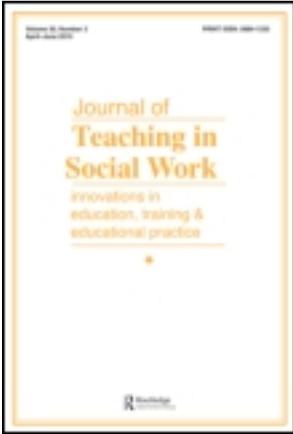


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Enhancing Critical Reflection and Writing Skills in the HBSE Classroom and Beyond

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Enhancing Critical Reflection and Writing Skills in the HBSE Classroom and Beyond

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Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) is an ideal location in which graduate social work students can enhance their critical reflection and writing skills while integrating social work theories with practice, research, and policy. A writing-intensive, learner-centered model using specific strategies is described via a framework of critical pedagogy. In addition to its application within HBSE, this model can be adapted across the social work curriculum. The article is situated within ongoing debates concerning the relevance of social constructionism and postmodernism to social work.

KEYWORDS *human behavior, critical reflection, writing skills, social constructionism, postmodernism, learner-centered education, universal instructional design*

INTRODUCTION

This article on supporting and enhancing social work students' critical reflection and writing skills is organized into four major sections: (1) reflection on the "emancipatory" potential of critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) and critical pedagogy in social work; (2) examination of the roles of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (1999),

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Learner-Centered Education (LCE), and Universal Instructional Design (UID) in relation to critical reflection and critical pedagogy in social work; (3) exploration of constructivist and postmodern approaches to teaching and learning; and (4) illustration from an HBSE course of several pedagogical innovations and strategies (connected with the three previous sections of the article), that can be adapted across the social work curriculum. The article closes with some brief concluding remarks.

HBSE is an ideal location for students to enhance their critical reflection and writing skills while they integrate social work theories with practice, research, and policy. While seeking to accomplish all of these tasks may seem like yet another “conundrum” for HBSE students and instructors (Feit & Wodarski, 2004), peer review workshops, graphic organizers like “Mind Maps” (Buzan & Buzan, 1996) and student-driven poster sessions advance a model for a writing-intensive, learner-centered pedagogy. This approach to teaching critical thinking and writing is inspired in part by Browne and Keeley’s *Asking the Right Questions* (2010) and by scholarship on critical pedagogy by bell hooks (1994) and Henry Giroux (1992, 2006).

REFLECTIONS ON THE “EMANCIPATORY” POTENTIAL OF CRITICAL REFLECTION AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The following reflections are framed by these questions: Which teaching techniques convey the value of critical reflection? How might future students challenge themselves to think critically? What are some creative ways to negotiate the “T word”—theory—often an intimidating subject for pragmatists who are enrolled in social work programs? One approach when entering conversations with students and colleagues regarding these questions is to consider the relevance of *a life of the mind*. In using this turn-of-phrase, it not only is important to observe and strengthen linkages between theory and practice, but crucial to support the investments that social work students, practitioners, and educators have in a style of layered inquiry that imagines critical reflection to be a necessary and, hopefully, deeply meaningful part of one’s life as one develops a professional use of self.

It has often been remarked that one of the best ways for a social worker to develop and hone a professional use of self, a stance whereby one is able “to be where a client is ‘at,’” is for each social worker to be keenly aware of where s/he is at, and from whence s/he begins, first and foremost (and, to do so in perpetuity, because where one is “at” may change). Social work educators and practitioners have the opportunity and an ethical obligation to be mentors to all students because of where they, as people (not just as teachers and practitioners) are “at.” In other words, educators and practitioners might be the strongest mentors within and for the profession when they acknowledge simultaneously their power and fallibility, and when they have

the flexibility to be present fully for each student, as they expect students and practitioners to be present for clients.

Social workers function on a complicated terrain. Many have commented that it is difficult to work at once within the system, despite the system, and to aim to create social change. Our paradoxical status has led certain writers, teachers, and practitioners to claim that social workers are at odds with themselves and that the profession has been this way since its inception. Olson (2007), for example, distinguished between social work's "professional project" and "social justice project" and described these projects as "discourses in conflict." Ongoing commitments to developing critical reflection and writing skills (and a professional use of self) are among the ways to address the inherent conflict that Olson perceived. As will be discussed, peer workshops, Mind Maps, and poster sessions—modes of critical reflection and writing and as enhancements of the professional use of self—can provide students with the opportunity to explore ongoing, self-directed, and interactive approaches in the classroom and beyond. Crucially, these modes of reflection and professional development are examples of experiential learning that emphasize creativity.

