not easy, but always worth the risk.

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The Promotion of Lifelong Learning: A Study Abroad Program for Practitioners

Misty G. Smith and Melody A. Loya

Abstract: For the social work profession, continuing education (CE) expectations serve to stimulate the greater purpose of professional growth, transformation, and lifelong learning. Currently, CE is delivered in a variety of formats—from paper-based methods with little to no interaction in the learning process to conferences and workshops with more face-to-face participation. An overview of the profession's expectations of continuing education, the practice of lifelong learning, and the integration of experiential learning are discussed. Our narratives explore a unique approach to continuing education from the leader, as well as one participant's personal reflections on being immersed in a transformative CE learning experience in Costa Rica.

***Keywords*:** continuing education, lifelong learning, social work licensing, transformative learning, values and ethics, experiential learning, study abroad

Introduction

The importance of continuing education (CE) has long been emphasized within the social work profession. Knowledge changes, and this understanding should lead social workers and other licensed professionals to actively engage in ongoing learning. As of January 2015, all 50 states require social workers to earn continuing education units (CEUs) in order to meet licensing requirements (Kurzman, 2016). These requirements range from a low of nine hours per year in Tennessee (Tennessee Department of Health, n.d.) to a high of 48 hours across two years in Arkansas (Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board, n.d.). States require varying hours of continuing education depending upon the level of licensure. Each state sets its own requirements for licensure and the continuing education required for renewal, but it is important to reiterate that all states have *some* level of licensure and continuing education requirements.

How can continuing education be offered in a way that allows for personal and professional growth and transformation while also enhancing practice knowledge and/or skills? Increasingly, CE can be earned via online modules, but are also available through conferences, workshops, and paper-based methods such as reading and responding to articles. In this paper, we (Misty and Melody) outline an approach to continuing education that encourages true involvement and may lead to transformation. We will lay some groundwork from the literature, outline the program, and share personal narratives from the leader (Melody) and one participant (Misty).

Expectations of the Social Work Profession

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015), in its latest version of the *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS), addresses lifelong learning. In the definition of Competency 1, "Demonstrate Professional and Ethical Behavior," is this statement: "Social

workers recognize the importance of life-long learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective" (p. 7). This commitment to lifelong learning was also present in previous iterations of the EPAS. Social workers have a sacred responsibility to remain abreast of changes in knowledge, but also to continue on the quest to being self-reflective practitioners. One of the behaviors outlined under Competency 1 is to "use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations" (p. 7). The idea that one can graduate "competent" should not imply that growth is over once a diploma is received. In fact, personal and professional growth is only just beginning.

NASW Code of Ethics and Values of the Profession

The preamble to the NASW (2017b) Code of Ethics states:

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. (para. 1)

The preamble also outlines the core values of the profession, which include service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

Section 1.0.4 outlines the need for social workers to strive for competence. Other sections of the NASW Code of Ethics (2017a) that were particularly relevant to the CE opportunity described in this paper are outlined under Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity. We would argue that traditional workshop-based CE courses, whether face-to-face or online, may not be the ideal pedagogy to encourage true growth and deep learning. Experiential learning is highlighted in social work programs, focusing on field education (i.e., hands-on learning) as the signature pedagogy. Furthermore, the Code states:

> Social work administrators and supervisors should take reasonable steps to provide or arrange for continuing education and staff development for all staff for whom they are responsible. Continuing education and staff development should address current knowledge and emerging developments related to social work practice and ethics. (Section 3.08)

Being a licensed social worker, I (Misty) feel that I have been trusted with a very important responsibility to all individuals who cross my path in the communities where social workers practice. We work with people who are often at their most vulnerable point in life, and they are trusting us to be of help, support, or guidance in this difficult season. Within these encounters, it is imperative that I am prepared and that I have not relied on my education alone to be an effective practitioner. The pursuit of learning and preparation is much broader than formalized education; it is a commitment to never become complacent or view myself as the "most experienced professional" or "perfect," and to always be humble in the realization that continual learning is necessary to be able to address the challenges that evolve in our communities. In

addition to being a licensed social worker, I have also been trusted with a very important responsibility as a social work educator in preparing future social workers for their profession. In my role, it is important that I am clear about expectations of social workers, both ethically and legally, but it is also just as important that social work students see me as a model of a social worker, living out those responsibilities. I believe students need to see me as a learner, as well—a *professional* that is still learning, even from them. If I want my students to be self-reflective practitioners and continually evolve their practice, then I am responsible for not only teaching this value but demonstrating this value. Because upon graduation, they, too, will also be trusted with a significant responsibility in our communities.

Continuing Education versus Lifelong Learning

The changing landscape of the social work profession and the need for more social workers make competent, self-sufficient, and self-reflective practitioners imperative. Social work practice requires engagement with a diverse clientele and the ability to work in partnership with multidisciplinary professionals. To maintain pace with today's rapidly changing context, knowledge must be continually refreshed and advanced throughout a practitioner's career. Thus, the notion of practicing lifelong learning becomes essential to the progression and evolution of the profession (Nissen et al., 2014).

