The Gatekeeper and the Wounded Healer

Cheryl Regehr
Carol A. Stalker
Marilyn Jacobs
William Pelech

ABSTRACT. Schools of social work and field practice educators are jointly charged with the responsibility of being gatekeepers of the profession. While screening of individuals who present with attitudes and behaviors that are incompatible with social work practice at the time of admission may be preferable, often it is in the field practicum where problems surface. This study attempts to identify students at potential risk through a content analysis of personal statements prepared by candidates for admission to an MSW program. Issues identified include: a focus on personal histories of abuse, injustice, or neglect and plans to work with other persons with similar experiences. Implications for field practice education are discussed. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Wounded healer, student, supervisor, field practicum, gatekeeping

Cheryl Regehr, MSW, PhD, is Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, 246 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5A 1S1.
Carol A. Stalker, MSW, PhD, is Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3C4.
Marilyn Jacobs, MSW, is University Secretary, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3C4.
William Pelech, MSW, is Assistant Professor, University of Calgary, 2500 University Ave NW, Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4.

The Clinical Supervisor, Vol. 20(1) 2001
© 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.
Each year a small number of individuals who are later judged to be unsuitable for professional practice are admitted to university programs which train helping professionals. In social work programs, this unsuitability is most commonly identified as stemming from (a) failure to adhere to social work values and ethics, (b) mental health disturbances and/or substance abuse, and (c) poor performance in the practicum involving problems forming relationships and/or a lack of respect or tolerance for personal and cultural differences (Kcorin & Miller, 1995). Despite the fact that students with these difficulties constitute a very small proportion of the total student body, the challenges they present can consume great amounts of time and energy. While faculty members may be confronted with the student’s difficulties when observing behaviour in the classroom or when reviewing academic work, many of these problems do not become evident until the field practicum. It is, therefore, most often the field supervisor who is faced with identifying and confronting dysfunctional behaviour and attitudes, working with the student to overcome deficits, and alerting the faculty liaison to the difficulties which are being presented.

Both faculty members and field supervisors experience internal conflict when, as educators with social work values, judgements must be made about the professional suitability of other individuals. On one hand, faculty and field instructors are committed to the social work principles of acceptance of others, of validating worth and right to self-determination of all individuals, of identifying strengths in people, and of recognizing the ability of all human beings to grow and change. On the other hand, they have the responsibility to protect future clients from those who may see themselves as competent social workers, but who may have ethical or cultural attitudes, and/or psychological or interpersonal difficulties which result in harm to clients. Despite the desire to support and encourage students who present with difficulties, ultimately, faculty members and field supervisors are jointly charged with the responsibility of being gatekeepers of the profession.

Research findings regarding factors that influence the choice of social work as a profession have implications for the gatekeeping function and illuminate the complexity involved in fulfilling this function well and equitably. Some authors suggest that the major determinant of social work as a career choice is a value system that is consistent with the social work mandate of assisting the disadvantaged of
society (Butler, 1990; Segal, 1992). Others argue that the motivation to pursue social work as a career frequently stems from personal experiences of hardship, a view which is supported by considerable empirical evidence. The theme of the “wounded-healer” is very common in the personal stories of members of all of the helping professions, including social workers (Maeder, 1989). In a study of 1,577 social workers, Lackie (1983) found that a “plurality” described themselves as “the parentified child, the over responsible member, the mediator or go-between, the ‘good’ child, the burden bearer” (p. 310). Studies have shown that social work students are more likely to report problems such as alcoholism and mental illness within their families of origin than are students in other programs (Rompf & Royce, 1994; Russel, Gill, Coyne, & Woody, 1993; Marsh, 1988; Black, Jeffreys & Hartley, 1993), and that social work students are more likely to report a history of sexual abuse and other early life traumatic experiences such as death of a family member, early separation from parents, and having a family member who is a victim of a violent act or who commits suicide (Black et al. 1993; Russel et al., 1993; Vincent, 1996). Family of origin dysfunction may be even more pronounced in males in the profession (Lackie, 1983).