Gibbons and Gray (2004) highlighted the "inextricable link between critical thinking and experiential learning" (p. 21) as well as the fact that "creativity is vital to critical thinking" (p. 22). They noted that critical thinking is now considered "integral" to social work; similarly, Clare (2007) called critical reflection a "dominant theme" in social work. However, as D'Cruz, Gillingham, and Melendez (2007) noted, it can be difficult to assess students' abilities to be "reflexive" if it is not entirely clear what "reflexive" means (p. 74). There are multiple, even competing, definitions of critical reflection and reflexivity. D'Cruz asserted that searching for common definitions for these terms may not even be desirable. A lack of "coherence" in definitions may serve to highlight the relevance of social constructionism to social work education and practice and to our discussions of critical reflection. They called seeking unification of definitions "debatable" (p. 85), as doing so may "stifle" creativity and the generation of theories and innovations. Yet, as the authors argued earlier in their article, not having agreed upon definitions admittedly can be confusing, or too tenuous, given the practical implications for practice.

D'Cruz et al. (2007) referenced Fook (1996, 1999) when they noted, "Critical reflection, as a practice skill, has been developed as a process that is taught to practitioners and students to enable them to enhance and research their practice" (D'Cruz et al., 2007, pp. 82–83). The authors cited Fook (1999) citing Brookfield (1995) in pointing out that reflection and reflexivity contain what Brookfield referred to as a crucial "emancipatory element" (D'Cruz et al., 2007, p. 83).

In her discussion of critical pedagogy in social work, Redmond (2010) referred to Boler's work on the "pedagogy of discomfort" (p. 11). Redmond

cited Boler's description of this pedagogical approach as follows: "It 'aims to invite students and educators to examine how our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture of the historical moment,' and, in so doing, rejects the oversimplified binaries of innocence and guilt or right and wrong, which are often associated with such discussions" (p. 11). Student and instructor interaction as practitioners, and thinkers have reverberating effects on praxis, theory in practical action. One can seek to understand and, as needed, to disrupt or even undermine the binaries with which we are faced. In the utilization of these approaches, one can practice what Fook (cited in Stepney, 2006) called "critical postmodernism," an orientation toward "deconstructing the dichotomous power and status relationships underpinning knowledge creation" (Stepney, 2006, p. 1301). In addition to exploring such approaches in HBSE, individuals can adopt these stances within a variety of social work educational and practice contexts to foster "emancipatory" critical reflection skills among a broad array of students, educators, and practitioners. In the next section, we will examine the roles of the NASW Code of Ethics, LCE, and UID in relation to critical reflection and critical pedagogy.

SOCIAL WORK ETHICS, LCE, AND UID

In the Department of Social Work in which the author taught, two required courses were offered in the HBSE sequence. This article refers to the first of these courses, "HBSE I," because of its writing-intensive design. Many of the graduate students asked the faculty to provide them with locations within the program wherein they could access greater support in honing their critical reflection and writing skills. The author turned HBSE I into such a location, in direct response to students' feedback and learning needs. Although that department's curriculum may change over time because of how its faculty elects to implement CSWE's revised Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (2008), it is hoped that a commitment to critical reflection and writing will continue to grow in HBSE and other core courses. The majority of newly matriculated part-time and full-time students take HBSE I during their first semester in residence. Therefore, students are introduced to rigorous, writing-intensive approaches to learning and critical reflection from the moment they begin their MSW course of study.

It has been shown that social work students benefit from a variety of writing practices before they are admitted to social work programs, while they are in school, and once they enter professional practice (Alter & Adkins, 2001, 2006). Importantly, social work educators can—and some argue ought to—use writing "as a strategy for teaching social work knowledge, values, and skills" (Falk & Ross, 2001, p. 125). Enhancing critical reflection and writing skills provides students with the opportunity to develop an "ability to

use writing both as [a] mode of learning and as a tool for effective advocacy” (Waller, Carroll, & Roemer, 1996, p. 43). Developing effective critical thinking and writing skills, by teaching professional values, supports the Code of Ethics that is a hallmark of our profession (NASW, 1999).

