SUPERVISING STUDENTS DEVELOPMENTALLY: EVALUATING A SEMINAR FOR NEW FIELD INSTRUCTORS

Kathleen Holtz Deal
University of Maryland, Baltimore

Jennifer A. Clements
Shippensburg University

This study compared 14 field instructors trained in a model based on understanding MSW students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral development and modifying their supervision to meet students' changing needs with a group of 24 untrained field instructors. T-test results suggest that students of trained field instructors were significantly more satisfied than students of those untrained with their field instructors' support and provision of specific, conceptually based feedback. Implications are discussed concerning the role of social work education programs in helping field instructors develop relevant educational skills.

FIELD INSTRUCTORS PROVIDE STUDENTS with arguably the most sustained individualized educational experience of their social work education, yet they often receive little training for this vital role (Abramson & Fortune, 1990; Raschick, Maypole, & Day, 1998). Social work experts in field education continue to mention training for field instructors, especially in learning theories, as a major gap (Raskin, 1983, 1994). Although social work practitioners can transfer some of their practice knowledge and skills to the new role of field instructor, the role also requires specialized knowledge and skills, such as how to structure supervision, provide effective feedback, establish learning objectives, and help students develop a professional identity (Caspi & Reid, 2002; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Borders (1992) describes learning to think like a supervisor as a cognitive shift from assuming a counseling role (focused on either facilitating the student's personal growth or indirectly treating the client through the student) to an educational role focused on the student's learning needs. Learning to become a field instructor entails developing a supervisory self, a process as complex as MSW students' development of a professional self (Reardon, 1988; Urdang, 1999).

Schools of social work typically offer new field instructors an orientation that addresses such areas as learning contracts, evaluations, the school's curriculum, and the transition from practitioner to educator (Lacerte & Ray, 1991). However, few models to train new field instructors have been fully developed and empirically tested. The only empirically tested seminar for new field instructors that was located included content on how to provide
a learning environment, develop a learning contract, conduct supervisory conferences, utilize process recordings, and establish expectations for student performance and evaluation (Abramson & Fortune, 1990). The seminar was evaluated by comparing data from students whose field instructors took part in the 10-session seminar with students of those field instructors who did not. According to student evaluations, trained field instructors differed significantly from those who were untrained in providing feedback on process recordings, linking process recordings to practice models, generating discussion of students' learning needs, and providing a more structured learning experience.

Some training models target a specific skill. Rogers and McDonald (1992) taught critical thinking skills to field instructors to help them conceptualize supervision in critically reflective ways and model reflective practice for their students. Field instructors completing this 10-week course scored higher on a standardized measure of critical thinking than a control group, but the study did not measure field instructors' actual supervisory performance. Other models have been developed to teach field instructors how to use single subject research designs (Doueck & Kasper, 1990), and decrease avoidant behaviors in addressing diversity issues (Armour, Bain, & Rubio, 2004). Raschick et al. (1998) based their field instructor training on teaching Kolb learning theory to assist field instructors in recognizing various learning styles and determining which teaching methods would be most effective with a student's particular style.

The training model used in this study is based on teaching field instructors how to identify affective, behavioral, and cognitive changes that MSW students typically undergo during the course of their social work education and how to modify their supervisory approach to meet students' changing educational needs. The only previous model (Reardon, 1988) located that taught field instructors the stages of MSW student development was based on Saari's (1989) model of clinical learning. Using supervisory vignettes pre- and post training Reardon found that, following six training sessions, field instructors were better able to assess student behaviors using a developmental framework, generate learning goals and strategies appropriate to students' developmental needs, and meet students' learning needs, rather than attempt to indirectly treat students' clients.

