



SOCIAL WELFARE CLUB: A TOOL IN LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Abstract: Field education is an essential component in social work education, but has been criticized for neglecting several key components of the learning process. This investigation through a phenomenological focus examines the social welfare club as a tool in developing social work leadership of not-for-profit organizations. The outcome reveals the intern competencies; Social Welfare Club model and how the club can inform the implicit and explicit curriculum; a conceptual model of vertical and horizontal integration of a social work department to prepare social workers for human service leadership; Identify the principles and methods of the transformational learning model and future teaching strategies in developing social work leadership.

Keywords: Social Welfare Club, Field Education, Field Placement, Macro Practice, Transformational Learning

Field education is a required content area in social work education, intended to foster the integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge and promote the development of professional competence (CSWE, 2008). A lack of adequate field placements for social work interns to practice the desired competencies of management and leadership of human service organizations prompted the need for this paper. Conahan (2013) exploratory study will be used to determine undergraduate and graduate students' understanding and perception of competence in not-for-profit leadership and administration as a result of their time as executive director of the social welfare club; A conceptual model will be presented that is designed to respond to the lack of mentoring and leadership development of social work students who find themselves in position of leadership or without proper training and mentoring. Lastly, the outcome of the social welfare clubs impact upon the implicit and explicit curriculum will reviewed; relevance of social work education within the larger community and the purposeful development of social work leadership.

A fundamental assumption of this article is that leaders are not born, they are made as articulated by Hartlet & Allison (200); leadership is the interaction and synergy of personal attributes skill and competencies and leadership intuition.

Review of Related Literature

Themes

Field Education

Field education has been described as an integral component in social work education wherein students are provided the opportunity to integrate, use, and apply classroom content to practical experiences (Barker, 2003). For social work students, field education serves as the link between academic study and the historical roots of social work as a profession engaged in the struggle for social justice. While the dissemination of an identifiable shared body of knowledge and practice

is a key component of any profession, in the social work field, there is also a need for an ethic of social or public commitment (Greenwood, 1957, as cited in Reid & Edwards, 2006).

The degree to which the social work profession currently fulfills its historic social mission is the subject of much discussion in professional journals (Reid & Edwards, 2006). Furthermore, the relationship between schools of social work and local community social and human service agencies is being tested by changes in funding and management structures, which have compromised the availability of adequate field internship opportunities (Poulin et al., 2006).

In response to the changing nature of local social and human service agencies and the requirements for Council on Social Work Education accreditation, some schools of social work have developed in-house field placements or even their own agencies in order to fill the gap created by these societal changes (Poulin, et al., 2006). Given the lack of adequate field placements in not for profit management, a need exists of a way to determine student's understanding and perception of competence in not-for-profit leadership and administration.

Leadership

The reported dearth of leadership training for management staff in the non-profit sector coupled with the increase in the number of social service agencies being run by professionals from outside the field of social work (Nesoff, 2007) restricts the opportunity for schools of social work to produce practitioners with administrative and managerial skills. Rank and Hutchinson (2000) exploratory study of practice professionals, academics in leadership position of accredited social work programs revealed five elements of leadership. These elements included thinking ahead, values and ethics, empowerment, vision and communication. Rank and Hutchinson (2000) explained that the skills provided by the respondents included: community development skills; communication and interpersonal skills; analytic skills; ethical reasoning skills; risk taking skills;

and cultural competence/diversity skills. Providing future social workers with the opportunity to hone their managerial skills fills an existing need in the nonprofit sector. Wimpfheimer (2004) identified the competencies required for management to include social and public policy issues, advocacy, public /community relation and marketing, governance, planning, program development, financial development, evaluation, human resources management, and staff development. The student serving their field placement in the executive director position of the social welfare club has such an opportunity. The students placed in administrative leadership positions are responsible for overseeing the mission and vision to ensure that the Social Welfare Club activities are congruent with its mission. The students placed in this leadership position ensure that the selected activities benefit the students of university as well as the local community through the promotion of the social work program.