Today, CE is being provided in diverse delivery modes by colleges, agencies, professional organizations, and private entities (Gianino et al., 2016). This diversity has created discourse within the profession on the quality and effectiveness of CE delivery. As a result, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) funded a major research effort, *The Missing Link Project* (Ruth et al., 2014), to study the social work CE system in the United States over a three-year period. Although findings from stakeholders on the overall quality and effectiveness were generally positive, all stakeholder groups strongly agreed that CE content tends to align with popular trends and the CE instructor's interest area rather than needed content. Social justice issues, social work profession-specific content, workplace safety, and macro social work topics were noted as missing among CE offerings. In the comparison among the quality and effectiveness of CE providers, positive views were strongly shared regarding traditional CE providers such as schools of social work, social work professional organizations, and conferences. CE providers receiving the lowest ratings included home-based providers, mail-based providers, non-social work organizations, for-profit companies, online or web-based courses, and employers. To address CE effectiveness, participants suggested inclusion of the assessment of learning but also the application of learning in their social work practice settings (Ruth et al., 2014). ASWB has established an Approved Continuing Education (ACE) Program to provide consistency to CE in social work by outlining quality-based criteria for CE approval. Among the regulatory jurisdictions, only 39 U.S. states currently accept ACE-approved CE hours (Kurzman, 2016).

Because CE requirements today are primarily driven by licensure mandates of individual states and territories, standardization of CE criteria is difficult (Kurzman, 2016); consequently, the burden of assessing for the quality of CE offerings lies with the individual practitioner (Gianino et al., 2016). Social work education has made an intentional shift to competency-based learning

focused on outcomes, pointing toward the need for further discussion and research regarding competency-based outcomes for CE.

From the perspective of the first author (Misty), continuing education requirements provide an expectation for the ongoing practice of learning, but I think most social workers would agree that learning takes place every day. My experience with receiving continuing education has been varied over my career. I have been a social work practitioner in settings where continuing education was infused within the culture of the agency, but I have also been in settings where I was the only social worker and thus was required to perform continuing education on my own time external to the agency. I have completed continuing education online as well as through attendance at workshops and conferences. Sometimes, the offerings were relevant topics to my social work practice and other times they were not so relevant. The CE experiences that I valued the most were the face-to-face ones where I could engage in topics that I could actually apply to my work with clients in practice. I love to leave CEs with additional tools for my expanding toolbox. The CE requirements for social work licensure in my state of residence indicate completion of 30 hours every two years (including six hours of ethics). Although this expectation serves as a positive reminder to remain current, as a CE participant, much more than 15 hours per year of learning is necessary to perform as an effective social worker in the ever-changing contexts of our profession. Owning an outlook of intentionality, responsibility, and purposefulness for my learning has become a must in my personal life and career.

My (Melody's) understanding of lifelong learning has evolved in the years I have spent in academia. Throughout my career as a licensed social worker, I have always been diligent about accumulating continuing education hours for renewal. Often, however, the focus became what CEUs were available and how the timing fit into my schedule, versus the topic or focus of the training. I also believe that continuing education, in and of itself, is not enough to change behaviors. For example, many licensing boards may mandate continuing education on ethics. However, having presented ethics workshops for a number of years (and always trying to move content beyond the very dry rules and regulations of state laws and licensing rules), I have experienced more than a few practitioners attempting to circumvent the system: "I have to leave early; may I have my certificate now?" Or, perhaps even worse, colleagues attempting to pick up certificates for others who left early from the workshop. One must ask if continuing education in and of itself is sufficient. I believe that we should focus more on the concept of lifelong learning, which should include both personal and professional growth.

Transformation and Experiential Learning

Ideally, continuing education provides the opportunity to transform and grow, which best occurs through experiential learning. It has long been acknowledged that experiential learning and social work education fit well together. Human interaction is a necessary component of building social work skills; however, the format of many continuing education opportunities includes an instructor presenting information. Participants may or may not have the opportunity to practice new skills, engage in discussion, or apply their learning. Online opportunities for CE abound, lending flexibility to when CEUs can be earned. This allows for rural social professionals to have a greater level of access to continuing education. However, these online workshops do not

generally involve interaction, and there is some concern about the quality of these offerings (Ruth, et al., 2014).

In school, social work students are taught about the importance of reflective or reflexive practice, but this seems to be rarely, if ever, emphasized in ongoing learning once a practitioner is licensed and is working in the field. Lifelong learning, according to Nissen et al. (2014) "relates to a set of values and principles regarding the role of ongoing acquisition, integration, and application of new knowledge throughout one's lifetime" (p. 386). Whether licensed or not, lifelong learning should be a professional mandate for social workers, and it is a corequisite to effective practice and growing competence. Nissen et al. further states that "educators [must] be *deliberate and intentional* about building updated lifelong learning models into *social work practice frameworks and educational structures*" (p. 386). They also posit that the emphasis on evidence-based interventions may disenfranchise some communities through a lack of support for varied ways of knowing.

Lifelong learning needs to be distinguished from simply receiving ongoing education. Lifelong learning implies a deeper application of problem-solving through both individual and group processes. It is "essential not only to us and those close to us, but also to the remaking and transformation of the society in which we live" (Billet, 2010, p. 403). Billet (2010) emphasizes a framework that integrates lifelong learning with the personal; it is a social process, while also being uniquely individual. Meaningful lifelong learning infers personal growth and transformation, and not just the accumulation of additional knowledge through continuing education. However, there is a dearth of social work literature exploring the concept of lifelong learning. One model of lifelong learning developed by Nissen et al. (2014) discusses the intersection of knowledge, values, and skills with organizational contexts, political and economic issues, and community and cultural contexts.

