Volume : 3 | Issue : 2 | Feb 2014 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper Social Science

Supervision –the Core of Social Work Field Practicum

Saju Paracka Research Scholar, IGNOU, Tamilnadu.

ABSTRACT

While field practicum is central to social work education, supervision is core to field work. The very essence of field work is the guided supervision extended to students facilitating effective change in the client. It. enables professional development of the students in terms of their mastering the core skills and through integration of theory with practice. Supervisor-supervisee relationship is key to supervision as without this relationship, the functions of supervision will not achieve the primary purpose of helping a student attain the level of knowledge and skills necessary to enter the field of social work. Adequate quality training to field instructors and faculty liaison is the only key to quality educative supervision which is integral to the professionalisation of social workers.

KEYWORDS : Social work, Field practicum, Supervision, field instructor, faculty liaison

SUPERVISION –THE CORE SOCIAL WORK FIELD PRACTICUM

Formation of social work students into professionals requires a core of knowledge and practical experience achieved through supervised training in the field. Faculty liaison and field instructors, play a crucial role in this regard by assisting them to successfully integrate theory with practice. Etymologically the word supervision derives from two Latin words 'super' meaning 'over' and 'videre' - watch or see. While field practicum is central to social work education, supervision is core to field work. The very essence of field work is the guided supervision extended to students facilitating effective change in the client.

What is supervision

Supervision within the social work context is a process in which the supervisor works with team member(s) to meet organizational, professional and personal objectives. These objectives can generally centres around competency, accountable performance, continuing professional development, and personal support (Morrison, 2001).

The second review committee of UGC on social work education in India describes it as a two way process between supervisor and supervisee in which the supervisor instructs, enables, guides, supports and communicates with the student in his/her quest for developing professional social work skills, knowledge and attitudes. It is also regarded as the personal tool for the student to integrate theory, methodology and practice at many different occasions.

Supervision thus is aimed to enable the professional development of the students in terms of their mastering the core skills such as observation, interviewing, relationship, recording, administrative procedures, training, fact-finding, planning, implementation, analysis and organisation. Further, it facilitates identification of needs and resources, intervention, working as pressure groups, listening and communication, programme development, resource mobilisation etc. It also becomes an opportunity for: reflection and self-reflection; openness; support; trying new things; feedback; modifying old habits; developing professional competence, knowledge, skills and attitudes; facilitating personal and professional growth; assisting students to make connections between practical work and theory and role modelling.

Ideally, a field teacher will provide a balance of formal and informal supervision because both types of supervision provide different educational outcomes. Formal supervision ensures that both student and field teacher have set aside time to discuss the student's learning in a planned and reflective manner. Also, the student can prepare learning tools, an agenda and take responsibility for planning the session. Informal supervision is often about discussing matters which need to be dealt with on the spot and is likely to be more practical than reflective.

Supervision should also be viewed from a dual perspective i.e., supervision on site by the agency supervisor and supervision off site by the school faculty. The success of the student practicum depends on the effectiveness of the supervision and instruction offered by the duo.

The school supervisor must be able to teach, have an understanding of social and individual problems, able to deal with facts and have a good grasp of the methods of solving problems. He helps the students shape their values, attitudes and insights which become the guide of his continuous professional performance. He is also is expected to submit written progress and terminal appraisals of student's performances according to school's standards, and assist the school in compiling pertinent records on agencies. (R. Thangavelu (1975)

The agency supervisor on the other sets the tone for the learning process that will take place during the field placement and embodies a living tradition which is rich in knowledge, practice and wisdom. (ibid).) *The distinctive contribution of the practice teacher is to enable a blending process which encompasses the tensions between 'education' and 'training' when seeking to promote competence.* (Durkin and Shergill (2000, p.165)

Functions

"A social work supervisor is an staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance and evaluate the on-the-job performance of the supervisee for whose work he is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility, the supervisor performs administrative, educational and supportive functions in the context of positive relations." (Kadushin 1992:22-23).

The administrative functions aims at promoting and maintaining good standards of work; implementing agency policies; monitoring and improving work performance. It includes the communication of expectations by the supervisor, which sets the stage for a learning experience in which the student has direction and understanding of his or her role within the agency and placement and others. The supportive role on the other refers to maintaining harmonious working relationships, morale and job satisfaction. It includes the role the supervisor plays in helping students deal with stress in the practicum and conflict Educative functions aims at developing the skills and knowledge of workers; acquiring professional competence; engaging in reflective practice. It includes experiential educational opportunities directed toward the development of professional identity, self understanding and helping students get professionally socialized in social work values, ethics and skills. Correspondingly Morgan and Sprenkle suggest four overlapping roles such as coach, teacher, mentor and administrator for the supervisor

The methods of supervision comprised of individual conferences, group conferences, seminars and on the spot instruction. The individual and group conferences represent a piece of problem solving and an opportunity for the student to think, reveal his ideas, verbalise them frankly and evolve a plan of action. These conferences incorporate instruction, guidance and encouragement for the student to do his/her learning. Moreover, tools such as process recording, journaling, value conflict discussions and case analysis, continue to be useful in the ongoing development of a social worker.