Rompf and Royce (1994) wisely point out that such findings should not be “misconstrued as evidence that social work students are drawn to the profession because of their own mental health problems” (p. 169). The data from these studies do not address issues of competence or health but rather indicate that such family experiences contribute to the choice of career. They also argue that some benefits (in terms of becoming a social worker) may come from growing up in a dysfunctional family, such as knowledge of the social service system and roles of social workers, the ability to relate to clients who are distressed, knowledge of effective coping strategies, and enhanced empathy and sensitivity. On the other hand, research supporting the conclusion that early life disruption and trauma are risk factors for maladaptive adult functioning (van der Kolk, Hostetler, Herron, & Fisler, 1994; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) would lead us to expect that some proportion of students with histories of early trauma will experience difficulties in their adult lives, including performance in the role of professional helper. The implications for social work education are clear: social work students who have had difficult life experiences may require help to recognize, acknowledge, and work through their feelings.
in order to avoid imposing their issues on clients. Russel et al. (1993) argue that schools of social work need to identify students with significant problems, and provide needed support, referral for therapy, and, in some instances, encouragement to withdraw from social work education either temporarily or permanently.

Since students who are admitted to schools of social work usually graduate (Carbino & Morganbesser, 1982; Hepler & Noble, 1990), the admissions process should, ideally, be the primary point for maintaining quality control in social work. However, not only are judgments made at admission imperfectly, but gatekeeping at this stage is challenging because of legal requirements and repercussions. For instance, the implications of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) on admissions decisions are unclear. Cole and Lewis (1993) note that this act prohibits preadmission inquiries regarding disability, and that, while a person who engages in the illegal use of drugs is not considered a disabled person under the act, a person who is currently in a rehabilitation program or who has completed such a program is considered to be a person with a disability and cannot legally be refused admission to an educational institution for that reason alone. On the other hand, Cole (1991) suggests that the American courts have recognized the responsibility of professional schools to determine the suitability of persons to engage in professional careers, and are reluctant to intervene in academic matters “unless there is suspicion that the decisions were made arbitrarily” (p. 20). Furthermore, court decisions have suggested that educational institutions, and especially professional programs, may have the right to refuse admission to individuals whose handicap or disability is likely to pose a significant risk of harm to themselves or others (Cole, 1991). Cole advises, however, that schools and departments of social work “would do well to provide applicants an opportunity to challenge the appropriateness of criteria in individual cases” (p. 22). Consequently, excluding individuals who report a history of substance abuse, early trauma, or family of origin dysfunction on the assumption that these experiences may lead to difficulties in the performance of the role of professional helper would be both a misinterpretation of the research findings and would quite likely be illegal.

In the midst of being called upon to make decisions regarding students who have evoked serious concern in the classroom or the field, many social work educators have asked whether the problem could have been identified at an earlier stage or whether there is a
better and less painful way to fulfill the gatekeeping function. In response to this kind of experience, the authors decided to investigate whether factors that can be identified in student application materials can predict later student performance in a two year MSW program. This paper reports the results of the second component of a two-part study. The second component involved a content analysis of the personal statements of applicants later identified as experiencing problems in the MSW program and a comparison of themes identified in their personal statements with those of students who were not so identified. The findings have implications for screening during admissions processes and, secondarily, for field supervision when students are admitted who present with attitudes and behaviours which are incompatible with social work practice.

The first component of the study looked at data from admissions material that could be quantified, such as age and gender, grade point average (GPA), and social service related experience (Pelech, Stalker, Regehr, & Jacobs, 1999). Twenty-four students, out of a total of 235, were identified by faculty as eliciting concern (method for identification is discussed below). These students were more likely to be male, were, on average, older than other students, had lower undergraduate GPAs, and had significantly more social service related work experience than non-identified students.

METHOD

The research design of this component involved an analysis of the content and quality of writing of the personal statements of 45 students, 21 of which came from the admission files of students who were identified as experiencing problems in the program, and 24 of which were not identified. In order to identify students perceived as experiencing difficulty, all faculty members and the Director of the Practicum were given a list of the students registered in the two year graduate program over a three year period (total population 235 students). These individuals were asked to independently identify those students who had experienced any of the following four problems:

1. Placement Breakdown—those students who experienced a placement breakdown because of difficulty in adapting to the practice setting or the expectations of the field instructor.
2. Extended Practicum—those students who were required to complete an extended practicum because of concerns identified by the field instructor, the faculty liaison, or both.