The demographic composition of the United States is experiencing the most expansive cultural diversity in its history. This changing face of our communities places an important responsibility on the social work profession to have a strong understanding of global issues that impact our clients from a holistic perspective. The International Federation of Social Workers (2014) emphasizes that the "principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work" in its global definition of the profession (para. 1). As a result of this shift, ongoing education to remain current on globalization issues that impact the lives of people becomes necessary in order to make effective practice decisions. Previous research has supported the notion that social workers have an interest in understanding the global context and its potential impact on their interactions with clients (Smith & Cheung, 2015). Furthermore, after delivery of an educational program focused on the topic of global issues, Smith and Cheung (2015) found that social work practitioners increased their interest in seeking global knowledge, with particular emphasis on the importance of increasing this knowledge through traveling abroad.

Non-traditional delivery modes of continuing education are surfacing in the health science and human service fields. The CSWE (2014) has sponsored "social work study tours"; in 2014, a group traveled to Costa Rica, but the focus of the program was not on continuing education

hours but rather on faculty development. Of late, professional organizations and private entities have begun sponsoring and promoting continuing education programming on cruise lines. Many of these CE offerings are marketing to interdisciplinary licensees in social work, mental health counseling, marriage and family therapy, nursing, and medical practice. For example, one state's NASW is sponsoring a cruise that is dubbed "Social Workers at Sea" and offers 10 CEs for the week-long cruise (NASW-NM, 2019). Although these CE opportunities may be viewed as study abroad or study away, the true focus of the education is not on studying the geographic environment or the population where they are traveling. The aim appears to be focused on workshop topics that would traditionally be delivered in a face-to-face format, with the added element of travel to promote self-care and relaxation.

As a learner, I (Misty) value interactions and experiences that promote hands-on application. I prefer to be an active rather than passive learner. Learning can be transformative, both personally and professionally, when the boundaries of comfort are pushed. Being a self-reflective social worker becomes vital to identifying our areas of growth, where we need further development and knowledge. Many times, our experiences as social workers highlight, in real time, those knowledge or skill gaps. As our context continually changes, and the multicultural demographics of our communities change, it becomes imperative that we learn about the global impacts affecting our society. Study abroad provides an important stage for this learning.

I (Melody) have presented many workshops over the years and try to infuse the opportunity for practitioners to see things from a different perspective. After being thrown into study abroad almost by accident, I began to see the possibilities for practitioners to participate in a worldview-shifting opportunity. Often, when we travel, it is from the standpoint of being a tourist. We are on a quest for adventure, or rest and relaxation, and may confine ourselves to tourist areas and activities. I began thinking about how to bring to professionals the opportunity that I regularly provide to students. For me, study abroad is more than a tour with a syllabus (Slimbach, 2010). Travel in general, but particularly study abroad programs, should help us grow and should help us shift our worldview. I have learned as much from leading programs as my students do from participating in the program. Seeing myself as a lifelong learner, I am transparent with my fellow travelers—whether students, practitioners, or faculty—about my own experiences, my personal growth, and my view that I remain a "human becoming," not a human being. The day I think I know it all, and cannot learn from others (whether colleagues, supervisors, students, or the communities and individuals that we visit when in Costa Rica), is the day that I need to leave academia and social work behind. We should always seek transformation and a deeper understanding, and always be willing to learn. The opportunities that have been afforded to me through study abroad have been pivotal in growing my understanding of our place in the world. For me, that ongoing transformation is at the heart of my commitment to engage in lifelong learning.

The Costa Rica for Professionals Program

The Costa Rica for Professionals Program developed from a similar program offered to social work students. I (Melody) developed the student program eight years ago and have led groups

multiple times. While the student program runs two full weeks, the professionals program lasts one week. Other than the length of time abroad, all aspects of the professionals program mirror those of the student program. All participants stay with host families, and the schedule includes *charlas* (lectures), visits to agencies, and cultural excursions. The overarching topic of the inaugural CE program was women and children, with a focus on immigration. All activities included a period of debriefing in order to reflect on thoughts and feelings, integrate knowledge, and explore the relevance to the participants' practice (whether educator or practitioner). Participants included eight women (seven from Texas and one from Utah) and one leader. The first author (Misty) was a participant. The group included six social work faculty members and two practitioners. Participants were provided with pre-travel readings and a link to a YouTube video which included information about the schedule and the agencies we would visit, tips for living with a Costa Rican family, money exchange, etc. The leader also communicated regularly via email with participants, answering questions and inviting pre-travel interaction.

Participants gathered in Costa Rica and were met by a representative of our third-party provider. On the first day, we were delivered to our host families and given information about when and where to meet the next day when our program officially began. Host families are responsible for getting participants to the agency (teaching them the walking route, or where to get a bus or taxi). During the week, we visited multiple grassroots agencies focused on women's issues, including domestic violence and immigration, listened to *charlas* about social issues and social work services, and visited with social work faculty from the Universidad de Costa Rica. There were cultural excursions to the central market, a walking tour of San José (with a lot of historical context of colonialism and reminding participants of the influence of figures like William Walker), Irazú volcano, and the National Museum, which is housed in the old fort. Four intrepid participants walked 12 kilometers in *la Romeria*, an annual pilgrimage to the *basilica* in Cartago where the patron saint of Costa Rica, *la Negrita*, is housed. We visited a grassroots agency focused on women's empowerment, and then visited a squatter's community where (primarily) Nicaraguan migrants lived. The community is in stark contrast to the propaganda of Costa Rican commercials offering to "save the Americans" if we "come to Costa Rica" (Costa Rica Vacations, 2014), a country marketed as teeming with rainforests, oceans, varied landscapes, and biodiversity. Group processing occurred at the end of each day, highlighting our learning and contrasting Costa Rican social work and social issues with those in the United States.