There is some support for the validity of using a developmental framework to understand how MSW students change during the course of their education. Such frameworks view students as typically following a sequence in responding to the emotional challenges of becoming a professional, in developing and refining their conceptual understanding of the helping process, and in improving their practice skills. In a study testing the validity of Saari's (1989) model, Platt (1993) found that, as predicted, beginning MSW students understood their clients and the helping process in global terms and tended to use concrete, action-oriented interventions such as providing advice and reassurance. As a result of further training and experience, students began to view their relationships with clients as more collaborative, eventually understanding helping as a process, while they concurrently formed more complex and differentiated conceptualizations of their clients. Using a synthesis of several develop-
mental theories (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Holman & Freed, 1987; Ralph, 1980; Saari, 1989; Stolttenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998), Deal (2000) found that, consistent with developmental perspectives, advanced students increasingly recognized and addressed interpersonal processes between themselves and their clients, differentiated their personal and professional selves, and increased their ability to attend to clients without intruding or imposing their own thoughts or ideas. Studies of students’ perceptions of and satisfaction with supervision have also found some indirect support for developmental models as shown in beginning MSW students’ desire for greater direction and advice (Knight, 2000; Strozier, Barnett-Queen, & Bennett, 2000) and advanced students’ interest in critiquing their own work, developing self-awareness, and addressing transference and countertransference issues (Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001; Strozier et al., 2000).

This article presents the results of a study evaluating the effectiveness of a model that educated new field instructors on understanding MSW students from a developmental perspective. Because, as indicated in the literature review, very few studies have tested the effectiveness of field instructor training, this exploratory study seeks to add to the literature on whether or not this area warrants further investigation. The article reports on triangulated data from three sources: field instructor responses to supervisory case vignettes, student reports of their satisfaction with their supervisory experience, and field instructor evaluations of the training seminar. The article presents comparative data between new field instructors who attended the seminar and a control group who did not receive the seminar training, as well as comparative data from students of both groups of field instructors. Implications for field instructor training are discussed.

Method

Procedure

Following approval by the University Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited in fall 2002 at orientation sessions for new field instructors from the University of Maryland, Baltimore. Attendees at orientation sessions were given information about the study and the seminar content by the first author. From the 59 field instructors who initially volunteered, 47 retained an interest in the study when subsequently contacted by telephone. An intervention group was composed of a convenience sample of all field instructors available to meet at the scheduled seminar times; following one participant’s early withdrawal from the study, this group consisted of 14 field instructors. Questionnaires were mailed to the remaining 33 interested volunteers; the 24 (72.7% return rate) field instructors who returned completed questionnaires constituted the control group. Members of the control group were offered the opportunity to participate in an identical seminar after the study’s completion.

Approximately 6 weeks after the end of the seminar, all students of the 38 study participants were contacted by letter by the first author, informed of their field instructor’s participation in the study, and asked to complete a questionnaire about their supervisory experience. Thirty-six participants supervised one student; the two remaining participants each supervised two students. In both instances where a field instructor supervised two students, one of their
students was randomly selected; both of these students returned questionnaires and were included in the study. All students who did not respond to the initial letter were sent a follow up letter. Thirteen students (92.9%) of field instructors in the intervention group and 20 students (83.3%) of field instructors in the control group returned completed questionnaires.

**Instruments**

*Field instructors.* Field instructors completed two survey instruments, both developed by the first author. The first instrument was a questionnaire accompanied by one of two hypothetical student vignettes and process recordings written to describe a typical foundation-year MSW student (Vignette A) or a typical advanced-year MSW student (Vignette B). Vignette A described a female student, placed in a medical hospital, who is highly anxious and concerned about saying and doing the “right thing.” Her process recording describes her efforts to help a woman, newly diagnosed with cancer, by following a set agenda and demonstrates difficulty being flexible in her approach and individualizing her responses based on the needs of this particular client. Vignette B describes a male student, placed in a multi-service agency for the elderly, who has had no previous experience with this population. His process recording describes efforts to help his elderly male client discuss the client’s concerns about his serious illness and his wife’s recent death. The process recording demonstrates this student’s ability to tolerate silences, stay with the client as he expresses feelings of guilt, and show some awareness of the interpersonal relationship developing between himself and the client. The vignettes and process recordings were based on developmental models of social work students (Holman & Freed, 1987; Saari, 1989) and other helping professionals (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Ralph, 1980; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