3. Poor Academic Performance—those students who had difficulty performing academically as demonstrated by such behaviors as repeatedly handing in assignments well past the due date or submitting assignments of poor academic quality.

4. Problems in Interpersonal Relationships—those students who elicited concern because of significant problems in interpersonal relationships observed in the classroom or in the practicum.

Faculty members were asked to refrain from discussing their selection with others, and the names of the identified students were received by the Admissions Coordinator. Only those students who were identified by two or more faculty members were deemed "identified students" and the names of these students were known only by the Admissions Coordinator and the Research Assistant. These cases were identified by number to guard against unnecessary disclosure of the names of the identified students. To create the comparison group, the identified students' admissions files were removed, and 24 files were randomly selected from all the remaining admission files.

The MSW application form in the program requests that the applicants discuss the following topics in a personal statement: (1) reasons for pursuing professional graduate education in social work; (2) how applicant's interest in social work has developed; (3) significant relationships (e.g., those with family, work associates, friends); (4) a current social problem; and (5) strengths and weaknesses related to the practice of social work. Students vary in their approaches to this task. Some applicants clearly organize the statements around the five topics; others choose a less structured format. These statements are then included in the ranking by faculty members regarding the applicant's suitability for the program.

In this component of the study, faculty members in the clinical concentration, with a combined clinical experience of over 40 years, served as readers of the personal statements. The readers began by independently reviewing five randomly selected personal statements in a search for categories or themes that emerged from the statements, and which they thought might discriminate applicants who would later be identified as having difficulties in the MSW program from those
who would not. They were blind as to whether the personal statements were from the identified or non-identified group. They then consulted with one another regarding the themes and categories that each had identified in the five statements they had read. From that discussion, the following nine categories were chosen as potentially relevant: quality of writing; descriptions of attachment/family of origin; personal experience of injustice/member of group treated unjustly; concern about injustice against others; explaining poor (previous) grades; previous lack of academic focus; possible issues with authority/accepting limitations; awareness of strengths and weaknesses; reference to personal therapy. These categories were listed on a standard comment sheet. Another five personal statements were randomly selected and read by both readers. The comments that each had written on the comment sheets were compared as a test for agreement, and the coding regarding the nine categories was found to be very similar. The remaining personal statements were then divided between the two readers and coded according to the nine categories. Readers also noted additional comments that did not fall under the existing categories. After studying each statement, each reader predicted whether the student who wrote the personal statement would be later classified as having problems in the program or not.

The blind condition was then removed, and the readers were made aware by coded number, which statements were written by identified students and which were not. The rate of accurate prediction was calculated and the comment sheets were reviewed and analyzed.

RESULTS

As previously mentioned, 24 students were identified by at least two faculty members as eliciting concern because of the criteria described above. However, personal statements were missing for three of these students. Therefore, 21 identified and 24 non-identified students were included in this analysis.

Prediction of Applicants to Assigned Group

As might be expected, the ability of the readers to accurately predict the later assignment of the applicant from the reading of the personal statement only was not perfect. A problem in calculating this accuracy was that, although the names of the applicants had been removed from
the statements, a few (especially the identified students) were recognizable to the readers because of classroom or field related interactions that had included some sharing of personal experiences. Consequently, for these statements, the reader had more information on which to make her prediction than she had for those she did not recognize. Therefore, the prediction figures are presented with the caution that readers who had no contact with the students may not have been able to predict as large a number as was done in this instance. To avoid this problem, readers would have to be persons other than faculty members.

Sixteen of the 21 (76%) identified students were correctly predicted to be assigned to the identified status. Due to the recognition of issues presented in the personal statement, the readers were fairly certain of the identity of seven of these students. When the students who could be identified were excluded, the rate of correct prediction falls to 64%, which is only marginally better than chance. Nineteen of the 24 (79%) non-identified students were also correctly predicted. The readers recognized only two of the non-identified students.

Comparison of Categories

The findings are discussed under eight of the nine categories initially hypothesized to be relevant in terms of later being identified as experiencing difficulties in the MSW program. Table 1 summarizes the ratings on each category for both student groups. The category “possible issues with authority/accepting limitations” proved not to be a common theme in more than one or two of the personal statements and was, therefore, excluded.