In a recent *JSWE* article, Sanders and Hoffman (2010) emphasized that “Social work educators are responsible for preparing their students to address complex ethical issues in a reasoned and defensible manner” (p. 7). The authors noted how “CSWE’s revised *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) continue to identify ethical decision making as a required competency for all undergraduate and graduate social work majors, thereby putting far more emphasis on ensuring that students are able to move beyond knowledge acquisition alone toward actually engaging in ethical practice” (p. 7). Students’ mastery of a nuanced ability to express themselves “in a reasoned and defensible manner” is indeed an ethical matter, and therefore of central concern to social work pedagogy.

LCE is ideal for addressing students’ various learning needs and is consistent with social work’s values and ethics. Instructors are not at the center of social work education in this model; learners must be and are. Conceptually, this approach is similar to being “where our clients are.” Educators can aim to be “where our students are at,” in the myriad ways their learning needs and preferences are given primacy without in any way diminishing the roles they play in this vibrant process, or the important, required course content that is being delivered and shared.

Learning needs and preferences are highly variable. In the LCE model, students are seen as mature, experienced experts in their own learning and lives, with instructors providing course content creatively and interactively, along with guidance, coaching, and mentorship. Weimer (2002), a leader in the LCE movement, described her early labors in her groundbreaking *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. Bemoaning the “authoritarian, controlling” and directive pedagogical tenor in many classrooms (p. 3), Weimer remembered when she first realized that students

needed to find their way past self-doubt, awkwardness, and the fear of failure to a place where they could ask a question in class, make a contribution in a group, and speak coherently in front of peers. It came to me that I might address the problem by making the students feel more in control. Would it help if I presented them with some choices and let them make some of the decisions about their learning? (pp. 2–3)

Weimer discussed candidly the importance of “redesign[ing]” teachers as well as courses (p. 3).

Learner-centered educational approaches thus decentralize pedagogical authority, or, some would argue, re-center pedagogical authority. This movement in authority is accomplished by purposefully shifting authority

away from solely being within the purview of the educator-as-teacher—who is most often in front of the classroom, lecturing, in traditional settings—to a mindful practice, wherein authority lies within and is shared by all of the educators who are in the classroom, including students who have the opportunity to work in close, respectful collaboration with each other and with their “official” educators and teachers.

Undergraduate and graduate social work students often hail from an array of backgrounds, life experience, and related knowledge. These learners ought to be seen as experts in their own right. (This is especially true of non-traditional social work students who are returning to school after years of working in the social services field.) Sometimes, students have a great deal of skill and experience but are learning the shared language of our profession, rather than being new to the field. Learner-centered education creates rich opportunities for all students to be mentors to each other, and for educators to be better mentors to their students.

Universal Design (UD) “is an approach to the design of all products and environments to be as usable as possible by as many people as possible regardless of age, ability, or situation” (Universal Design Education Online, 2008). As Bowe (1999) highlighted, UD therefore is not only about accommodating students with disabilities, but about highlighting, respecting, and underscoring the complexities of all human variance and diversity. Like LCE, UD’s foundational perspectives are directly connected to CSWE’s Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards and specifically to social work values regarding cultural competence. UID is a subfield of UD. Lightfoot and Gibson (2005) called UID “a new framework for accommodating students in social work courses” (p. 269). Although their article is largely about accommodating disabled students, Lightfoot and Gibson noted that in addition to better meeting the needs of students requiring accommodations, UID has the potential to benefit all social work students.

Proponents of UID take as a premise the idea that all learning environments can be designed in advance in ways to reflect the greatest possible array of students’ needs, preferences, and learning styles. Thus, the preferences, desires, and needs of visual learners and kinesthetic learners, for example, can be taken into even greater account than is sometimes the case (as, for example, when a primarily auditory lecture is presented to students). UID is not perfect; no situation or choice can ever meet everyone’s needs. An LCE- and UID-informed pedagogy nevertheless is useful.

