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Abstract

Providing services to communities while providing education and training for social work practice in communities is at the core of this paper. These activities are discussed and reviewed in the context of social work in communities. Social work field placements (internships) in communities can provide positive learning experiences for students and excellent services to communities. The Winslow Project, a two-year community-focused placement for two group of first year master of social work (M.S.W.) Students is described and the results of this project are discussed. In order to fulfill a commitment to the community concept, students need a well-defined concept of group and community practice in order to provide the range and quality of services that are required for social work practice in the 21st's century global community paradigm. Providing social work intervention practices in the community is paramount to the further development of social work as a profession. It will also provide support and encouragement for communities to provide these supportive services within the community context. Social work history is rich with the type of models necessary for this to occur.

Keywords

qualitative research

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by
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Abstract

Providing services to communities while providing education and training for social work practice in communities is at the core of this paper. These activities are discussed and reviewed in the context of social work in communities. Social work field placements (internships) in communities can provide positive learning experiences for students and excellent services to communities. The Winslow Project, a two-year community-focused placement for two group of first year master of social work (M.S.W.) Students is described and the results of this project are discussed. In order to fulfill a commitment to the community concept, students need a well-defined concept of group and community practice in order to provide the range and quality of services that are required for social work practice in the 21st's century global community paradigm. Providing social work intervention practices in the community is paramount to the further development of social work as a profession. It will also provide support and encouragement for communities to provide these supportive services within the community context. Social work history is rich with the type of models necessary for this to occur.

In this article, a study related to social work field instruction and community practice is discussed. The field placement experience is an important cornerstone of the graduate social work experience. Through these internships, students are able to relate their classroom education to practical applications. Traditionally most schools of social work utilize agency based individual placements as the primary field training for their students.

Community social work has the potential for being neglected in these types of restrictive placements, as well as in the classroom, and even in the generalized arena or domain of practice methodology. To fulfill a commitment to the community concept, social work students need a well-defined concept of group and community practice in order to provide the range and quality of services that are required for social work practice in the 21st's century global community paradigm.

Field Training: An Overview

The type and quality of field experience in social work and other disciplines is an important area of study, relative to skill competencies, and the impacts on participants (CSWE, 1994). This is not to say that it should not be challenging and demanding, rather the first year generalist field instructional experience should provide a healthy start and broad community spectrum to a social work career. The more specialized second year field instructional experience should build on and

enhance the generalist skills and academic knowledge gained in course work and the first year field practicum. Kissman and Tran ([1990](#)) highlighted the importance of quality field training, where they postulated that the importance of field placements in social work education could hardly be overemphasized. Since social work is an "applied discipline, much emphasis is placed on socializing students into the profession by providing hands-on experience in the field" (p. 27). Tolson and Kopp ([1988](#)) indicated that many traditional placements are in an agency setting with some combination of experiential and academic components (the articulated model), where "the level of learning has not been evaluated consistently… the most important influence on social work practice is the practicum" (pp. 123-124). Rodgers and Williams ([1977](#)) suggested that because a social work student may spend half of their educational experience in a practice setting, field instruction should be considered a most valuable aspect of the training process. It is therefore important to include multiple options for field experience along with coursework offerings that enhance the particular type of placement. This concept applies well to the next area of discussion, which will focus on field placements and community practice.

Field Instruction and Community Practice

The importance of teaching group as well as community practice skills and theory in social work and related disciplines cannot be stated strongly enough. Brzuzy and Segal ([1996](#)) suggested that "teaching students to understand, appreciate, and use research based in the community" is desperately needed in social work education (p. 59). Many schools of social work have no community development courses available and group courses are limited, many times to one advanced course in group theory. The tasks that most social workers perform in their daily jobs are entrenched in community ideology. In order to perform these tasks adequately some expertise in community practice is necessary. For example, Birnbam and Auerbach ([1994](#)) found "graduate social work education has practically eliminated group work as a specialized area of study, and students in foundation courses learn little about group work theory and have limited or no group field work experience in which to develop practice skills" (pp. 325-335). According to Kurland and Salmon, ([1989](#)), "requirements for concentrations offer a unique opportunity to add depth and sophistication to the teaching of group work and to better prepare students for the demands of contemporary professional practice, which requires a great amount of substantive expertise" (p. 100).