I (Misty) have always wanted to study abroad but never had the opportunity as a social work student. I have traveled outside of the United States only twice in my lifetime; neither time was for an intentional focus on studying. As a social work educator, I have lived on the periphery of hearing and seeing pictures of my faculty colleagues' and students' study abroad experiences and was always envious of the rich growth experience I was missing out on. It had proven difficult for me, previously, to be a study abroad faculty leader because it required being away two weeks from my young children in the summer months, a difficult time to provide arrangements for my absence. So, when this new and innovative one-week CE opportunity to study abroad was developed and advertised, it really spoke to me. It appealed to me because it was different from most CE offerings, as it deviated from the traditional types of CE learning (workshop, webinar, mail submission). This opportunity was a hands-on option to experience learning from others abroad in their natural environment, rather than through a textbook,

classroom, or internet search, which aligns well with my learning style. I was also intrigued by this option because I did not (and do not) want to become stagnant as a professional social worker or educator. I want to continually push myself to face situations and experiences that force me to grow and evolve in our global society. I felt like this learning experience would align well with advancing my personal and professional growth.

Experiences of the Program

Host Family Stay

I (Misty) will be honest: The thought of staying with a Costa Rican host family was both intriguing and frightening at the same time. I think the frightening part was the idea of not being able to communicate. I speak *very* little Spanish, and I know from my professional experience how difficult it can be to communicate when you do not share the same language. But I was looking forward to facing the challenge upon arrival. The very first day, after being dropped off at my homestay, I was nervous as the other CE participants drove away. Although I was a stranger, I was immediately embraced by my Tica mom and her family. They included me in every aspect of their Sunday, spending time with me like family. One of my Tica mom's daughters spoke English, so this gave us an initial pathway to communicate. From her daughter, I learned that my Tica mom did not speak any English. So, her daughter set up the Google Translate application on her cell phone and I, too, had the application on my phone. My Tica mom had a granddaughter that was just about the same age as my daughter, so we played hide-and-seek and played with dolls. At the end of the day, her family left to return to their homes. I was in my room alone, and I had this strange feeling of loneliness (even though I was not alone). But it made me connect this experience to a youth who is placed in a foster home or a family living in a homeless shelter, where although love and support may be extended, everything is new and different.

For me, the culture, language, food, and environment were all new and different. But that lonely feeling, that experience, made me get in touch with *those* feelings, embrace vulnerability and discomfort, and learn about myself as well as my Tica mom and her culture. Obviously, we found many similarities to share and embrace. We found ways to communicate; it really is amazing what you can accomplish with hand gestures and a little help from technology. My Tica mom was widowed and lived alone, so she really embraced taking care of me all week. She knew that I had children and that I missed them, so she made a point to ask me questions about them so that I could keep them close at heart, because family was so important to both of us. Although she gave me a key to her home, when I had to come in late, she was always waiting up for me. I did not try one authentic Costa Rican meal that I did not like. Mangos and pineapples were way better in Costa Rica! Although staying with host families was one of the most initially intimidating components (fear of the unknown), it ended up being one of the most enriching and meaningful experiences of the entire CE experience. I have even remained in contact with my Tica mom through letters and email since my departure, only because I don't have Facebook!

Agency Visits

Our visits to grassroots social service agencies provided insight into the commitment of agency leaders, who have dedicated their lives to finding creative ways to build these agencies in order to meet and address the needs of their communities. It was a practical experience to learn of our common challenges between countries in the social service arena, but also to explore new and innovative ways to meet clients' needs. Listening directly to clients share their personal experiences of overcoming struggles and also their praise for these agencies was meaningful; it clearly indicated that they would not be where they were without the services offered by the respective agencies. Meeting teenage mothers who through the support of the social service agencies were able to continue to pursue their education—while also learning to grow as new parents with their children alongside them—was a phenomenal model to see in action. These mothers were being supported in having both paths, rather than being forced to choose one over the other. We have much to learn from our social service communities abroad because we do not have all of the answers. Although we have some commonalities in the struggles we face, we can learn new ways to address those challenges. Our ways are not perfect, and others may perform better in particular areas. In the social service arena, Costa Rica really focuses on the macro context and social justice issues, whereas the United States predominantly takes a very micro-oriented approach, sometimes forgetting the broader context and its hovering impact. This focus on macro issues and social justice was echoed by social work faculty on the visit to the Universidad de Costa Rica. Ideas were brainstormed and shared for ways to address concerns with collaboration efforts through organizations and research endeavors. Reflection and debriefing were infused in each day's concluding activities, which really provided a holistic vantage point of each CE participant's on-going growth and learning takeaways.

La Romeria

The timing of the CE experience coincidently happened during the time of Costa Rica's *la Romeria* on August second, the pilgrimage for their patron saint *la Negrita*. Costa Ricans from all over the country travel to the church on foot (though some crawl)—some for many days—to honor *la Negrita*, pray, and ask for miracles. I (Misty), along with three other CE participants, decided at the conclusion of our day's planned activities to walk the pilgrimage. The distance was 12 kilometers, and we started our journey at 5:30 p.m. It was a rainy trek requiring rain gear and umbrellas—the kind of wet that makes your socks and shoes squishy! We were surrounded by thousands and thousands of people making this journey. People of all ages were represented, from children in strollers to older adults, some individuals even in wheelchairs. Along the route, businesses passed out food items and Red Cross tents were available for help. It was a humbling and once-in-a-lifetime experience to walk alongside all these Costa Ricans, so passionately and fiercely dedicated to showing honor and faithfulness. I never felt scared walking this great distance in a country I had never been to before; I felt like we were all on this journey together. We were immersed in their cultural experience. Despite the problems and challenges we each faced, we suspended our day-to-day struggles to be faithful to this journey that was greater than ourselves. Don't get me wrong—it was a mind-over-matter experience, with a great deal of positive self-talk, as the trek progressed way into the evening. I saw so many parents pushing their children in strollers or holding their children's hands on this walk; it made me think of my