Although quotations from the personal statements would more adequately illustrate the differences between the two groups of personal statements, in order to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the students, only the descriptions of the differences are presented. Statistical tests have not been applied to the data, as such tests would imply a degree of precision that is premature. Statistical analysis has, therefore, been postponed until a larger sample is obtained, perhaps including data from another educational setting.

Quality of Writing/Focus of Writing

The quality of writing did not easily differentiate the two groups, as it was judged to be adequate or excellent in 67% of the identified
TABLE 1. Comparison of Personal Statements of Identified Students and Non-Identified Students on Selected Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Identified Students N=21</th>
<th>Non-identified Students N=24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- average to excellent quality of writing</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- focus on own issues</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of attachment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reference</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those described, Positive family of origin</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early difficulties</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- parent alcoholic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- incest/sexual abuse Hx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- orphaned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience of injustice/abuse/neglectmisfortune/disorder</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- former alcoholic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- abused wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- incest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- learning disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- &quot;victim of upbringing&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern About Injustice Towards Others (Not Own Struggles)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining poor marks</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of focus</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Strengths and Weaknesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No weaknesses mentioned</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns by reader</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported receiving personal therapy</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

students and in 88% of non-identified students. Both groups of students demonstrated some errors in spelling and grammar. A few of the identified students demonstrated some additional problems such as cramped presentation, unclear statements, and poor organization.

The focus of writing was somewhat more likely to be associated with identified student status. Identified students were more likely (24% comp-
ared to 13% of the non-identified students) to focus on their own histories of misfortune and abuse throughout the statement. These personal histories included having an alcoholic parent, having a parent who was a survivor of political detention and torture, being a victim of sexual abuse, experiencing a disability, having had psychiatric treatment and having an inadequately treated medical problem resulting in significant anger and marital discord. These painful experiences were perceived by the applicants as contributing to the pursuit of social work as a profession. For two of the students who were later identified as having problems, the readers commented on a narcissistic or grandiose tone to their statements, while the readers did not record this comment about any of the statements of the non-identified students.

Descriptions of Attachment/Family of Origin

Although it is suggested on the application form that applicants discuss family relationships they consider significant in their lives, approximately one quarter of students in both groups (24% of the identified group and 21% of the non-identified group) made no reference to early life attachments in their personal statement. On the other hand, 54% percent of the non-identified students described specific family of origin experiences using positive words like “loving,” “open” and “supportive” to characterize their parents and families. They also described experiences where they felt unconditional love or were taught that maintaining relationships was more important than other issues. They indicated that they saw these experiences as shaping their personalities and contributing to their choice of profession. Many recognized that they had lived lives of privilege in terms of race or class.

In contrast, while 38% of identified students also specifically described positive family life experiences, 43% of the identified group pointed to earlier difficulties. Four identified students reported personal experiences of parental rejection and neglect. These students identified issues of parental alcoholism, emotional distance, and psychological damage. In turn, these students believed these experiences led them to become overly responsible, to be unable to have satisfying relationships with others, and/or to have their own struggles with substance abuse. Two other students described significant adult relationships only in terms of the ways these individuals had helped them heal from the pain of childhood experiences.

A smaller proportion (21%) of non-identified students also de-
scribed early life difficulties. However, they were more likely to speak of strong relationships in childhood which helped them through the hardship. Two students described difficult relationships with their fathers related to alcoholism, abandonment, and/or severe criticism but also described positive relationships with other family members. Of these, one student discussed a personal process of healing through other significant relationships and religious convictions.

**Personal Experiences of Injustice/Abuse/Neglect/Misfortune**

One of the categories identified in the initial reading of the personal statements was reference to personal experiences of injustice, abuse, neglect, stigmatization or misfortune, and/or a sense that one was a member of a group that was discriminated against or treated unjustly. Sixty-two percent of the identified students described such experiences. They included being sexually abused as a child, being an abused wife, being discriminated against and misunderstood because of mental health problems, and having an undiagnosed learning disorder. Further experiences included discrimination as a result of having a disabled family member and having a partner with a life-threatening illness.

A smaller proportion (17%) of the non-identified students also referred to personal experiences of injustice, neglect, and misfortune. One referred to being the target of ridicule, social isolation, and institutional mistreatment as a young unmarried mother many years previously. Another referred to the discrimination suffered as a disabled person. One non-identified student spoke of how the experience of having an inflexible parent had contributed to later difficulties in school and in marriage, and the same person in adulthood experienced a disabling injury. The fourth felt victimized by change when laid off from a job.