This expertise can be applied to micro, mezzo, and macro practice in the larger community as well as the agency setting. The current paradigms evolving from CSWE seem to be changing direction toward more generalist foci in social work education, which is supportive of the broader scope that group and community practices offer (Council on Social Work Education, [1998](#)). Elliott ([1993](#)) indicated that social work interventions are predominantly delivered through a residual service delivery model. Elliot indicated that in social work today, a large degree of privatization and the logical positivist research model is prevalent alongside a medical model of intervention, both of which address individual pathology. "This combination does not fully represent the social work tradition that along with individual change has always aimed to also encompass social action, social change, and community development" (p. 21).

Training students in the theory and methodology of community practice through placements in the community and focused directly on the community is one way of accomplishing this goal,

which is also a timely focus for social work researchers. Coulton (1995) stated that "compared to our knowledge of individuals and families, research attention to the functioning of communities has been scant" (p. 438). Because social work has a long-standing relationship with varied community based practices, sociological theories, and principles of group dynamics as they apply to individual functioning in the context of community, the opportunities for research through studying social work students in community placements are vast. There is little doubt that with the current globalized economic conditions and changing roles for social workers, alternative training options need to be considered; where changes from for profit, nonprofit, and governmental agencies are resulting in social crises at all levels of service provision. Providing services in the community, in the home, etc. may become more the norm than the exception.

The nonprofit and government sectors, in which most social workers practice, will face great challenges in dealing with local social problems and needs. Social work practitioners, managers, students, and faculty must be prepared to recognize and seize the opportunities in these crises and to use knowledge, research, and practice skills to develop and strengthen community-based practice and service models. They will also need to build policy and research agendas that are grounded in community and family development (Weil, 1996, p. 484).

The way to achieve this is through field training experiences, grounded in community practices, coordinated by well-established community curricula for the classroom experience, and includes greater balance between prevention, development, and remediation (Morrison, Howard, Johnson, Navarro, Plachetka, & Bell, 1997). Universities need to consider being "partners in promoting" community involvement and interdisciplinary social work.

True generalist practitioners need to possess a holistic approach that emphasizes the environment as well as the person. There is a need for an expanded community-oriented focus in social work education and field instruction. To achieve connections between social work education, the practice community, and the larger cultural community students could be placed in a neighborhood network rather than in a single agency, where they can experience the "context" of services as well as perform a variety of social work roles. Such placements might offer enough variety to be used for more than one year. This practice in "neighborhoods and communities" needs to be based on solid social work perspectives with focus on "changing the culture of what is seen as valued, possible, and appropriate in these communities, which in turn will modify the opportunity systems for children and families" (Morrison, Howard, Johnson, Navarro, Plachetka, & Bell, 1997, pp. 532-533).

Community-Based Field Placements

Models and techniques for community practice have been with us for some time and social work history is rich with community oriented practices, and providing alternative field placement opportunities along with the more traditional individual agency-based field placements, is a responsible way to reflect this domain of practice. Community development programs are on the cutting edge of social work practice, and it is encouraging to see innovative schools of social work developing field-training experiences that include alternative models. The community oriented model that is the focus of the following study exposes students to a wide array of challenges that result in them being better prepared as social work practitioners, policy makers,

administrators, educators and researches, within the spectrum of community practice. This paper is the result of this two-year study in which the writer completed dissertation research requirements. This involved the writer in an intermittent-active role as will be discussed later.