Peer review workshops and the use of conceptual, graphic, and visual organizers—often known as “webs” or sometimes as “Mind Maps” (Buzan & Buzan, 1996)—have long been techniques of choice adopted by elementary, middle, and high school instructors operating within LCE settings or seeking to make their educational environments more LCE- and UID-oriented. Increasingly, these techniques also are being incorporated by universities (Huba & Freed, 2000; Weimer, 2002). Numerous practical resources, like

the National Writing Project's *30 Ideas for Teaching Writing* (2003), exist for supporting good writing practices inside and outside of the classroom. Social work instructors who seek to be LCE- and UID-oriented would likely benefit from further adopting the techniques that are suggested in *30 Ideas*, along with webs and peer review activities, including the evaluation of poster sessions. Some social work educators already are using mapping techniques in their teaching. For example, Forte's (2007) textbook on *Human Behavior and the Social Environment* used "models, metaphors, and maps for applying theoretical perspectives to practice," and Clare (2007) used maps in her "deep learning" approach, as well. There have already been clear signs of peer review approaches being marketed to social work educators, Trim's text (2007) being a notable example. It seems that a pedagogical sea change is taking place.

Over the past two decades, teaching trends across the disciplines have become more learner-centered. Today, social work educators and students addressing writing skills development have far greater opportunities and resources available to them than was typically the case for their predecessors. Pearson Education, a well-known publisher of social work textbooks, recently began producing supplements for students called the "*What Every Student Should Know About . . .*" series. These instructional installments, also called the WESSKA series, can be purchased individually or packaged with any main text available from Allyn & Bacon or Longman (both of which are divisions of Pearson). *Practicing Peer Review* by Michelle Trim (2007) is among the imprints.

The availability of these supplements breaks from a trend that had been present in many educational circles, wherein teachers are given what could be termed *insider access* to crucial information regarding how best to help their students to accomplish peer review, edit their own papers, write and think critically, although students are not always privy to such approaches. Walvoord's *Helping Students Write Well* (1986) includes a useful section on "working with alternative planning devices" like webs, but far more information on these webs could be made available to students as well as teachers. In the following section, we explore constructivist and postmodern approaches to teaching and learning to draw further upon the connections established between the NASW Code of Ethics, LCE, and UID, in relation to critical reflection and critical pedagogy in social work.

DECONSTRUCTIVE AND IDEOLOGICAL DILEMMAS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In HBSE I, students in the classes I taught were asked at the very beginning of the course (and were expected throughout its duration) to "unpack" what often is taken for granted in the world around us. The assignments in the course revolved around this stance, as did the majority of the

assigned and supplemental reading, and in-class activities. All work completed in the course was accomplished with an appreciation for the inherent deconstructive and ideological dilemmas and opportunities, framed by the instructor's openly social constructionist lens. Here we address some of these dilemmas and opportunities in relation to the article's main themes, beginning with a discussion of constructivist teaching and learning.

Johansen (2005) used online journaling in a baccalaureate-level HBSE course to establish constructivist models of learning that are decidedly LCE in scope and purpose. (She uses the term *student-centered*, which is usually interchangeable with *learner-centered*.) Like many strong advocates of teaching critical reflection in social work classrooms, in her work Johansen provided definitions of critical thinking and reflection. It is important to note, however, that many social work educators have argued that "the jury is out"; there are many, many definitions of critical thinking and reflection, as well as varying levels of agreement concerning the usefulness of these definitions or the promise they hold for critical reflective change. What may be referred to as this lack of "coherence" in definitional stances, of course, may in fact be a demonstration of the relevance and importance of social constructionism to social work education and practice.

As Johansen (2005) noted, our work in the field and in the classroom depends largely on revisiting what Mezirow called the "meaning of experience" (Johansen pointed out Mezirow's partial reliance here on Dewey). Arguably, then, traditional educational models may not be as effective as student-centered models in fostering critical thinking and reflection in the HBSE classroom and beyond. This is one of Johansen's main points. She stated, "Constructivist learning models, emphasizing collaboration, active, and student-centered learning, allow opportunities for students to challenge, argue, question, or reflect on their own belief systems as well as to consider alternative viewpoints" (p. 90).