own children. I thought about how worried I would be to lose my kids in the crowd of people, as it was very difficult in rain gear to recognize others; it made me think of the level of faith parents must have on this journey and the socialization occurring by their parents modeling this passion, faith, and dedication to their children. But, really, we were not that different from one another. I, too, would do this for my family and my children (to pray for them and to teach them something of significant value). We were getting tired, we were hungry, and we had been walking on these downtown community streets passing storefront after storefront when all of a sudden, we turned the corner and the Basilica appeared out of nowhere. It was breathtakingly beautiful, all glowing with lights and color. We had finally arrived at around 11:30 p.m. that evening. Thousands of people were gathered outside the church with thousands more arriving every minute. There were two lined entrances to the church, one for those walking in on foot and one for those crawling on their knees. It was mind-blowing! Yes, I could have been told about this rich cultural tradition in a classroom or read about it in a textbook, but I have seen it, felt it, heard it, and hurt through it, and, therefore, I will never forget it. It was truly a transformative experience!

Squatter's Community

Visiting the Nicaraguan migrants in the squatter's community was one of the most raw and powerful experiences on this CE trip. I (Misty) don't know that anything prepares you mentally and emotionally for being up close and personal with seeing something you so wish wasn't a reality in others' lives. From the moment we arrived, the women were inclusive, warm, and welcoming toward us. One young woman in particular was most eager to show us her home; her pride was obvious—both for her home and for her community. As we began our trek uphill with her through this community, I really thought that I had seen the depths of poverty in my practice as a social worker, but as we kept moving, I realized I had not—not ever to this magnitude—and I was so incredibly surprised. I made a point to notice my surroundings using all of my senses; this community had developed their own "homes" made from any materials that they were able to locate (metal, mesh wiring, wood, pallets, plastic). They had found creative ways to connect these materials into structures and walls with the earth being the flooring in their homes. They had found ways to informally organize and collapse their skill sets to lay their own plumbing underneath the ground. Upon finally arriving at this woman's home, she welcomed us inside and showed us the rooms. Rooms were segregated by materials, but there were no doors on the rooms. Peering into one of the rooms, we could see a mattress on the dirt with her two small children lying on top. Pets roamed freely through the community and the smells changed as we continued our journey. As we walked back downhill, I noticed that their view was a skyline of the city. This struck me as such a stark dichotomy to see the skyline of buildings, where money flowed freely, from the vantage point of a community living in extreme poverty, but yet so incredibly proud of their homes. I internally processed and reflected so much throughout this experience. I was captivated by the incredible faces of strength I saw; strength really does have many different faces. They shared their stories, and many were about migrating to Costa Rica from Nicaragua. Some women migrated alone, and some migrated with their families through intense conditions, physically and emotionally. These women were strong and brave, and they were dedicated to finding a pathway for better opportunities for their families. It made me think about the conditions they escaped, as they were so proud to be in Costa Rica and a part of this community. I could empathize with the mothers, as I would do anything to keep my children

safe and provide them with a better future. I could also connect this experience to the border crisis families are dealing with in the United States. Tears flowed freely that day, both from us as CE participants and the women of this community as they shared their experiences and prepared a traditional meal for us to enjoy alongside them. These women had come together supporting one another to build a community, with the support of a grassroots social service agency. It was incredibly humbling, to say the least; the strength, resolve, and pride of these women was motivating and powerful. It not only made me appreciate the basic things that I have and often take for granted, but it also reminded me about perspective and finding pride, joy, and hope in spite of the struggle. Every one of us walked away that day changed people and professionals.

Summary

Attending this CE opportunity as a participant was transformative for me (Misty) as a person and as a social work professional in the teaching role. It was like no other CE I have ever encountered; it forced me to embrace vulnerability and broaden my perspective. It reminded me of the value of humility that we should extend as professionals in our practice with clients as well as with students. How many times are our clients or our students in the uncharted territory of new and unfamiliar places that make them feel alone and, as result, shut down? This CE experience has made a difference in helping me remember to be humble and helping my students be okay with vulnerability to grow and to help their clients grow as well. The richness of learning through listening to the clients' stories at various agencies and observing clients' natural environments cannot be conveyed with the same value and meaning in a classroom. It was a strong reminder that no one is immune from needing support or help. It has made me more mindful of intentionality and serving purposefully. It also reignited my passion for my work as a social worker. We have the ability to learn so much from our clients and our encounters. This CE experience taught me so much about the meaning of relationships and community. Relationships are critical. I built relationships with my Tica mom and her family, and I built relationships with fellow social work faculty and practitioners, who I could call today and know they would assist me. Connection, no matter whether it is brief or extensive, has the potential for significant impact. As individuals, we may not know the timing of when our brief or extended relationships will instill inspiration, hope, motivation, and change; therefore, every connection matters. This CE experience has had a vast impact on me; it has made me a more well-rounded person, practitioner, and educator.