Prior to beginning the study, two field instructors familiar with these developmental models reviewed the vignettes and process recordings for content validity, resulting in changes that more fully reflected the developmental characteristics of students to be emphasized in the seminar. The questionnaire consisted of 12 open-ended questions covering the following areas: student’s level of training and rationale; process recording feedback; immediate supervisory goals and strategies; levels of support, structure, and autonomy recommended for the student; semester goals and strategies; and supervisory focus and rationale. A demographic questionnaire included information about field instructors’ previous supervisory experience and training.

The second instrument was an evaluation of the seminar that field instructors in the experimental group completed during the final seminar meeting. Field instructors used a rating scale (from 5=extremely useful to 1=not useful) to rate their satisfaction with the usefulness of seminar content and teaching methodologies. The evaluation included an open-ended question regarding field instructors’ use of information learned during the seminar.

*Students.* The third instrument was a questionnaire completed by students of field instructors participating in the study. This questionnaire was based on supervisory strategies recommended by the developmental models listed above as well as relevant items from previous studies of student satisfaction (Elli-
son, 1994; Fortune & Abramson, 1993; Knight, 1996; Lazar & Eisikovits, 1997). Students used a rating scale (from 5=very satisfied to 1=very dissatisfied) to rate 27 items that assessed their satisfaction with their field instructors’ educational approach. Students used the same rating scale to rate their satisfaction with their supervision's focus and their supervision overall; frequency of supervision was rated on a scale from 5=weekly to 1=never.

Data Collection

The study used a pretest–posttest experimental design. In early fall, prior to the beginning of the seminar, field instructors in both the intervention and control groups were mailed a vignette of a hypothetical MSW student, a process recording representing a client interview conducted by the student, and a questionnaire composed of the 12 open-ended questions as described above. Field instructors were randomly mailed either Vignette A or Vignette B along with a brief demographic questionnaire.

Field instructors in the intervention group then participated in a 12-hour seminar (four three-hour weekly sessions) co-led by the first author and the school of social work’s assistant director of field instruction. The seminar had a dual focus: (1) acquainting field instructors with MSW students’ normative affective, cognitive, and behavioral changes from entry to graduation; and (2) providing them with suggestions on how to modify their supervisory focus, structure, and teaching methodologies to address their students’ changing needs. Guidelines for supervisory meetings and written feedback on students’ process recordings were provided. A summary of the curriculum is provided in Table 1 (see Deal, 2002, for a full description of the seminar).

Posttests were administered at the end of the fall semester, 6 weeks after the completion of the seminar. Field instructors in both the intervention and control groups were mailed the second student vignette, process recording, and questionnaire using a crossover design to reduce the practice effect. Field instructors who received Vignette A as a pretest, received Vignette B as a posttest, and vice versa. At this same time, students of all field instructors participating in the study were mailed a questionnaire as described above.

Data Analysis

Data for this study were broken into three categories: student data, field instructor vignettes, and field instructor evaluations. The field instructor vignettes were evaluated using an independent two-person rating system. The two raters were experienced field instructors who followed a specific rating guide developed by the first author. Each field instructor’s response to each of the 12 questions was ranked with a score of 1 (barely minimal or no understanding), 2 (partial understanding), or 3 (clear understanding). The overall interrater agreement was 72.6% with 77.7% agreement on Vignette A and 68.0% agreement on Vignette B. All differences in ratings were discussed by the first author and the two raters until a consensus was reached. This decision was made prior to beginning the rating process, based on the use of an untested instrument and the higher degree of difficulty in achieving reliability when rating large units of text (e.g., paragraphs; Weber, 1985). Using SPSS 10.0 a MANOVA was performed to examine differences between pre- and posttest
TABLE 1. Summary of New Field Instructor Seminar Content

**Session 1**
- Composite model of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of beginning and advanced MSW students
  - Beginning students: high anxiety; dependent on field instructor; self-focus due to self-consciousness; concrete thinking leading to concrete interventions
  - Advanced students: decreased anxiety; ability to think in more complex, symbolic terms leading to increased complexity in understanding clients; ability to view client–worker relationship as interactional process; possible dependency–autonomy crisis
- Setting learning goals consistent with student stage of development
- Homework: Assess your student’s view of a client and her helping role.