In this position the executive must utilize macro practice skills such as organizational leadership, administration and management theory.

Experiential Learning

How students transfer the abstract knowledge they acquired in the classroom to its practical application has been identified as one of the essential questions in social work education. The place for this transition is in the student's field placement. This emphasis on the importance of field education points to the utility of experiential learning in social work education. Previous research by Miller, Kovacs, Wright, Corcoran, & Rosenblum (2005) looked at field education as an experiential learning environment with an eye toward better preparing field instructors and students for learning in the field practicum. They found experiential learning to be a useful conceptual tool that highlights the diverse ways people learn (Miller et al., 2005).

Experiential learning has been described as “the process of creating and transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs, and senses” (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffen, 1998, p. 46, as cited in Miller et al., 2005). The experiential learning model appears to account for issues raised in the research on different adult learning styles (Cartney, 2000). The concept of experiential learning, with its focus on learning while doing, allows for various learning styles by not prescribing activities. Instead, experiential learning emphasizes learning through varied experiences with an emphasis on reflective practice (Horwath & Thurlow, 2004). As stated above, the field education component of social work education takes abstract knowledge and transitions it to the real world of social work practice. The question of how this happens has been answered through the application of an experiential learning model, particularly Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle of concrete experience, reflection, abstraction theorization and experimentation.

Engaging college students in educational activities has been shown to improve their learning and success in college (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; as cited in Pike & Kuh, 2005). This finding is in line with student-engagement theory, which posits, “students learn from what they do” (Pike & Kuh, p. 186, 2005) and is grounded in the developmental theories of Piaget and the philosophy of John Dewey (Dudderar & Stover, 2003). In addition, having college students, on a voluntary basis, participate in educational activities that are community service related and designed to benefit the community in which the college or university is situated, has been linked to local community residents having a more positive view of students and the local college or university (Ferrari & Bristow, 2005). Fostering the perception of universities and colleges as interested in and engaged with their local communities, can help beat back the widespread impression that colleges and universities are isolated from the real world problems that communities confront.

Transformational Learning

Transformational learning postulates that learning is transformational only when learners are able to critically examine, question, and validate the ways of knowing and feeling that they take for granted (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 2000). According to Mezirow (2000), “Transformational learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken for granted frames of reference, and make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and effective so they generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 7–8). Implied within this model is a high degree of “willingness on the part of the learner to participate freely with the values of freedom, equality, tolerance, social justice and civic responsibility” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). In the transformational model, it is incumbent for the educator to promote a climate or a learning contract that promotes trust, safety, empathy, and freedom to challenge internal and external power structures.

This paper explores transformational learning as a concept that examines field education experiences of past Social Welfare Club student field placements in not-for-profit leadership and transformational situations. The social welfare club identified in this study has an organizational design that is a not-for-profit model using a committee structure for board members and other volunteers from the faculty and student body. Faculty members serve as directors of the board. One faculty member is chair of the board, as well as club advisor and field instructor to interns. The “agency’s” executive director is an intern who reports directly to the advisor/field instructor. Traditional officers of president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary are all elected annually by the members. In addition, committee chairs preside over a number of committees, each of which corresponds to organizational goals as spelled out in the club goals and planning

document. Each committee has a chairperson responsible for reporting progress to the executive director.

The student director is responsible for ensuring that the club activities are congruent with its mission to benefit the students of the university as well as the local community. In this position the executive must use macro practice skills such as organizational leadership, administration, and management of workers. A final responsibility of the director is to manage a mentoring process for pre-social work majors who must have 30 hours of volunteer experience at a local human services agency as a requirement for the social work curriculum.