From the perspective of the developer and leader (Melody) of this fairly unique continuing education offering, my travels to Costa Rica have influenced me as a faculty member in a social work program, as a leader of students on study abroad, and as a social work practitioner. Most importantly, leading these groups has taught me multiple lessons about teaching, social work, and life. My interactions with Costa Rican social workers helped me shift from viewing the U.S. social worker's focus on "helping" to a focus on "accompanying" clients on their journey. I have learned a great deal about South-South migration and the impact of U.S. policies on Latin American countries throughout history. I have a more nuanced view of colonialism and have learned firsthand about the impact of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on Costa Rican social services. I have developed deep and lasting relationships with my Tico family. Like Misty, I experienced a considerable amount of angst over my first homestay;

however, it has become one of the things I most look forward to. My husband, who does not travel with me on work programs, has been able to meet my Tico family when we have traveled to Costa Rica on vacation. I have experienced skepticism and downright suspicion regarding my motives for wanting to visit Costa Rican social work classrooms and visit with professors, giving me insight into how the United States is viewed in other countries. I gained empathy for others who migrate to the U.S. and have difficulties in learning English or understanding U.S. customs, culture, and worldviews. I have grown a great deal through my educational experiences in Costa Rica and other Latin American countries, and I am always excited to share that deeper, more transformational learning with others.

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The Journey to Serve the World through Continuing Education

Sherri Harper Woods

Abstract: This article presents my reflections of my call, response, and commitment to serve the world through continuing education opportunities that build the capacity of clinical social workers and counselors. I discuss the journey that began with my dissertation project and ended with the local, state, and global service of facilitating continuing education. The article also demonstrates the movement from building capacity through live workshops to utilizing E-learning.

***Keywords*:** continuing education, professional development, electronic capacity building, continuing education network

Introduction
Hearing the Call

"There are three steps in living life on purpose. They are hearing the call, responding to the call, and committing to the call." These were not new words to me but hearing them in the context of a seminary graduation speech (June, 2012) added new meaning. Social work itself requires hearing a call to serve vulnerable populations, responding to the call, selecting how you will serve, and committing to the call of which vulnerable populations you will serve. Living my life on purpose means serving as a social work educator and equipping domestic and global social workers and counselors to provide strength-based interventions and strategies that empower vulnerable populations.

I heard a specific call to serve the world through providing continuing education and professional development to social workers, counselors, and caregivers when I was designing my dissertation project. My call was so clear to me that I made a vow the day I defended my dissertation.

When the questions "What will you do with the knowledge you have gained to serve our world and equip others for the work of the ministry?" and "How will you engage in the expression of fundamental commitments related to self-care and personal growth necessary to minister for yourself and for others?" were asked during my dissertation defense (T. Wardle, personal communication, April 2012), I was able to passionately respond. I answered, "I will provide continuing education opportunities for licensed social workers and counselors." This promise led me on a domestic and international continuing education voyage to utilize facilitating continuing education workshops as my agent of change to the world.

Serving the World through the Public Service of Continuing Education in my Community
Responding to the Call

Continuing education is not a destination; it is a journey. I immediately responded to the call domestically and packed my professional briefcase with opportunities to provide continuing

education. The first stop was in 2011, when as director of continuing education of Mind, Body, and Soul (MBS), the non-profit cofounded by my husband, I began offering several free continuing education workshops to educators, social workers, youth leaders, and pastors within the Mahoning Valley. Shortly after, MBS became a continuing education provider registered with the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board. In 2012, I met with my mentor, Dr. Joseph Mosca, about assisting in fulfilling part of the James and Coralie Centofanti Center for the Health and Welfare of Vulnerable Populations' mission to establish a process for planning and coordinating continuing education (focused on expanding their scope for effectiveness in working with vulnerable populations) to health and human service professionals in the regional community.

During our meeting, I stated, "I propose that you consider allowing me to serve as the Continuing Education Director of the James and Coralie Centofanti Center for the Health and Welfare of Vulnerable Populations and offer workshops to social workers and counselors as a public service from the Center." Dr. Mosca (personal communication, March 2013) responded, "Well, it is part of our mission and we have not begun to offer these yet. I'll partner with you through Mind, Body, and Soul to offer a few workshops to counselors and social workers in the area as a public service. We will offer them at no cost to the participants. If there is a response, we will offer more."

There was a great response; for over five years I offered over 20 workshops in partnership with the Centofanti Center and independently for MBS to a consumer base of approximately 326 licensed counselors and social workers. As the participation grew to the largest workshop attendance of 135, the interest and requests grew, and I began to specialize in workshops related to trauma, mindfulness, and spirituality. Some of the workshop topics were Forgiveness, The Real F Word; The Other F Word: Self-Forgiveness; Healing the Wounded Soul; Sexual Abuse Recovery and the Christian Client: Solution-Focused Therapy; Trauma-Informed Clinical Supervision; Worried Sick: Breaking Free from Chronic Worry and Anxiety; EMDR and Mindfulness; Unglued: A Look at Anger Reactions; The Clinical Coach; The Ethical Dilemma of Self-Care; and Spirituality and the Treatment Process.

According to the consumers, my continuing education workshops were "engaging and provided opportunities to practice the skills that were introduced." On a scale of one to five with five being excellent, the workshops averaged a four. The feedback increased my confidence and strengthened my commitment.

From 2011 to 2015, I was able to respond to the call of providing continuing education workshops through MBS and the James and Coralie Centofanti Foundation, serve as CEU Coordinator of Youngstown State University, and serve as presenter to local and state professional development conferences for social workers. It had been four years and the call to serve as social work continuing education educator was still knocking on my door.

Serving the World through Continuing Education Abroad
Hearing the Global Call

In 2016, my territory enlarged, and the journey led me to presenting professional development workshops abroad. Serving as a continuing education provider abroad changed my perspective of continuing education. While providing continuing education in Haiti and in Israel, I realized that as a practitioner in the United States, I have the right, responsibility, and privilege of continuing education. While conducting a faculty-led service learning in Haiti and following a Self-Care and Vicarious Trauma continuing education workshop for staff, I had a conversation with Stephanie, the director of the Special Needs Orphanage, and she identified the privilege of continuing education and the need in Haiti. With guilt I asked,

Sherri: "How can I best serve you during our next visit?"