The Winslow Project

The project took place in the small Northern Arizona desert community of Winslow, with a 12,325 population, located on historic U. S. Route 66. This multi-phase project provided a cross-cultural and interstate generalist community development practicum, for Ohio State University social work master's students. It was conducted on-site and was funded through a partnership between business constituencies with interests in Winslow, civic and community organizations on-site, private donors, and the students involved in the project. The student interns were able to pursue increasing levels of involvement in overlapping spheres of intervention. These spheres include:

- Creation and maintenance of a civic association (La Familia), community micro-enterprise confederation in the underdeveloped, principally Hispanic neighborhoods of Coopertown and Southside, which included community-based, needs assessment longitudinal research.
- Development and provision of ongoing violence prevention and citizenship enhancement programs for elementary and high school students.
- Coordination and improvement of citywide social service, church, civic, and business collaborative networking to create a national model for community-building for the 21st century, and
- Traditional placements in various social service agencies in and around Winslow, with emphasis on networking, and collaborative interrelated wrap-around service provision.

The Center for Peace Studies and Community Development in Columbus, Ohio administered this project in conjunction with its role as a Field Internship Agency for Ohio State's College of Social Work and relative to its various community development activities. The executive director for The Center for Peace Studies and Community Development, William D. Eldridge, Ph.D., was the project director and is a full time faculty member in the College of social work. Conjoint on site weekly classes in community development were required of all student participants as they are a requirement for all field placements. Residence and activity offices were located at Madre de Dios Catholic Church in Coopertown, a sub community in Winslow. All operations for the Winslow project began at the Madre de Dios church and many of the community functions took place there as well.

The field placement involved students completing their first year (MSW I) generalist field experience as required by The Ohio State University Masters of Social Work program. This first year fieldwork design was a block placement, conducted between June and August of the summer following the students' first year of academic course work. The Winslow project integrated student cohort team building, Hispanic American and Native American cultural learning, personal experience, and comprehensive community services into a consolidated eight-week period. The students assumed their professional roles approximately six days per week, ten hours per day, through the eight-week project. This constitutes a total community service

commitment of approximately 480 contact service hours. The students actually exceeded the typical non-block first year placement of 320 hours. The extra hours was considered volunteer time, which the students had contractually agreed to when, accepting the field placement.

Sample

Twenty-one students took part in the Winslow Project. Of the seven students who participated during the summer of 1997, there were six females and one male. The mean age for the females was 27.8 years, while the male students' age was 57 years. All of the students had social work employment history and three were volunteers who had already completed their field placements before this project.

Among the 14 students participating during the second summer of 1998, there were 12 females and 2 males. The mean age for the females was 27.4 with the youngest being 20 years and the oldest 34. The mean age for the males was 23.5 aged 23 and 24 respectively. One of the female students was an upper level social work undergraduate and not in an official field placement. The students that participated in this experience assumed a good deal of the cost including their airfare and some food costs. The Winslow experience involved these students living together as a group in dormitory housing.

Project Activities

The students were involved in a variety of different, but related, service delivery functions. Personal learning consultations, team evaluation, and cohort feedback procedures were parts of their generalized first year learning experience. The students also met together for training throughout the nine months before their experience in Winslow; which focused on preparing them to work and relate effectively and compassionately within the cultures and environment they discovered in Arizona. During these training sessions, they also worked on group cohesiveness, which would prove beneficial to them later.

While in Winslow, they were engaged in learning about community-based practice while actually residing together as a small group microcosm (a student community), while at the same time spending eight weeks working with community leaders, adults, families, and children in and around Winslow. The needs of the community and the agency involvement added to the experiential foundation of the Winslow project.

The project also involved specific task objectives as follows

- Develop and support a neighborhood residents (civic) association.
- Develop a leadership coalition in the Hispanic neighborhoods of Coopertown and Southside.
- Work with children on literacy and anti-violence programs.
- Assist in various social service activities on the Hopi and Navajo Reservations.
- Assist adults and teenagers with career planning activities.
- Conduct individual and family counseling sessions.
- Facilitate small group meetings related to community projects.