Brookfield (2009) drew a distinction between reflection and critical reflection by pointing out how work in educational and practice settings ought to emphasize what he referred to as "ideology critique." In Brookfield's opinion, ideology critique is what distinguishes reflection as potentially transformative. He noted,

Ideology critique describes the process by which people learn to recognize how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices. Critical reflection as ideology critique focuses on helping people come to an awareness of how Capitalism and White Supremacy—the twin towers of contemporary ideology—shape beliefs and practices that justify and maintain economic and political inequity. (p. 293)

Teachers and students in the HBSE classroom can make ideology critique operational by examining social work theories critically through

discussion, writing, and reading. Many social work theories are borrowed from other disciplines and social work theoretical frameworks therefore may be seen as a complex mixture. This reality to some degree renders HBSE courses daunting because of the sheer number of theories addressed. Levande (1987) spoke of the problems with and limitations of “add and stir” approaches to curriculum development (p. 61). As she stated,

Instead of adding to expand HBSE content boundaries, the change advocated here is described as transformation, revision, and reconstruction. It is a change noted by Levande as having been defined by Rich as, “revision, the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” (p. 62)

Combining the attention paid to work on rigorous writing and critical reflection skills development with an expectation of covering a broad array of theories of human behavior may seem like a tall order. As Levande (1987) noted, however, transformations, although often challenging and difficult, are not impossible. Ideology critique is not only possible and practical, it is also ethically necessary. Social constructionist theory and related postmodern approaches toward critical reflection, writing, and teaching in the HBSE classroom can help to realize the promise of ideology critique.

Although mainstream theories still hold understandable sway in the social work literature, a number of social work authors have argued that social constructionism (and other poststructuralist and postmodernist theories) are not merely fringe but, rather, are vital social work theories, especially if their tendencies toward relativism are not taken to an extreme (Thomas, 2004). Social constructionism and many of its related theories, based upon perspectivism and interpretivism, are grounded in the recognition that societies and their members construct views and understandings of existence within contexts that change across time and space and that are informed by power dynamics rather than neutrally or in a vacuum.

All of these concepts are directly applicable in social work education and practice settings and can help us to interpret and adapt the codes of ethics, policies, and protocols that undergird and shape our profession. Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (2006) devoted a chapter in their HBSE textbook to the relevance of social constructionism and related theories to social work research, practice, and policy. Payne (2006) paid sustained attention to social constructionism and argued that all social work theories (and theories used by social workers, whether or not they are called social work theories) are socially constructed and ought to be examined with a social constructionist lens, rather than being taken at face value. Fook (1996, 1999, 2002), a well-respected leader in the social work critical reflection movement may be seen to privilege poststructuralist and postmodernist epistemology in her writing.

Nevertheless, as a variety of authors have noted, postmodernism continues to receive mixed reviews in social work. Citing a number of social work scholars, Feldman, Barron, Holliman, Karliner, & Walker (2009) asserted,

Postmodern perspectives in social work practice and education have been both embraced and critiqued in recent years . . . While some authors see great potential in postmodern ideas of constructed realities . . . others caution that postmodernism holds the danger of moral relativity that may serve to erode the value-based mission of the profession . . . We are aware that these critiques are present within social work discourse. (p. 123)

We therefore need to celebrate postmodernism's possibilities while acknowledging its potential limitations.

Certain postmodernist premises and tools, like deconstruction, may help social workers-in-training to become self-reflective thinkers and writers—and, by extension, more ethical practitioners—by supporting them in critically examining the positivistic and empiricist lenses that have a long-standing history and are gaining prominence in many areas of contemporary social work education and practice. As Danto (2008) asserted,

In social work education today, postmodernism offers our students the imaginative spin they covet. After struggling for years with the demands of empiricism in HBSE and policy, and with positivism in research and practice, they now have a methodology that is relevant, challenging and somewhat less impeded by biases than others. (p. 721)

Hence, we need to describe some pedagogical strategies that take up a constructionist mantle in an LCE, UID-oriented context, to foster and enhance social work students' critical reflection and writing skills in HBSE courses and beyond.