**Session 2**
- Primary variables to consider in supervision: degree of structure, level of autonomy, focus (client, student, client–student relationship)
- Supervisory approaches and behaviors recommended for each stage of student development
  - Beginning students: Help student lower anxiety; provide high degree of structure; give advice and suggestions; provide rationale for why interventions did/did not work; keep supervision client focused; assign cases student can handle
  - Advanced students: Provide more complex observation on student’s work; help student identify underlying themes; include student’s reactions, countertransference, and relational processes in supervisory focus; allow for greater autonomy
- Applying principles of differential supervision to the supervisory conference
- Homework: Write case notes on your next supervisory session including goals, summary, and evaluation of your supervision.

**Session 3**
- Process Recording Guidelines describing beginning, middle, and advanced levels of 11 interviewing skills
  - Conveying empathy, moderating activity level, individualizing client, maintaining focus, demonstrating flexibility, understanding interpersonal processes, collaborating on goals, differentiating tasks and responsibilities, forming a positive bond, using self-disclosure appropriately, recognizing countertransference
- Using the Process Recording Guidelines to provide developmentally appropriate written and verbal feedback to students: practicing identifying levels of student skills; brainstorming responses
- Homework: Assess your student’s skill levels using one of her process recordings.

**Session 4**
- Review and integration of information from previous sessions
- Strategies to help students progress to the next developmental stage: using students’ realization that they do affect clients; timing the assignment of more difficult cases; promoting greater autonomy; consistently monitoring students’ work
- Effective field instructor behaviors that transcend students’ developmental stages based on findings from the extensive student satisfaction literature
- Seminar evaluation
scores between the control and intervention groups. The student data, which were collected in the form of rating scale items, were entered into SPSS and independent samples $t$ tests were completed on the items. Because of the innovative nature of the study and the small sample size, the use of several $t$ tests could be warranted despite increased Type I error rate (Stevens, 2002). The field instructor training evaluations were analyzed by calculating the mean scores of each individual item.

**Results**

**Field Instructor Data**

The field instructors who participated in the study had a mean age of 42.80 years ($SD = 8.74$) and an average of 11.67 years of experience as social workers ($SD = 7.24$). Similar to the student demographics, the field instructors were predominantly Caucasian (84.2%; $n = 32$) with the remainder of the group being African American (15.8%; $n = 6$). Gender was predominantly female (94.7%; $n = 36$) and males represented 5.3% of the sample ($n = 2$). Independent samples $t$ tests showed no significant differences between the control and intervention group with regard to age ($t = -1.10, p = .913$), and years of experience ($t = .018, p = .986$). In addition, a chi-square analysis showed no significant differences between the control and intervention group with regard to race ($\chi^2 = .038, p = .846$) and gender ($\chi^2 = .017, p = .896$) of the field instructors.

A MANOVA was performed to examine differences between the control and intervention groups in regards to pre- and posttest scores. Using pretest and posttest scores as the dependent variable, order effects were found between the intervention and control groups ($F(1, 30) = 41.734, p = .001$). The group effect ($F(1, 30) = .004, p = .951$) and the interaction effect of group by order ($F(1, 30) = .415, p = .525$) were both nonsignificant. The order in which the field instructors received the vignettes influenced the results. Scores on Vignette A were higher than scores on Vignette B regardless of whether Vignette A was completed before or after the intervention. It appears that the vignettes were not comparable, with the advanced student vignette (B) being more difficult to analyze. Overall 89.5% ($n = 34$) of the field instructors misidentified the B vignette as a foundation student. Therefore, scores of participants who received B first, then A at posttest, would show improvement regardless of their group assignments.