- Network and conduct community cooperation planning functions among human service organizations.
- Create plans and needs assessments for micro-enterprise development, and provide physical labor to help build parks, repair homes, etc.

Each student worked and learned as a member of smaller teams with other students, community members, and professionals; and had an opportunity to be involved in a range of differing activities from which their experiences and newly acquired skills and knowledge were shared with other teams and within the whole student community.

As described, the students all resided, ate, slept, and worked together. They slept in bunk beds with three to four persons per bedroom. In this context, one of the most significant aspects of this internship was the opportunity for them to become a community in the process of learning and caring for each other, while also engaging the exterior community neighborhoods. The project provided the opportunity for these two communities to develop simultaneously.

Winslow provided a rich and extraordinary opportunity to learn about and work with members of the Southwestern Hispanic community. The social work students were able to work extensively with the Hopi and Navajo Native American Tribes living in Winslow, and on adjacent reservations just north of the city. The students attended cultural orientation lectures and group training seminars. The focus of these workshops was to formally learn about Hispanic, Native American, and Southwestern cultures.

Their experiences provided many learning opportunities. Some of the learning challenges included solving conflicts within their own group and with one another, living in a new environment, being away from family and friendship supports in Ohio, and "becoming a group." These contexts of the experience created a symbiotic developmental process as the students, the community members and, the two communities conjoined and separated many times during the processes of community development.

Major Research Questions

The writer and the project director developed research questions focused on the experiences and knowledge gained by internship participants, as follows

- Are there changes in feelings/attitudes related to community practice for the students that chose to take part in this field placement experience?
- Is there any perceived personal or professional growth for these students through this experience?
- What is the Program Director's evaluation of the student's progress and the project?

The study included a longitudinal/multi-baseline, ABA (pre-test-interim-posttest) research design, focusing on the students and their perceived and observed experiential growth and learning processes, as well as the perceptions of the program director related to these dynamics. These variables were extracted and analyzed through narrative analysis of written self-report and observation during the experience.

Data Collection

Data collection included

1. an initial questionnaire session one month prior to each group of students leaving for Winslow,
2. an on-site mid-term questionnaire and observation session at week five in Winslow and,
3. a follow-up questionnaire session one month following each group's return from Winslow.

The same interviewer administered the questionnaire at the three data collection sessions by the. The mid-term and follow-up sessions included the original interview questions slightly altered to elicit information about how students had applied their learning to their present situations. The questions contained a significant focus on community, community-based practice, and identity as social workers, social work field experience, and the student's feelings about these topics. The researcher acquired the observation data through the two-on-site visits and the follow-up interview with the project director. The data is narrative in nature and therefore, evaluated through this analysis method. The outcome variables relate to the concept that students can benefit from an experience like the Winslow Project.

Results

Presentation of the questionnaire data

The questionnaire contained multi-layered items focusing on community, community-based practice, field experience, and the students' feelings about the experience. The questionnaire also assessed student's goals of the project and relationship dynamics within the student groups, beginning with questions regarding the student's expectations of the experience, to elicit their projections of what the Winslow experience could provide related to their field instruction, personal, and professional growth. The follow-up questionnaire included questions that asked if the experience had met expectations.

As evidenced by the data, all 21 students believed that they were meeting their expectations at mid-point and 19 reported that they had met or exceeded their expectations at follow-up. Among the expectations reported as met by the students, are the following. Twelve students reported better communication skills, ten improved assertiveness skills, twenty increased cultural awareness, twenty-one achieved better relationship skills, nineteen gained in social work practice skills, twenty-one added community development experience, fifteen increased their sense of self-awareness, seventeen reported gains in spiritual growth, fifteen felt they grew emotionally, and ten described better general well being.