PEER WORKSHOPS, "MIND MAPS," AND POSTER SESSIONS AS PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

The author's HBSE I students were informed via the course syllabus of the requirement

to produce a quality Critical Analysis Paper on a relevant topic that is of interest to you and that is related directly to one or more of the theories that (and/or theorists whom) we will discuss this semester. You will present your paper during a "mini-conference" at the end of the course,

in the form of a “poster session.” The paper will be “workshopped” with your peers at every stage before the final version is due. (Wiener, 2010, p. 7)

Using Blackboard, the course management interface, students were given detailed grading rubrics for the paper, the poster session, and the peer review (“workshopping”) assessment process, along with supplemental guidelines (with a variety of ideas and suggestions) in advance of the first class meeting. The syllabus included the instructor’s tailored “Guidelines for Effective Workshopping” (Wiener, 2010) and Trim’s (2007) WESSKA text was recommended. The Critical Analysis Paper was discussed throughout the semester, beginning with the first class meeting.

The Critical Analysis Paper included five evaluative features, all of which were graded: an abstract (or preliminary) topic proposal, a “sketch,” a draft, a final paper, and a poster. The “sketch” could be a graphic organizer, like a Mind Map, or a traditional outline. Students were encouraged (but not required) to do a Mind Map; of the students who elected to create Mind Maps and similar conceptual webs, many elected to use software shareware that is available online, others drew maps by hand, and a few used Microsoft Visio’s “brainstorming” diagram templates. Students were encouraged to use the course’s required texts, by Robbins et al. (2006) and Payne (2006), in their exploration of paper topics from which to choose.

Students were asked to work in close consultation with the instructor and with their peers throughout the course to evaluate their writing needs in relation to the topics about which they were writing and reflecting.

Prior to the first class meeting, students were informed via a Blackboard email message that they would be asked on the first day of class to provide the instructor with an ungraded writing sample in response to a prompt that asked them to define their understanding of the meaning and purpose of theory in social work. These individualized responses were crafted after students had worked collaboratively in small groups and experienced a large classroom discussion and interactive lecture in response to the prompt mentioned above and several other prompts on theory in practice. Based on students’ responses to prompts, they were assigned to a peer workshopping group. They began working in this group during the second week of class, and continued working in this group for the remainder of the semester. Students were advised by the instructor in the course syllabus, “I believe that individuals have different strengths in different areas, and I will aim to form groups that meet multiple needs” (Wiener, 2010, p. 7).

Students also were advised throughout the course,

During group workshopping, you will explore writing processes—from coming up with clear and interesting ideas, to creating outlines and drafts, to revising, to editing—in order to find methods of thinking and

writing that help produce effective papers. I have found that the best ways to improve writing significantly are to write a lot, to read a lot, and to give and receive feedback on writing on an ongoing basis. (Wiener, 2010, p. 10)

It was explained to the students that this approach was based upon the instructor's experience of teaching writing and critical thinking while working as part of a team of composition and rhetoric teachers in the past. The instructor thereby was "owning" the ways in which her background informed her teaching orientation. The key was to be transparent with the students about the expectations involved with what might be called a "writing-intensive" course, and to adjust expectations, as needed and when appropriate, in ongoing consultation with students who would be active participants in decision-making about these adjustments.

In addition to allocating time during designated HBSE class sessions for peer workshopping, the students were made aware that their workshopping would be assessed on the basis of four major features, graded separately from the written products themselves. These features included a self-evaluation from each student, the instructor's evaluation of their individual involvement in the peer review process, an average of each group member's anonymous evaluation of each other group member's individual participation in the group process, and the group's evaluation of itself (calculated as an average of each group member's anonymous evaluation of the entire group process, minus the evaluating member's involvement). Students were given a clear LCE message through these assessment endeavors: their critical reflection, writing, and overall learning experiences were driven largely by their own choices, efforts, and actions, and their interactions with peers as well as their instructor. They also had the consistent opportunity to apply field-related learning in the classroom and vice versa. Each class session was 3 hours in length, which helped with planning the workshopping and coordinating the course's other required and supplemental activities.

Many students commented in-person and on their peer workshopping evaluations (collected on the last day of the class) that they appreciated the strongly diminished likelihood of procrastination in this LCE- and UID-centered reflective and writing model. Even students who at the beginning of the course had a limited "buy-in" regarding the LCE model tended to report by the end of the course that they could perceive the benefits of workshopping. In other words, students who might have been unclear about or even suspicious of the benefits of peer review at the course's beginning often noted in their peer workshopping evaluations, as well as remarked anecdotally at or after the course's conclusion, that the benefits of peer review met or exceeded their expectations. They were glad to have participated in workshopping activities and in the future would seek out peer reviewing opportunities. Some students also commented that, after

experiencing workshopping in this course, they felt more confident about giving and receiving feedback, more comfortable seeking help from others, and understood the importance of having input from peers as well as from mentors, supervisors, and instructors.