**MSW Student Data**

Students who participated in the study had an average age of 30.55 years ($SD = 10.73$). The enrollment status was fairly mixed with full-time advanced students comprising 36.6% of the sample ($n = 11$), full-time foundation students 33.3% ($n = 10$), part-time foundation students 26.7% ($n = 8$), and part-time advanced students 3.3% ($n = 1$). Students were predominantly Caucasian (69.7%; $n = 23$), with 24.2% of the group being African American ($n = 8$). The sample included one Hispanic student (3%) and one student identified as other race (3%). The sample was predominantly female (93.9%; $n = 31$) while males represented 6.1% of the sample ($n = 2$). An independent sample $t$ test used to evaluate the rating scale data collected from the MSW students found no significant differences in age ($t = -.259, p = .840$) between students who had a field instructor in the control versus
the intervention group. Chi-square analysis also indicated no significant differences between level of education ($\chi^2=3.705, p=.395$), race ($\chi^2=1.678, p=.642$), and gender ($\chi^2=3.275, p=.358$) of the student and whether he or she was working with a field instructor in the control or intervention group.

Several significant differences in student satisfaction with their field instructors' educational approach were found between the control and intervention groups. Students of trained field instructors were significantly more satisfied than students of untrained field instructors in their field instructors' support of their work at the agency, provision of specific feedback on their work, use of theoretical concepts when discussing clients or situations, and explanations for why an intervention the student used did or did not work (see Table 2).

Overall student satisfaction and satisfaction with the focus of supervision were also examined. All students who participated in the research rated their satisfaction with both supervisory focus and overall satisfaction as high. The control group rated satisfaction with supervisory focus with a mean of 4.45 ($SD=.686$) and overall satisfaction with a mean of 4.40 ($SD=.940$). The intervention group's ratings were only slightly higher with a satisfaction with focus mean of 4.50 ($SD=.522$) and an overall satisfaction mean of 4.58 ($SD=.515$). A MANOVA was completed to test for significance using the two satisfaction ratings as the dependent variables and was found to be not significant ($F(4,60)=.392, p=.814$). There were no significant differences found between frequency and length of supervision sessions between the control and intervention groups (see Table 3).

**Participant Evaluation of the Seminar**

Seminar participants evaluated the seminar highly. On a 5-point rating scale (from 5=extremely useful to 1=not useful), participants' mean ratings for the usefulness of the four major content areas covered in the seminar in their role as field instructors were: the normal stages of student development (4.9); supervisory techniques recommended for each stage (4.8); assessing skill levels in student process recordings (4.5); and helping students progress to the next developmental stage (4.2). In terms of teaching methodologies used in the seminar, participants found handouts (4.9), talking with other field instructors (4.6), small group exercises (4.4) and homework assignments (4.2) the most helpful while a power point presentation (3.7) was less useful. Participants rated the seminar as having met ($n=5; 35.7\%$), exceeded ($n=3; 21.4\%$), or greatly exceeded ($n=6; 42.9\%$) their expectations.

All participants reported having begun to apply the seminar content to their supervision. In response to an open-ended question asking which information and techniques they were using, field instructors identified information on students' developmental stages ($n=7$), supervisory strategies and methods ($n=11$), and assessing process recordings ($n=7$). Specific strategies mentioned included increasing the structure of supervision, balancing direct suggestions with exploring students' ideas, and making supervision client, rather than student, focused.