An interesting phenomenon observed during this experience was that the students began to see their group as a community early on, with 19 out of the 21 students describing their group as a community with all of the characteristics and roles that would be expected. It was during this process that the concept of the student group as a community began to develop and expand. The cohesiveness of the group was also significant in this data set in that, all of the students reported

that they felt bonded with their fellow group members at mid-point. The purpose of question one was to elicit this information. The purpose of question 2 was to elicit each student's concept of community and then to apply that concept to the student group, to measure growth relative to knowledge of community. The initial definitions related to what constitutes a community were consistent as applied to groups of people in similar situations. All 21 students agreed that community involves some form of mutual focus and working together. Twenty reported their student groups were able to meet this criterion and thus develop as communities while working in the larger community of Winslow.

The students described their groups as typical communities, with the relationships and conflicts consistent with the dynamics of community. There was a definite change in the way the students viewed community throughout the experience as evidenced by 19 students remaining consistent with their responses throughout the process. These students first described community as groups of people who all have one characteristic in common, live in a shared area, have shared interests, etc. At mid-point 16 students expanded the definition to groups of people whom live near one another and interconnect in their development and prosperity. Finally, at follow-up, 18 students described community as independent personalities that work together for a common cause, have shared strengths and goals, are mutually committed to the whole, etc. When asked to apply these concepts to the groups, the students again showed their cohesion and community growth. The members of the cohorts spoke fondly of one another and related that the group members became very close, although there was some resentment stated by six students related to a few members who did not perform as expected by the majority, though there was much resistance by these students to label them. When asked to talk about the problems in the group, these six students responses included the following

- The group works well together overall.
- It was nice to have such a group of people with such diverse personalities and styles.
- The group got along better than expected.

For the most part, we worked well together although at time there was a bit of strain due to so many independent personalities.

It is interesting that one can view the process for these students in terms of their changing perspective of community. The idea of bonding with others in a way that connects the larger whole or that community has a dynamic of family or people who are connected suggests the cohesiveness of the students as groups.

Question 3 follows the same concepts as question number two. The difference here is that the students were to define community development related to social work practice. The hypothesis here is that the Winslow experience will enhance the definition of social work practice and community development for these students. The purpose of question one was to elicit this information. The simple definition at the beginning changed at mid-point and follow-up. The cohorts started with a standard textbook definition of social work in the community, moved to an appreciation of community building as a long-term process, and finally to working at community building from within the community. The students redefined their concept of social work in the

community throughout the experience, constituting a transition from individual change agent to active participant in a larger collaborative, contextual, and interdependent process.

The students appear to have realized the complexity of communities. Their willingness to allow for and respect differences increased through trial and error during this experience. Their realization was that social workers do not bring people together for community practice as much as they "practice life" with and among people through active problem solving and planning. The data indicates that the students conceptualize community building as not something that you do to a community but rather, it is an experiential process that involves people and their collective evolvement.

Each student shared their feelings about personal relationships and the importance of these in their lives. The focus was on family and friendships on the initial questionnaire, and on the group members and community on the mid-term and follow-up questionnaires. The results showed growth in relation to group cohesiveness over the experience and, the level of commitment between group members to one another and to the group as a whole.

It was interesting to see the struggle that these students took part in as they attempted to redefine their concept of community. The idea of their group as a community or family was foreign to their prior beliefs about what community was. By the end of this experience, the students reported achievement and growth as the result of the relationships formed and, that constant contact with others was an essential element to the group development. The concept of family, advocacy, social action and interdependency all became themes for these students, and concepts of location, common goals, group as a community, and the ability to be tolerant of others were reported as positive outcomes of this experience.

In the next data set, the object was to elicit students' feelings and thoughts about how they performed in their field placement and in their student community. It sought to get the students to self-assess their roles in these teams, as well as, the larger community of Winslow. One student described the role of caretaker in the beginning, which seemed to continue as time progressed. Another described roles in terms of task orientation, which remained consistent throughout the experience, which is an outcome that might be expected. Another group of students were able to define their task roles well initially, but by the end of the process, they described a combination of task and group roles. From family roles to group roles was the transition for these students. Some stated the roles were not clear and indicated that they would have preferred more structure, while others thrived on the challenges of the unknown. There were several self-proclaimed leaders in the groups and though these are characteristics most often described by the other students as problematic, they can be very positive in the practice of community development. The main result presented as a feeling of achievement and, even though the students may have seen their roles as static and not changing much, they related that the roles they assumed were more beneficial due to the experience.