These course experiences supported the students in becoming better writers and thinkers as well as in becoming better practitioners and advocates. In micro-, mezzo-, and macro-practice, giving and receiving feedback, attitudes toward input from others, and knowing when and how to ask for help are all vital facets of our profession's effectiveness and of our professional identity. These functions arise daily in our conversations and interactions with individual clients, families, and groups, as well as with co-workers, supervisors, administrators, political representatives, constituents and stakeholders, community coalitions, and neighborhood associations. In our goal of supporting individuals, families, and groups in becoming self-empowered, being able to call upon one's direct experience, to reference the importance of receiving and giving feedback, asking for help, and negotiating input from a variety of sources is valuable. Doing so is an illustration of how we as social workers use a professional use of self to be fully present for the needs of others.

Students also were encouraged to use blogs and work groups that were established via Blackboard for private, virtual, group-based interactions, outside of class. In addition, students were given the opportunity to do brief, spontaneous, or "check-in" workshopping during class, if special needs arose. During workshopping sessions, students talked with their peers in the four- or five-member groups formed beginning with the second meeting of the class. The week during which students workshopped their paper drafts (which they were instructed to send to each other, in advance of the class meeting), they had about 45 minutes of workshopping time in-class. Otherwise, these in-class sessions lasted for about 30 minutes. Students discussed where things "were at" with their ideas, papers, and writing, including successes, challenges, and questions. The instructor visited with each group to ensure that the students were making suggestions to each other, and taking turns in sharing the floor with their peers.

When we began teaching the course in a writing-intensive way, the poster session had been the last element of the paper writing process. However, based upon additional student feedback, the assignment sequencing was changed so that students experienced the poster session before they were required to submit their final papers. Students who advocated for the change in this sequencing reported that they felt their final papers would have been strengthened with the benefit of feedback they received from their peers during the poster session. Since this revised assignment sequencing was implemented, students reported that they too felt similarly to the

students who had recommended the sequence change in the first place. The posters were assessed based upon an average of students' anonymous evaluations of each other's posters and presentations as well as the instructor's evaluation of each poster and presentation, using the same criteria used by the students. On the last day of the class, all students were split up into two similarly sized groups. The first group of students displayed posters and then was visited by the second group of students. Then, the groups switched places and roles. All of the students in the first group also visited each other before the groups switched places. The students in the second group all visited each other, as well, when it was their turn to put their posters on display. Thus, every student in the class had the opportunity to visit every other student's poster; all students interacted with each other.

Students were provided with a "mini-conference" poster session grading rubric that was posted on Blackboard and projected on-screen in the classroom during the actual poster session. Each student was given a confidential worksheet with every other student's name, and the worksheets then were submitted to the instructor. The students' averaged assessments and the instructor's evaluation were weighted equally in each student's overall grade calculation, again sending the students a vivid LCE message.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Any instructor working with students in classrooms or in fieldwork settings can teach social work content by incorporating poster sessions, peer workshopping, and organizers like Mind Maps into assignments and activities in their classes and field settings. These techniques for enhancing critical reflection and writing skills can be adapted and used across the curriculum, within the framework of flexibility afforded by CSWE's revised Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.

One of the keys to success in using writing-intensive, LCE- and UID-infused models is for social work instructors to be willing to relinquish some pedagogical authority (or, as noted above, to "re-center" this authority, so that it is shared with the students themselves). Such a vital project can be accomplished in the service of bringing all students more fully into relationship with each other—and into fuller relationships with their instructors—as well as providing students with the opportunity to be more richly engaged with their own educational experiences than has sometimes been the case, historically. It is consistent with our professional values and ethics to send the message to students that their learning in part can be accomplished on their own terms, with their input as foundational; with fellow students as their co-teachers; and with instructors as mentors and guides, teaching beside and with them, rather than beyond and above them.

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