**Discussion**

**Strengths and Limitations**

The study had several important limitations. The use of one school of social work, the
<table>
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<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Intervention Group</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>Supports work at agency</td>
<td>5.892</td>
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<td>4.50</td>
<td>.827</td>
<td>4.83</td>
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<td>Helps make supervision safe</td>
<td>.431</td>
<td>.517</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.686</td>
<td>4.66</td>
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<td>Gives specific advice about ways to help your clients</td>
<td>2.919</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.66</td>
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<td>Communicates understanding of the student role</td>
<td>1.127</td>
<td>.297</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.792</td>
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<td>Uses theoretical concepts</td>
<td>5.874</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.669</td>
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<td>Reassures you that difficulties in learning are to be expected</td>
<td>2.527</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.798</td>
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<td>Is clear about his/her expectations</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.904</td>
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<td>Encourages you to experiment using different approaches with clients</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.706</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>4.33</td>
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<td>Allows you to work independently</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.826</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>4.83</td>
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<td>Gives you sufficient guidance</td>
<td>2.631</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>.622</td>
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<td>Provides specific feedback on your work</td>
<td>5.430</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<td>Structures your supervision meetings</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<td>Acknowledges areas in which you are capable</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.603</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.793</td>
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<td>Considers your current learning needs</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.670</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.792</td>
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<td>Makes connection between theory and practice</td>
<td>4.606</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.779</td>
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<td>Explains why an intervention did or did not work</td>
<td>10.694</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.651</td>
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<td>Models good social work skills</td>
<td>.355</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>.452</td>
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<td>Communicates empathy with your role as student</td>
<td>4.161</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.651</td>
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<td>Problem solves any difficulties in your student-field relationship</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.29</td>
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<td>Helps you develop greater self-awareness</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.797</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps you identify underlying themes in what client does/says</td>
<td>3.818</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>.622</td>
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<td>Relates your work to your learning contract</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.793</td>
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<td>Suggests a more complex way to understand your clients</td>
<td>2.524</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.669</td>
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<td>Provides constructive criticism of your work</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.637</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.669</td>
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<td>Assigns cases that are neither too difficult nor too easy for you</td>
<td>2.816</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>.622</td>
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<td>Helps you anticipate potential problem situations with clients</td>
<td>2.105</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.651</td>
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<td>Helps you learn ways to talk with clients about your relationships with them</td>
<td>3.867</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.669</td>
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small sample size, and the volunteer nature of these motivated participants cautions against generalization of the findings. The use of a larger non-convenience sample would provide useful information about the extent to which the content and focus of this training might assist a broader range of field instructors. The study included no measure of field instructors' actual supervisory performance, relying on students' level of expressed satisfaction with their field instructors' behaviors. The addition of an objective measure of field instructor performance would strengthen the study.

Due to the small sample size, power was a concern for the data analysis. In order to achieve sufficient power, \( p < .05 \) was used as the significance level for all analyses. Several authors suggest that it is important to balance Type I and Type II errors, and that in exploratory, hypothesis-generating studies with small sample sizes, the use of \( p < .05 \) is appropriate without correction for the number of tests (Black, 1999; DeVaus, 2002; Lipsey, 1998). While, the use of multiple \( t \) tests increases the risk of Type I error and ideally, either multivariate analyses (e.g., MANOVA) or a data reduction strategy (e.g., principle components analysis) would have been used to reduce the number of analyses conducted, such analyses would not have been appropriate with the current sample size. (Because the Bonferroni correction is overly conservative [Stevens, 2002] and our goal was to maintain sufficient power, it was not used in this study.) Therefore, all results should be interpreted with caution, and findings should be replicated. However, these findings are indicative of areas that are promising for future interventions and evaluations.

The low level of interrater reliability for the case vignettes limits the reliability of these results. In addition, problems with these data illustrate the difficulty in establishing equivalent vignettes. The study's use of a crossover design, however, was helpful. If such a design had not been used, and all field instructors had been given Vignette B as a pretest and Vignette A as a posttest, for example, the results could have been misinterpreted as an increase in knowledge. Interestingly, the findings from this part of the study suggest the difficulty in identifying the gradual changes that occur in the clinical work of advanced MSW students. The advanced student described in Vignette B was misidentified as a foundation student by 89.5% of field instructors. This error may be due to a lack of clarity in the vignette. However, the misidentification is also consistent with the learning principle (Saari, 1989) that gross distinctions are understood first (e.g., beginning students can be distinguished from experts), while subtleties and nuanced distinctions require additional time and experience. Field instructors, therefore, may require more experience and practice to be able to identify.