There is limited research on the activities or uses of undergraduate clubs as a component in a student's education (Satterfield & Abramson, 1998), and only a few articles tangentially related to the focus of this article (Skiff, Ayrault, DePriest, Houghtaling, & McIntyre, 2003). An earlier article describing a simulated social service agency as a component in a macro social work practice class points toward the usefulness of providing students with opportunities to apply their learning (Lowe, 1996). The strengths from this model included outcomes such as insight into organizational structure and policy and how it affects service delivery to clients, how universities can work collaboratively with communities and the relationship of urban health problems to poverty. The limitations of this model included the irrelevant content of community practice, insufficient time devoted to developing skills related to political action and lobbying, and a need to have more opportunities to learn community organizing and community building (Lowe, 1996).

Method

Conahan (2013) explored the experiences of nine past student interns of a Social Welfare Club in a mid-sized university in the northeastern United States. The investigation centers on the concept

of the undergraduate and graduate field placement position in the club as a tool in integrating social work education and practice, wherein the student has the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, administration, and organizational management. In order to better understand how different students experience this placement and to describe the themes and structures of social work education that are embedded in this position, a phenomenological inquiry was conducted using qualitative interviews with past executive directors.

Because of a lack of literature on social welfare clubs, a qualitative methodology was chosen to explore this topic in depth. The participants were from one university's BSW and MSW programs. Participants were seniors in the BSW program or foundation year students in the MSW program. This social work program is located in a mid-size state university in a rural setting that attracts students from urban, suburban, and international areas. The Social Welfare Club executive director field placement has a certain built-in structure that is unlikely to be found in more informal undergraduate clubs.

Past research in social work field education has demonstrated the usefulness of an experiential learning model (Gearing, Saini, & McNeill, 2007; Horwath & Thurlow, 2004; Miller et al., 2005). This knowledge informs this study's design and points toward the use of a phenomenological focus to build on the experiential nature of learning in field education.

The research questions of this study include the following:

What are the experiences of former executive directors of the Social Welfare Club?

What themes and structures underlie these experiences? How do these underlying themes and structures relate to concepts in social work education? What do the aggregated concepts reveal about this placement in the context of social work education?

Findings

The sample surveyed consisted of nine social work students ($N = 9$), six graduate students in their foundation year and three undergraduate students. Four of the graduate students were international students. All study participants were interviewed after their completion of the field placement. The first research question, what are the experiences of former executive directors of the Social Welfare Club suggests the following four key themes emerged about the internship experience: (a) an understanding and application of collaboration and collaborative activities; (b) an increased awareness of role, function, and professional development; (c) recognition of social injustice issues and the role of leadership in addressing the need for social justice; and (d) awareness and application of skills associated with organizational management of not-for-profit organizations. The second research question what themes and structures underlie these experiences is revealed in the competencies developed during the course of the field placement and displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Competencies Required	Competencies Experienced	Emerging Themes
Social Activism	Legislative Advocacy	Collaboration and Social Justice leadership
Needs Assessment	Organizational Assessment	Awareness and application of leadership skills and management
Coordination of Volunteers	Volunteer Coordination	Collaboration and Awareness and application of leadership skills and management
Promotion/Marketing	Newsletter Development	Awareness and application of leadership skills and management
Strategic Planning	Organizational Planning	Leadership in addressing Social Justice
Practice informed research	Policy Research /Analysis	Leadership in addressing Social Justice
Fundraising	Grant Writing	Collaboration Social Justice leadership Leadership in addressing Social Justice
Supervision/Consultation/ Mentoring	Supervision/Mentoring	Awareness and application of roles, functions and professional development
Succession Planning	Assessment and Planning	Awareness and application of leadership skills and management
Financial and Organizational Accountability	Budget management Quarterly and Annual Organizational Evaluation	Awareness and application of leadership skills and management

Research questions three and four, how do these underlying themes and structures relate to concepts in social work education; what do the aggregated concepts reveal about this placement in the context of social work education. The findings helped inform the development of the conceptual model proposed and to purposefully implement a culture of leadership development. A limitation of this research is that it does not seek to evaluate how successful this position is in imparting social work knowledge and skills. Therefore, it does not evaluate the role of the experience in directly affecting the student attainment of practice competencies.