Stephanie: "Our special needs family experiences a lot of grief within their lives due to the demands of caring for a special needs child with little resources and a high death rate. During your next visit, it would be helpful if you provided a training for our staff on grief and assisted in writing a booklet on understanding grief."

Stephanie was not the only staff member who requested assistance in continuing education. Other departments requested that on our next visit our team provide the staff with continuing education on trauma-informed care, grief counseling, boundaries and healthy relationships, solution-focused therapy, and the strengths-based approach to integrate Christian faith into the workshops. I had a similar experience while conducting a faculty-led study abroad in Israel and facilitating a continuing education at the Galilee Medical Center.

During my presentation, *Bilateral Stimulation as a Resource for Holocaust and Syrian Refugee War Survivors*, it was noted that the social workers serving at this hospital could benefit from continuing education opportunities. I again asked the question,

Sherri: "How can I best serve you during our next visit?"

Hanna (Director of the Social Work Department of the Galilee Medical Center): "The technique you shared is simple and easy to apply with patients who are receiving trauma recovery treatment. I hope you return and on your next visit, we can arrange more time for presenting professional development and growth workshops."

By March 2019, my call to serve the world as a social work educator through continuing education was becoming more defined and more challenging. Answering this call was contingent upon my returning to those countries, my available resources, and my available time. Yet, there was a desire to respond to the deficit of continuing education in third world countries and specific topics that integrated spirituality into the treatment process. New questions surfaced within my life of service. I became plagued by questions: What happens to health professionals who serve vulnerable populations who have experienced trauma in remote areas that have limited access to continuing education? What can be done to address the de-isolation of these

care professionals? How can we empower them to serve those recovering from horrific trauma? What would happen if the care professionals became civically engaged in building the future of continuing education around the world?

There was a solution. I would continue to offer continuing education opportunities to remote global areas when permitted, but I would also develop virtual E-learning continuing education opportunities. I have a dream. A dream that care professionals of all ages, ethnicities, and gender will have the same access to effective and quality continuing education. I believe that professionals can provide continuing distance education online training to expand the capacity of professional competence and growth for the under-resourced.

The Vision of Growing Capacity through Continuing Education E-learning
Responding to the Global Call

E-learning is an evolutionary pedagogy in social work that transforms learning so that it can be synchronous and asynchronous. E-learning can be cost-effective and an asset for rural populations (Phelan, 2015). In April 2019, I wrote down my agenda to growing professional competence in local and international social workers and counselors that involves creating an agenda for action. Interwoven in every university are the goals of teaching, scholarship, and service.

Establishing electronic continuing education is a place to join the network that I am building through service learning and study abroad with the regional, national, and international needs of affordable continuing education. These continuing education workshops have an agenda for action and provide professionals an opportunity to share their expertise with others as a form of service. The virtual model of open access continuing education will provide opportunities to those who service vulnerable populations all over the world to increase their professional growth. Building an electronic continuing education repository will expand the capacity of professional development and growth for licensed social workers and counselors around the world.

The Plan

The plan for delivering virtual continuing education can be realized through the collective resources of the Health and Human Services College of Youngstown State University (YSU). YSU has invested in “Classrooms of the Future” that are equipped with Cisco Spark Stations—touch-based collaboration devices that expand the classroom beyond its four walls. These classrooms are resources for faculty and staff. My plan is to use the Classrooms of the Future resource and video storage system as a potential to offer online continuing education.

The end goal is for faculty of the Health and Human Service Professionals to utilize these classrooms as a platform for teaching, learning, and service within continuing education. In the meantime, the plan begins with me being the change agent—starting the change with my own service.

The Reality

The reality is that a dream is just a dream until you plainly write the vision and move on the action steps to implement it. A vision without movement is just an uncolored picture. Having vision and being a visionary can feel like a curse. You see in panoramic view what will happen, but you have to do the work to *move* toward what you see. However, when I honestly examined the movement of my call to build the capacity of continuing education opportunities globally, what I could see was not important—because I simply hadn't done enough from March 2019 to October 2019 to examine. Around October, I became frustrated. I was writing the manuscript for this journal for the Special Topics: Continuing Education issue and noticed everything I was writing was about "what had happened to lead to this point" and "what would happen." There was little to show of action and commitment to the global call. My last live global presentation had been in March 2019.

I spoke to my best friend and accountability partner who is also a social worker and counselor. She said, "Faith is not knowing all parts of your vision. Continue to write the plan and move as though it is going to happen. Look for opportunities and when they come, take advantage of them." This was easy for her to say, but I do not believe she knew that I was ready to give up. This continuing education vision to change the world one workshop at a time was like an overdue baby that I had carried for over seven years. I said to myself, "If something does not happen soon, I will abort the birth of the vision." Then came Rwanda.

The Appeal

A call to service always includes a direct appeal. Rwanda's greatest challenge in mental health is the development of mental health workforce capacity. According to World Health Organization's (2018a) *Mental Health Atlas 2017*, there were only 234 mental health professionals in the country. This translates to roughly one specialist per 50,000 inhabitants. Of them, 45 were psychologists (1 per 250,000), 7 were psychiatrists (1 per 1.6 million), and 20 were social workers (1 per 600,000). In November 2019, while in Kigali, Rwanda, at a Multicultural Trauma Training and site visit for a future service learning course, as my friend had said, an opportunity arose for me to build capacity within the field of mental health through continuing education.