The goal of self-assessment continued as students began to look inward for the answers and discover what it was about them that enhanced this experience. The data showed evidence of a difference in thinking related to the concept of responsibility as applied to self, other individuals, and communities. The process of learning as evidenced by self-report showed an eagerness to

learn and grow as a student community. They recognized and confronted some of their own behaviors and applied the needed changes. The nature of the Winslow experience allowed for this self-evaluation to take place through the challenges faced outside the comfort zone of home, time spent in contemplation in the desert, and in personal meetings with Dr. Eldridge. The reported values remained consistent throughout the experience and the student's were able to apply these to the experience without much conflict. There was reported insight into recognizing their limitations and utilizing the strengths of others as a way of maintaining balance. Other characteristics were the ability to be flexible and remain strength based, openness, seeing humor and caring about others, putting strengths into action, utilizing self as a tool, and acceptance of the opinion of others.

When stated their goals and evaluated them, the data indicated patterned wishes to be more active and social, and less withdrawn, along with goals related to an inner sense of peace and self-nurturing. The opportunity to challenge self in such a way as to take some new risks, learning to live with and get along with the group, and interacting with people from Hispanic and Native American cultures were goals that were achieved. Some students had seen the initial goals as being different somehow then the outcomes, but the transition process suggests the outcomes and goals were not different at all. The ability to learn about ones' self and apply this knowledge was a positive outcome of this field experience; and the experience provided a means for self-assessment and change and, in the process, challenged assumptions and concepts that interns brought into the experience. The work related to "just getting along" with others in the group environment was challenging in itself while the students reported that the greatest challenges were dealing with their own agendas. The Winslow experience provided a catalyst for solidifying the blend of students and the cultures that they were involved in, and the process of identifying their roles and goals helped them identify insights gained and the changes made.

The final question allowed students to add any final comments to the experience. Closure and the ability to gain a synopsis of the student's feelings was the desire. Some of the feelings shared focused on relationships among group members. The most positive note was that the students were able to recognize their own potential and the importance of the learning experience as a whole. Many of them described the experience as rewarding, challenging, fulfilling and, had met their expectations. One student related satisfaction with the experience and rated it as the greatest of their life. They agreed that they were able to learn more about self in the process of dealing with others in the group, and these relationships were their greatest challenges at times. There was an expressed need for more prior training, which might have enhanced the preparation for this experience, including prior coursework on the local culture and customs, theory and method of community development, and race and ethnicity coursework that includes more focus on Hispanic American and Native American information. The strength of the group experience and the process of applying personal growth and experiential learning to personal and professional settings were follow-up goals for some of the students. The students as a whole reported that their coursework in this area was limited to race with little focus on cultures.

Project Directors' Narrative

The Project Director, William D. Eldridge, Ph.D. was asked by the researcher to narratively address four content areas in a review of the two-year Winslow Project, including the impact on

the community of Winslow and the future of social work in terms of such projects. The four content areas were knowledge of community, knowledge of community development, cohort development among the students, and community outcomes.