Discussion

Drawing upon the literature and consultation with faculty the author expected that students in this field placement would reflect upon their understanding of these experiences and through this reflection evaluates their understanding and application of organizational practice competence in not-for-profit leadership and administration. The study findings evaluated through a transformational learning framework in a 480-hour field placement suggest consistent themes of professional evolution. The students began the learning process with a perspective of administration and leadership of a not-for-profit organization that can be characterized as uncertainty and apprehension toward this type of field placement. The students then transitioned to a stage of curiosity and information gathering and eventual reflection and integration of experiences, theory, and practice skills, resulting in a belief of competence in their practice skills associated with administration and leadership.

Although the sample size was small in this exploratory study, consistent themes emerged over six academic years that suggest that field placement can be structured on campus and it can promote the development of administrative competence in leading a not-for-profit organization. Burns (1979) defined leadership as a process that inspires and enables people to grow morally and to obtain levels of motivation and precise goals that go beyond self-interest into the common interest. This growth is accomplished by the development of relationships with followers, by tapping into values that match the organizations, and by developing a shared sense of values and ideals (Burns, 1979). Examples of this growth is exemplified by the students understanding of the nature and dynamics of the organizational environment; collaboration and trust with stakeholders and predecessors; decision making guided by the mission and vision of the organization; use of a planned change process; evaluation and accountability that is guided by

established goals and objectives; and quality evaluation and accountability to stakeholders.

Wimpfheimer (2004) identified the competencies required for management to include social and public policy issues, advocacy, public /community relation and marketing, governance, planning, program development, financial development, evaluation, human resources management, and staff development. The themes that emerged from the students' reflection support the competencies identified by Wimpfheimer. The four themes identified are (a) an understanding and application of collaboration and collaborative activities; (b) an increase in awareness of role, function, and professional development; (c) recognition of social injustice issues and the role of leadership in addressing the need for social justice; and (d) awareness and application of skills associated with organizational management of a not-for-profit.

During the process of this study a number of observations became apparent. Leadership development within this program seems to have developed by accident and without design with undergraduate and graduate students unless the student entered the practice sequence with the goal of developing leadership skills. This observation is consistent with the literature review findings suggesting that leadership is a non theme in social work training and education (reference). The horizontal and vertical and vertical integration of leadership within the curriculum was not evident unless the field placement and practice courses with community and organizations were specifically occurring with the student.

At the faculty level, a number of faculty were involved in community leadership activities such as sitting on boards, social justice causes, and fundraising activities. The integration of these activities with students is not evident or purposefully integrated. Existing faculty and newly hired faculty have had little or no exposure to the purposeful application and development of

leadership with undergraduate and graduate students unless the student specifically requested this area of practice.

Overall it is reasonable to conclude that leadership development and preparing students for management or a leadership role post-graduation is consistent with the literature findings.

Supporting the findings that student's will find themselves in positions of leadership without the necessary skills and competence required for the position offered or obtained. The results of the literature review assert that few social workers are in leadership positions or are unable to compete with other disciplines that lead human service organizations. Consequently, few undergraduate and graduate trained social workers are in positions of leadership.