When the facilitator became sick, I was given an opportunity and I committed to present a Vicarious Trauma and Self-Care workshop to Rwandan social workers, community health workers, psychiatric nurses, and psychologists. The presentation included faith-based interventions for addressing compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious trauma, and developing a self-care plan. Following the presentation, the participants responded with appeals that affirmed the need and my ability to meet the need.

> Participant 4: "This was the best part of the conference. I feel as though you provided me with tools I can take home and use."
>
> Participant 22: "God is important to me and you included God."

Participant 31: "You have perfect skills for teaching."

Participant 17: "I like that I learned that I have to heal myself first."

Participant 9: "I like that you gave so many tools to use."

There were many comments from the Rwandan and international delegates that affirmed that continuing education was needed and that I was equipped to offer engaging continuing education.

The conversation that meant the most and served as the midwifery for me to actually give birth to the true vision of changing the world through continuing education was with Agnes. As we ate lunch, she described the lack of professionals in the mental health field and the impact the vicarious trauma that practitioners who work with survivors of the genocide face because they, too, are survivors. Agnes talked about her faith-based agency and the need for training and her desire to include faith-based continuing education as part of their agenda. I shared with her my dream and vision and how my own lay counselors curriculum, *Journey Coaching Curriculum* (Woods, 2019) could build the capacity of non-professionals and address mental health needs at the non-severe level. She asked: "When are you coming back to teach us more?" I responded, "Perhaps in 2021." She replied, "Many will be spiritually and emotionally dead by then. You must come back next year."

Global Continuing Education and E-Learning Modules
Committing to the Call

The Commitment in Action

Here was another opportunity that my friend had placed in front of me. Here was the chance to move from dream to vision and from vision to vision fulfilled. Here was an opportunity to commit to another global live workshop and to develop the E-learning modules that could be shared with Haitian, Israeli, and Rwandan practitioners. So… I did it. I went beyond hearing and responding to the call—I committed to the call. I had planned to return in June 2020 to train social workers, community health workers, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, pastors, youth leaders, and faith-based agency leaders in the *Journey Coach Curriculum* (Woods, 2019).

I have written the curriculum. The *Journey Coach Curriculum* (Woods, 2019) is a faith-based, strengths-based, trauma-informed social therapy lay counseling model that will increase mental health workforce capacity of non-specialized professions. It integrates evidence-based interventions of mental health counseling, spiritual direction, spiritual formation, mindfulness, and meditative practices to reduce stress, depression, pain, eating disorders, general anxiety, and other mild trauma-related stressors. The purpose of the training aligns with the World Health Organization (2018b) to improve the availability of non-specialized workers, build opportunities for task-sharing of non-specialized workers, provide self-delivered interventions for mild to moderate conditions, and develop informal care by community networks. I have partnered with Global Engagement Institute and had planned to provide the continuing education training as a

pilot in Kigali, Rwanda, in June 2020 to address the need for the integration of spirituality in the healing process of trauma growth and recovery.

As of January 2020, I have further actualized my plan to expand quality education. Utilizing the YSU Classrooms of the Future, I have captured the traditional lecture-based learning environment through Cisco Webex recording. I utilized the assistance of the Youngstown State University Tech Training Coordinator of IT Customer Services. With her assistance, the YSU Classrooms of the Future, and Cisco Webex, I now have six E-modules that can be shared with local and global practitioners in the countries where I have already offered live workshops (Haiti, El Salvador, Israel, and Rwanda).

It happened when I merged my commitment to offering local continuing education with the technology resources available. Within January, I offered six live continuing education workshops on the topics of managing anger reactions, trauma-informed supervision, dialectical behavior therapy, shame, forgiveness, and anxiety to local social workers and counselors. These workshops were hosted in YSU Classrooms of the Future, which allowed me to record the live sessions utilizing Cisco Webex Go to Meeting and my personal computer. These recorded modules have been edited into E-modules. Now instead of talking about what I can do, I can share the recordings of live presentations and PowerPoints as E-modules with Haiti, Israel, Rwanda, and any other populations that are under-resourced in the area of continuing education.

The Future Response and Commitment

I have heard the call, I have responded to the call, and finally, I have committed to the call and stretched continuing education beyond four walls. I can say in present tense that continuing education is my agent of change. There is an evident interest in the special topic of integrating spirituality into the trauma growth and recovery process. Moving forward, I will offer more live workshops on these subjects and will continue to record these sessions into E-modules that can be shared locally and globally.

The initial plan has been adapted due to the restrictions of COVID-19 and live workshops being cancelled. However, three virtual workshops have been shared with paraprofessionals in Rwanda through virtual platforms. I have continued to develop the E-modules and more will be shared as synchronous virtual workshops in spring 2021 as the countries open back up. The continuing education workshop to integrate spirituality into the treatment of trauma that was scheduled for June 2020 in Kigali, Rwanda, was cancelled due to COVID-19. The team of licensed counselors, social workers, and trained lay counselors plan to respond to the appeal of the Rwandan practitioners and present the *Journey Coach Curriculum* (Woods, 2019) when it is safe to do so.

What a difference a few months can make on a journey! The rapid change in my response and commitment just reminds me that the call to serve the world through continuing education is a journey and not a destination. I am no longer frustrated. I feel grateful, empowered, and confident that the E-module webinars and the live Rwanda workshops are only the beginning of the journey to serving the world through live and E-learning continuing education workshop opportunities.

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