**Concern About Injustice Towards Others**

Many of the students in both groups expressed a wish to help others encountering troubles that were similar to their own. The ability of students to articulate concern for the plight of others which was independent of their own history of hardship was examined. Forty-eight percent of the identified students and 67% of the non-identified students did indicate such concern. Students in both groups spoke eloquently and knowledgeably about their concern for foster children,
members of First Nations groups, street youths, refugees, and people with mental illnesses who become caught in the criminal justice system. Alternately, some identified students wrote only of issues such as co-dependence and marital breakdown as significant social problems.

Academic Concerns

As poor undergraduate grades were associated with problems in the MSW program in the previous study (Pelech, Stalker, Regehr, & Jacobs, 1999), personal statements were examined to determine whether students felt the need to justify poor undergraduate grades. In fact, only 14% of the identified students did address poor grades. One reported having a diagnosis of learning disability that affected undergraduate grades. Another student argued that the GPA should not negatively influence the merit of the application, as courses had been selected to achieve a good foundation in important areas, and the student implied that others chose courses simply to get good grades. This applicant carefully outlined recent achievements that demonstrated the ability to do well in graduate school. Another identified student said that it was only in later life that an enjoyable and interesting topic of study was found and, therefore, better marks would now be achieved than in the past. Only one non-identified student argued that he or she had the intellectual ability, but was misunderstood in school.

A second academic-related issue that was suggested by the data was previous difficulty or obstacles to identifying a satisfying occupation as demonstrated by multiple previous academic degrees or careers. In fact, 29% of the identified students and only 8% of the non-identified students had mixed academic and occupational backgrounds.

Awareness of Strengths and Weaknesses

Forty-three percent of the identified students and 29% percent of the non-identified students discussed their strengths but did not mention weaknesses. Possible concerns were noted by the readers in response to 29% of the identified students’ personal statements and in response to 13% of the statements of non-identified students. The concerns noted for identified students included statements where weaknesses such as "the tendency to over-identify with clients" were mentioned. Another identified student indicated that previous life issues had interfered with work, and a third indicated that there had been previous difficulties finishing papers to meet deadlines. In some cases,
perceived strengths were also viewed by the readers as potentially problematic. One student described having social and intellectual abilities of an exceedingly rare quality, and another suggested that a strength was in the ability to be focused and "visionary." In contrast, non-identified students tended to describe the development of their strengths through interpersonal encounters and educational experiences. These students included among their strengths "the belief in justice . . . and the resilience of the human character," creativity, empathy, energy, and an enthusiasm for new learning. One non-identified applicant innovatively reframed the question about strengths and weaknesses to one regarding personality characteristics that were perceived as "useful in social work" and "less than useful."

Personal Therapy

Personal therapy can be an important learning experience for individuals wishing to help others. Fifty-seven percent of the identified students and 25% of the non-identified students discussed their own experiences with therapy. The identified students had received treatment for previously mentioned problems such as substance abuse and the after-effects of childhood sexual abuse. One applicant indicated continuing to see a psychiatrist for mental health issues, and another had been a member for many years of an organization which focused on facilitating self-discovery.

Six of the applicants in the non-identified group also mentioned having sought some form of therapy. For four, the presenting problem was marital difficulties, one had discussed some personal issues with a supervisor, and a final applicant had obtained assistance from a spiritual advisor.

DISCUSSION

As one might expect, a specific list of characteristics that describe the personal statements of students who may later encounter difficulties in their graduate social work studies could not be identified. However, the findings do suggest that there may be qualitative differences between the personal statements of some students who are later seen as having difficulties and those who are not so perceived. In many cases, the differences are quite subtle, and, in a few, no differences are detected. Nevertheless, applicants with a history of significant difficulties in early
life, particularly experiences involving abuse, injustice, or neglect, who tend to focus their personal statements around these experiences and whose plan is to work with other persons with similar experiences may be at greater risk for such difficulties than others. The findings of this phase of the study, especially in combination with the results of the quantitative component which suggested that students in difficulty were more likely to be male, older than other students, have lower GPA's on entry, and have more previous social service experience (Pelech, Stalker, Regehr, & Jacobs, 1999), do provide some ideas for consideration by those who are responsible for admissions decisions.