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<th>TABLE 3. Comparison of Length and Frequency of Supervision Sessions Between Control and Intervention Group</th>
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more advanced levels of a skill, for example, those illustrated by the student in Vignette B. This finding suggests the need for greater emphasis on helping field instructors recognize which changes, new or incremental, are likely to occur in cognitive and behavioral skills among advanced students.

Implications for Field Instructor Training

Similar to other studies that examine student satisfaction (Fortune & Abramson, 1993; Fortune et al., 1985; Kadushin, 1992; Strozier et al., 2000), students in this study expressed an overall high level of satisfaction with their field instructors as seen in the mean satisfaction scores in Table 2. This high level of satisfaction serves to highlight areas in which significant differences in student satisfaction levels were found. Students of trained field instructors were significantly more satisfied than students of untrained field instructors in several areas explicitly covered by the seminar: supporting their work at the agency, providing specific feedback on their work, using theoretical concepts when discussing clients or situations, and explaining the reasons why an intervention the student used did or did not work.

It is important to note that student satisfaction with field instructors' educational strategies is not a measure of instructors' actual performance, despite its frequent use as an outcome measure in studies of student learning (Fortune et al., 2001). Its utility in this study, however, is based on using student satisfaction as a way to measure whether teaching field instructors' specific supervisory skills could be detected by their students and make a positive difference to them. The finding that items of difference in students' level of satisfaction were skills explicitly emphasized in the seminar offers some support for the idea that trained field instructors learned and implemented seminar content and that students found these supervisory behaviors to be helpful in their learning.

In their evaluation of the seminar, all trained field instructors identified ways they were immediately applying information and skills they learned; this self-report is consistent with student evaluations. The primary area of difference between the trained and untrained field instructors that was found in this study is that field instructors who received training were valued by their students for providing conceptually-based, specific feedback. One particular type of feedback that emerged as important was field instructors' provision of a rationale for the effectiveness of students' interventions with clients. The utility of this type of feedback was stressed during the seminar because it offers students opportunities to increase their conceptual understanding and behavioral skills. Conceptually, providing a rationale for why students' interventions did or did not work helps students develop a more complex and differentiated understanding of the helping process (Saari, 1989), for example, why clarification worked well in response to certain client statements, while affective empathy was more effective at another time. As students appreciate and understand the complexity of the helping process, they are better able to choose appropriate interventions.

Because of the innovative and exploratory nature of this study, supervisory behaviors demonstrated by trained field instructors that had a significance value of $p < .10$ were of interest (Black, 1999; DeVaus, 2002; Lipsey, 1998). Four
areas of difference had p values between .05 and .10 and thus appear promising for future research. Students of trained field instructors expressed greater satisfaction with the extent to which their field instructors communicated empathy with their role as a student, made connections between theory and practice, helped them identify underlying themes in client material, and helped them learn to talk with clients about the client-worker relationship (see Table 2). Three of these areas are of particular interest. First, the ability of field instructors to assist students in identifying underlying themes in client material is an important step in helping students move from a focus on the concrete (the specific facts of the client’s situation) to the symbolic (the meaning underlying these facts). The seminar emphasized the role of the field instructor in facilitating this process, consistent with Saari’s (1989) statement that the student’s “capacity to utilize symbols is only developed out of an interpersonal sharing of perceptions” (p. 40). Second, in helping students learn how to discuss the client-worker relationship with their clients, field instructors are facilitating students’ ability to see their work in relational terms, a significant cognitive shift from being primarily self or client focused (Ralph, 1980). Students are expected to be developmentally ready for these skills in their advanced year; however, the study’s small sample size made it impossible to compare field instructors of advanced versus foundation students. Third, students’ perception of the supervisory relationship as supportive and empathic is important because empathic understanding, support, trust, and acceptance are crucial for effective supervision (Muse-Burke, Ladany, & Deck, 2001; Rich, 1993; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

Given the importance placed on the above skills in the literature on student development, determining whether field instructors can facilitate student learning in these areas through specific training suggests a promising area for future research.