The response to this topic area indicated there is no better way to "learn very quickly about a community other than actually living in the community." This data suggests that the knowledge of community continues far beyond the Winslow experience and many of the students supported this in their responses to the questionnaires. One point made in the interview was that if the project continued it would include "story telling" about the community as an introduction to Winslow. This situation would include ten or fifteen people invited to come together and tell the Winslow story; the students and possibly other people in the community could be the audience. As they relate their story through pictures, videos, audiotapes, narrative, or anecdotal discussions the knowledge of community enhances. Knowledge about community and community involvement are synonymous terms when viewed from a pragmatic perspective, as are social work and community ideologies. Another salient point is the need for concentrations in community development at schools of social work. Because the students "really don't have any knowledge of community development," it was necessary to teach a concurrent course while they were on-site, although they need far better preparation in terms of the theory and methodology of community practice. The ideal would be to move community development and community theory academic courses to the first-year and then have second year students involved in Winslow type field placements. There is agreement that if this would most likely contradict CSWE requirements that the first year placement be generic, while the second year placement is specific. However, it was concluded, "a community development placement is very clearly an example of generalist practice." The ideal would be to have generalist practice orientation be part of the second year scenario, which provides students the opportunity to complete courses in community development and community practice in the first year. Finally, "the greatest advantage of community practice outcomes is start up activities, followed in subsequent years by more comprehensive work putting icing on the various components of the cake that are built in previous sessions." It is important to finish what we start and this requires follow-up. The follow-up could utilize telephone interviews, e-mail, the Internet, or other means of contact. Follow-up community evaluation, "particularly when you have a neighborhood association that is built (like LaFamilia in Winslow) comes through a local indigenous organization that remains after the students depart." The continuation of the projects and activities initiated by the students while in Winslow are evidence of positive outcomes as well.

Promoting community-based experiences in social work education is important and exemplified within the primary service interventions for the Winslow project. All the information presented points to the fact that these students benefited from the Winslow experience in many ways. Learning to work as team members and challenging themselves in a new environment was an important element of their learning. This study investigated the concepts of community, community development, and social work in communities. In the processes of analyzing the experiences of the twenty-one students, the research questions acted as filters for the information. The following includes a summary of each research question and student responses.

First, are there any differences in feelings/attitudes for the students taking part in this field placement experience? The narrative responses of the students support this outcome and suggest

that students gained knowledge during their experience. Secondly, many reported that they would practice social work differently because of the impact of this experience, and many reported they would repeat this experience again if given the chance. This is a testimonial to this experience repeated many times during the interview process with both cohorts. Third, what is the Program Director's evaluation of the student's progress and the project? As was presented in the Program Director's narrative there are many benefits to this type of placement, including service delivery to communities along with personal & cohort development among interns. The need for more support and community focus at schools of social work was also postulated. The impact of this type of training is supported in the data presented.

Implications

Review of Study

Because the profession of social work has a longstanding relationship with community-based practices, community development and strengthening the bonds that support families and communities; students of social work could benefit from training within the community-based environment, as with the training received in the Winslow Project.

Attitudes and feelings

The narrative analysis of the questionnaire data sustained the reported differences in student feelings about themselves, the members of their group, and about the people and community of Winslow, where students believed that they were not only meeting their initial expectations but also exceeding them by the end of their experience. Both groups of students indicated better communication skills, assertiveness skills, cultural awareness, relationship skills, social work practice skills, community development experience, self-awareness, spiritual growth, emotional growth, and general well being. As these are all related to self-growth, awareness, and social functioning they fit very nicely with the research question related to personal and professional growth.

Social Work knowledge

Students saw their group as a community early on and presented this with all of the characteristics and roles that one might expect in a community. It was during this process that the concept of the student groups as a community began to develop and expand for both cohorts, suggesting the validity of the common Winslow internship experience. The student's concepts of community expanded, and developed through the Winslow experience, including, growing cohesiveness of the groups, and struggles with their concepts of what community should be. They reported achievement and growth as the result of the relationships they formed, whereby constant contact with their group members was an essential element to the community identity and each person's identity as a member of that community. The concept of family, advocacy, social action, interdependency, location, common goals, the group as a community, and the ability to be tolerant of others were positive outcomes of this experience. Their insight into the dynamics of community practice increased through the various experiences that were taking place.