However, assuming that the faculty members who served as readers are representative of other faculty members, it is clear that they were far from perfect at identifying students who may potentially present problems by their admission data alone. Further, it is not reasonable to exercise the gatekeeping function by systematically excluding applicants on the basis of the above criteria. Since all students admitted to the program had, at minimum, a B average as undergraduates, students in the program were not likely to be identified as unsuitable solely on the basis of classroom performance. The field practice supervisor is often left with the vital role of identifying the problems, supporting students in the process of growth and change, and, perhaps ultimately, recommending that a student does not pass the practicum. What then are the implications for field practice supervisors in performing this function?

Early models of field supervision focused on the personal growth and self-awareness of the student. Supervision examined the internalized and externalized manifestations of the student’s experience and dealt with the student’s emotional issues as they interfered with learning. Students were encouraged to be reflective and to disclose their own personal issues (Hamilton, 1954). These approaches were highly criticized as being intrusive and stressful for the student (Rosenblatt & Mayer, 1975) and were, therefore, abandoned in favor of other models (Winjberg & Schwartz, 1977; Rogers & McDonald, 1995). Subsequent models of supervision have focused on the identification and development of specific skills, for instance, in competency-based and task-centered instruction (Larsen, 1980) and in solution-focused supervision (Rita, 1998). In addition, self-directed adult learning has become an important addition to social work supervision. In this approach, student needs are identified through a process of self-appraisal, and the field
The supervisor acts as a facilitator of the learning process (Knowles, 1972). The field instructor is expected to respect the student's prior experience and knowledge yet engage the student in an equal process of establishing and evaluating the student's learning needs.

While the skills-based and adult learning models have much to offer field practice education, they often do not address students who present with interpersonal or psychological problems which interfere with social work practice. This has caused some authors (Bogo, 1993; May & Kilpatrick, 1989) to argue that while social work should not return to quasi-therapeutic models of supervision, supervisors are remiss in not considering educational approaches which include the student's subjective experience. In order to develop a professional self that is congruent with the personal self, students must be provided with opportunities to reflect upon and examine strong personal reactions to clinical situations and be assisted to deal with the stress of this self-reflection (Bogo, 1993; May & Kilpatrick, 1989). From this perspective, field instruction itself is seen as a helping relationship (Fox, 1998) and a process which should parallel clinical practice (Kahn, 1979; Brashears, 1995). While this process may be uncomfortable for all students, it can be painful and disruptive for students with interpersonal or intrapsychic difficulties. Consequently, these students require experienced supervisors who can provide support yet maintain clear professional boundaries required to perform other supervisory functions.

Due to the drain on resources and the emotional burden to both students and field instructors of dealing with personality patterns and beliefs incompatible with social work practice, schools of social work must continue to search for admission screening methods that identify those who should not be admitted without excluding those who have much to offer the profession. At present, however, it appears that even with the most careful and thoughtful screening of applicants, a percentage of students will continue to be admitted who later experience difficulties in the field practicum. Procedures must be in place to deal with students admitted to social work programs who present with the potential for problems. Increased communication between faculty members and field practicum directors may lead to early identification of students at risk. Additional research that identifies features of these students is important to increase the specificity and decrease the arbitrary nature of this process. Students identified as being at risk for problems in the field should then be matched with highly skilled and
experienced field instructors capable of identifying issues and guiding students to address them. Schools of social work must be prepared to provide ongoing support for students and supervisors engaged in difficult processes during the practicum and ultimately work with field instructors in performing the gatekeeping function if the student is unable to overcome the problems. Efforts to develop standardized criteria for competence and failure need to continue (Coleman, Collins, & Aikins, 1995). Social work educators in both the schools and the field must persist in efforts to evaluate students in a manner that balances concern for the individual with the important responsibility of gatekeeping. The commitment to assist those in need must extend to students; however, the profession must take care not to place individual student needs over the safety of members of the communities that are served.

REFERENCES

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). Congress of the United States of America S.933


RECEIVED: 2/29/00
REVISED: 8/11/00
ACCEPTED: 8/23/00