Implications for Practice and Research

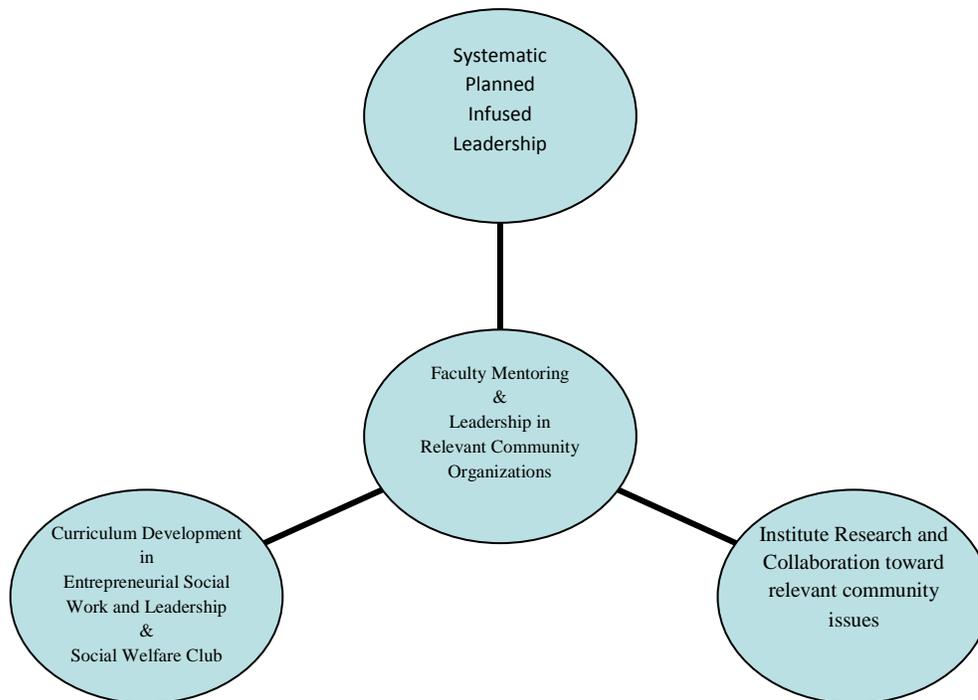
The results of the investigation of social work internships within the Social Welfare Club suggests that field placement opportunities can be developed within the university system by using existing institutional resources. This planned and purposeful strategy to develop management and leadership experience and education can be institutionalized and relevant not only to the university community but the larger community and its institutions. The development of not-for-profit leadership and administrative competencies can be accomplished through an existing generalist social work curriculum and the reinforcement of professional identity. The findings of this study highlight the crucial nature of the student field instructor relationship and its support in learning organizational practice. The setting of the field placement and the support for the student in the field setting serves to enhance the risk and protective factors in developing a meaningful field placement.

Upon further examination of these findings this author can conclude that undergraduate and graduate students can be developed as leaders, if the educational process of leadership is planned, purposeful and infused with the social work faculty, department and the curriculum. If students are to be trained in generalist practice at the undergraduate and foundation year of the graduate level greater integration of community leadership modeling, research and mentoring must be provided in a systematic, planned and purposeful process.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Displays a conceptual model that connects existing functions within the social work department that can be directed at developing a systematic infused process of developing leadership within the Generalist Intervention Model.

Figure 1



The framework in Figure 1 has three distinct functions. The first function is curriculum development. This includes undergraduate courses in administration in nonprofit organizations and practice with communities and organizations. This part of the curriculum as in many other programs is a course that will embrace all undergraduate BSW students and foundation year MSW students. Administration of nonprofits is designed as an elective for students that have a beginning interest in leadership. At the graduate level, entrepreneurial social work electives are available for those graduate students in the advanced year of the MSW curriculum. The electives