The concept of measuring how students feel about their field placements is not new. The importance here is that as these students were involved in many field placements in and around the Winslow community, though they were all related to one actual community placement. In reviewing the data it appears that the ability to learn about ones' self and apply this knowledge is a positive outcome of the Winslow experience. The students suggested they "had been forever changed" through this experience and, that they would practice social work differently as a result. The students in both cohorts suggested that this experience provided a means for self-assessment and change and, their involvement was rewarding, challenging, and fulfilling and as having met and exceeded their expectations. The community development course that was part of their field instruction was highly rated, though all agreed that coursework integrated into their first year curriculum would have enhanced this curriculum.

Project Director's Evaluation

The final area for review here is the project directors' thoughts related to the experience of the students. It is important to note that this data closely mirrors the reported experiences of the students. The "group-block" field placement experience is a positive experiential method for training future community-oriented social work practitioners, and the profession of social work must be responsible for encouraging this opportunity. It was postulated that because social work includes theoretical frameworks from various disciplines and paradigms including but not limited to, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science that this phenomenon helps define social work as a profession.

Conclusions

The Winslow project was a generalist approach with a community involvement commitment. It is from this focus on social action, social change, and community development that the study is presented. The conclusion is that social work as a profession has linkages to community practice and the practice of community development. The results of this study provide the following

- There are perceived differences related to how these students perceive community because of this experience.
- There are differences reported in insight and/or knowledge base in reference to social work in community on the part of the students involved.
- The social work students were provided with a well-defined concept of group and community practice.

They were indoctrinated in the theories involved with group and community contexts and this was clearly established in the training and educational component they received during their experience.

- Their training in community practice through working as a community in the community appears to have influenced their self-reported enhancement as practicing social workers.
- The students reported that they are better able to connect theory, practice, and research because of their field training activities.
- Community oriented field placements is an important method for this training.

- The block-group field experience method is a positive alternative to other more traditional training agency based models.
- These alternative training opportunities need to be available as community practice and demand for trained social workers grows.
- These options can be excellent training activities for students and outcomes from these can have far reaching positive influences on the profession of social work.

Providing social work intervention practices in the community is paramount to the further development of social work as a profession. It will also provide support and encouragement for communities to provide these supportive services within the community context. Social work history is rich with the type of models necessary for this to occur.

Final Thoughts

The study has provided information that can guide and suggest changes in curriculum for schools of social work. The development and provision of community practice programs or concentrations is timely for the social work profession. The struggle related to forces within the profession that requires one to choose between focusing on individual change or working as an advocate for social change must be resolved. Schools of social work need to place greater emphasis on social work practice in communities. This community orientation is needed in today's complicated practice environment. There are some salient points made here and they are as follows

- Schools of social work should provide quality-learning experiences, which incorporate community into the social work educational process, the classroom instruction, and into field placements.
- Schools of social work might need to consider setting up their own field units (agency) rather than relying on outside agencies for placement opportunities.
- Schools of social work should promote community development on the part of their students.

The focus on community will help students to prepare for professional roles.

These points are supported through the study and are congruent with the research hypothesis which indicates that community based training is important to social work education and to the profession of social work.

There is a need for development of an expanded community-oriented focus in social work education and more specifically in field instruction. The field placement experience is and has been the cornerstone of the graduate level social work preparation as has been implied and supported. The process of developing new social workers within this conceptual context lies in community-based field experiences. The community-based training experience should be a priority for schools of social work. Development of alternative learning experiences will provide greater opportunities for social work students in their preparation and entry into the professional roles as social workers. Traditionally schools of social work have relied on external agencies for placing students for field experience. This results in a detachment of the school from the

community in which they exist. The suggestion that schools of social work become their own agencies would allow schools to become more directly involved in their local communities. Community development programs are on the cutting edge of social work practice and that it is encouraging to see innovative schools of social work developing field-training experiences that include alternative models. The body of knowledge in social work includes solid theoretical foundations in community practice. In fact, much of the foundation coursework for BSW and MSW programs according to the CSWE adhere to these theoretical roots.

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