There were many areas in which no significant differences were reported between students of trained versus untrained field instructors. Students of field instructors in both groups reported similar levels of satisfaction with the supervisory environment including the ability of their field instructors to provide safety, structure, reassurance, clear expectations, and understanding of the student role. There were no significant differences between students’ satisfaction with field instructors in both groups in encouraging experimentation, allowing students to work independently, and helping to solve difficulties in the student-field instructor relationship. Students of field instructors in both groups also reported similar levels of satisfaction with a number of supervisory methods that field instructors used, including modeling social work skills, providing guidance, making appropriate case assignments, relating students’ work to their learning contracts, anticipating potential problems with clients, and suggesting more complex ways to understand clients. These findings suggest that students were similar in their satisfaction with their field instructors’ performance in many areas. Because several of these supervisory skills were included in the seminar (e.g., the uses of structure, when and why to allow students greater independence, modeling problem solving in the student-field instructor relationship), replication of this study with a larger sample could help determine
which supervisory skills need to be explicitly emphasized with new field instructors.

Field instructors completing the seminar rated the content as very pertinent to their teaching role and reported immediately applying the material. The enthusiasm with which participants shared experiences with each other suggests that the seminar served the additional purpose of normalizing the questions, doubts, and fears associated with becoming a field instructor (Urdang, 1999). Consistent with other studies, field instructors preferred teaching methods such as small-group discussions that reflect adult learning models (McChesney & Euster, 2000). The seminar provided field instructors with university support for their new role by addressing their learning needs and awarding them Continuing Education Units for their participation.

**Conclusion**

Abramson and Fortune (1990) concluded from an earlier study that future field instructor training should include ways to help field instructors learn to provide specific, conceptually based feedback and structure students’ experiences to meet their learning needs. By including information on how field instructors can modify their supervisory approach depending on their student’s developmental needs, this seminar seems to have taken a step toward addressing this gap. This study, by testing the utility of a brief seminar to train new field instructors in models of MSW student development, adds to the literature recommending training in educational theories and methods for field instructors. While methodological problems arose with the vignettes used to assess field instructors’ knowledge of the seminar content, data evaluating the impact of the seminar on student satisfaction supported the positive effect of the training on several important supervisory behaviors. Additional models of field instructor training need to be developed and empirically tested so that the most relevant educational skills needed by new field instructors can be emphasized.

Field instructors play a critical role in social work education. Although the role of practitioner is helpful, it is insufficient to prepare field instructors to educate and assess students (Caspi & Reid, 2002; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). The counseling profession is establishing standards to credential clinical supervisors in order to assure their competency (Getz, 1999). Britain has developed a nationally recognized credential for practice teachers (field instructors) that involves 150 hours of training, followed by extensive evaluation of their skills in teaching, monitoring, and assessing students (Rogers, 1996). Research continues to build, which supports the necessity of training new field instructors in the educational aspects of their role. If social work education programs in the United States are to progress toward recognizing, supporting, and enhancing the vital educational role of field instructors, we need empirically tested training models and further evidence that helping field instructors develop skills as educators makes a difference for our students.

**References**


Kathleen Holtz Deal is assistant professor, School of Social Work, University of Maryland, Baltimore. Jennifer A. Clements is assistant professor, Department of Social Work and Gerontology, Shippensburg University.

The authors thank Donna Harrington, associate professor at University of Maryland, Baltimore, for her valuable suggestions on this manuscript.

Address correspondence to Kathleen Holtz Deal, University of Maryland School of Social Work, 525 West Redwood Street, Baltimore, MD 21201; e-mail: kdeal@ssw.umaryland.edu.

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