offered cover topics of financial sustainability; entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial social work. The Social Welfare Club continual availability for field placements for undergraduates and graduate students as well as other community placements will continue. As expressed earlier, the availability of the aforementioned courses does not by itself provide an infused approach to the curriculum. This aspect of the model is designed to reach out to those students who enter the social work program with an interest established in this area of practice. Faculty mentoring and leadership in relevant community issues and organizations is a second critical aspect of the transformational learning process. This aspect of the model helps facilitate a number of critical functions. The role of the faculty within the community may or may not be communicated or integrated as relevant knowledge and opportunity for students. In addition veteran faculty and recently hired faculty may be unaware of the opportunities within the community that is relevant and congruent with research interest and the social work curriculum. Looking at faculty mentoring within the traditional model of academia that applies to navigating the academic institution, paths to tenure and promotion this process can also serve as a mechanism to raise awareness of community organizations, leadership opportunities and application of these experiences to the social work curriculum. The senior faculty can serve as an excellent resource and facilitator to coordinate areas of interests of the faculty and needs of the community. The ongoing output of these efforts can be utilized as a platform to inform students of the ongoing nature of the Generalist Intervention Model and leadership within the community. The third function of the model that can have a direct impact on the output of the model is the utilization and integration of the existing research institutes within the social work program. The research institutes are Consistent with the mission of the state System of Higher Education and Kutztown University, the purpose of the Institutes of the Social Work program is to provide a

nexus of scholarship, curricular innovation, and community based solutions in which the program provides leadership in regionally recognized areas of expertise. One element of the institutes' service areas is scholarship. Institutes provide opportunities for faculty, students and community partners to engage in research related to the particular focus of the institute. This research might be related to discovering the nature of social problems, evaluating community needs, and the efficacy of existing programs. Institutes are laboratories for learning applied research in real-life settings, serving as the vehicle for the dissemination of findings in the form of lecture series, presentations at professional meetings, and scholarly publications. The Institutes contribute to community-based solutions through the development of specialized curricula. These curricula may include elective coursework, continuing education training, custom-tailored staff training programs and independent study arrangements. Institutes provide the personnel for technical assistance to existing social service agencies. They provide the necessary focus to allow community professionals to engage the social work program in collaborative innovations in practice. The institutes also provide the conduit for professionals to share expertise with each other and with the program via networking opportunities, guest lectures and adjunct teaching.

The structure of institute leadership is provided by a faculty member who is responsible for identifying a team of students, faculty and community partners who engage in strategic planning regarding the mission and activities of the institute. The team identifies community needs in relation to their specialized area of interest, seeks internal and external funding and organizes activities. The institute leader plays a key role as liaison to the social work program leadership and provides ongoing feedback and direction to the program for program renewal. The areas of

research cover areas of Justice, Aging, Addiction Studies, Mental Health and Children and Families.

Table 2: Some examples of this synergy and output of the above process are outlined

Table 2.

Research	Social Justice	Curriculum Development	Community Leadership
Two publications co-authored with students	Human Trafficking Awareness Campaigns	Three graduate Entrepreneurial Social work Courses developed	Five faculty members on seven different human service organization boards
Two co-authored publications with student submitted for publication	Leadership advocacy training and awareness	Collaboration with Business College	

Implications for Practice and Research

The findings of this study have implications for faculty and field instructors in understanding how students develop organizational leadership and administrative skills through a transformational learning process. Field placement opportunities can be developed within the university system by using existing institutional resources such as an existing social welfare club.

The development of not-for-profit leadership and administrative competencies can be accomplished through an existing generalist social work curriculum and the reinforcement of a professional identity. The findings highlight the crucial nature of the student field instructor relationship and its support in learning organizational practice. The setting and support for the

student in the field setting serves to enhance both risk and protective factors in developing a meaningful field placement.

Research is needed to follow up on graduate and undergraduate students to determine if career paths have been developed in the not-for-profit administration of human service delivery systems and the effectiveness of integrating transformational learning models in developing leaders.

Concluding Remarks

This investigation offers some preliminary data and a conceptual framework to address the need for development of social work leadership within organizations. The use of transformation learning and existing structures and functions within an accredited social work program can develop and produce a process and output of integrating faculty, community, and curriculum in such a way that leadership development can be a systematic and institutional output of social work education by creating synergy in and between key functions of the educational process. The model can serve as one way to address the need of preparing social workers in such a way that they are prepared to rise to the position of leadership and how to take advantage of the resource of mentoring, theory and experience of other professional.

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