Supervisory process & relationship

An integral component of supervision is the development of a healthy supervisee-supervisor relationship. This is distinct from a personal one and is built on the premise that an infant's "secure base" with an attach-

ment figure triggers the infant's exploration of the wider world, and similarly, a client's secure base with a therapist facilitates exploration within the therapeutic process (Bowlby 1988). The Attachment theory developed by Bowlby is applicable to supervision because it provides an empirically-based framework for understanding both the nature of relationships and the process of establishing a supportive, secure base for supervision. Research on field education has suggested that the supervisor's support, availability, openness, and trust are characteristics that predict successful supervision in the eyes of new students (Fortune and Abramson 1993). The supervisor's ability to develop positive relationships with supervisees has been reported as the principal characteristic that social work students value (Kadushin 1992)

Theoretically, the supervisee will feel confident to explore the environment and develop a professional sense of self when the supervisor's care giving provides a secure base for learning. It is this interpersonal interaction of the supervisor with the student that makes the latter more effective in handling people. This strong bond of relationship determines the knowledge on student needs, helps for charting learning experiences and deciding upon the best way to achieve the learning objectives in relation to the assignments in field work. The supervisory relationship is thus the heart of field education, (Beddoe, 2000) and is a dynamic, evolving one, requiring the field instructor to use a variety of skills, depending upon student's position in the learning process.

Supervisor and supervisee engagement in social work training thus is an essential educational activity. Paulo Freire calls it as a praxis wherein both supervisee and supervisor are learner-teacher and teacher-learner respectively. Both bring with them an ability to teach and to learn. Through their action and reflection both deepens their understanding and knowledge of their own self and the world. Deeper insights into the process of action-reflection is unravelled cognitively as 'auto reflection' processes constituting of a forward movement from 'thought-word-action' to 'action-word-thought' further leading to awareness, action and organization.

Literature on supervision is replete with the significance of this relationship without which the functions of supervision will not achieve the primary purpose of helping a student attain the level of knowledge and skills necessary to enter the field of social work practice. A good supervision relationship is one in which both student and field educator feel comfortable to give and receive constructive feedback and in which the open expression of differences is seen as a healthy part of the education process. Supervisor's support, availability, openness, and trust are a few factors that predict successful supervision in the eyes of new students (Fortune and Abramson 1993). Moreover, the effectiveness of field learning is enhanced when the triad of students, faculty supervisor and field instructors work in harmony and communicate goals and expectations continuously (Fernandez 1998)

Despite this pivotal role of supervision in field work education, there have been fewer empirical studies of what constitutes effective supervision and there are no pedagogical standards on supervisory structure, format, or learning/teaching processes.

The way ahead

Supervision to achieve its aims should focus on providing adequate training to field instructors and faculty liaison. Without such training, they may not be able to appreciate or use skills that help the student integrate theory with their practice. Field work supervision thus is a recapitualisation of the very purpose of a school of social work for its students. What is important to successful practicum is a symbiosis of Field supervisor (instructor) and faculty supervisor.

Just like the many wonderful learning moments that happen in social work classrooms, there is no substitute for guided learning in the field. The following opinion of a student echoes the power of positive modelling by supervisors on professional socialization (Barretti, 2009).

> Watching my supervisor was the most beneficial learning experience that I've had in any environment. He is balanced person who knows what he's doing. He was able to share freely, teach by example and not by being directive, ...
> When I was dealing with certain circumstances,
> I would think about him and draw on him...'

REFERENCES

Abramson, J.S., & Fortune, A.E. (1990). Improving field supervision: An evaluation of a seminar for new field instructors. Journal of Social Work Education, 26(3), 273-283 | Barretti, M.A. (2009). Ranking desirable field instructor characteristics: viewing student preferences in context with field and class experience. Clinical Supervisor, 28 (1), 47-71. | Beddoe, L. (2000). Learning for supervision in contemporary social work practice in Aotearoa. Paper presented at the Supervision: From Rhetoric to Reality Conference, Auckland, NZ | Bowlby, J. (1988). A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development.New York: Basic Books. | Caspi, J., & Reid, W. (1998). The task-centered model for field instruction: An innovative approach. Journal of Social Work Education, 34, 55–70 | Durkin, C & Shergill, M 2000, A team approach to practice teaching, Social Work Education, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 165-174. | Fernandez,E. (1998) Student perceptions of satisfaction with practicum learning. Social work Education, 17, 173-201. | Kadushin, A. (1992a). Supervision in social work (3rd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press. | Morgan, M M & Sprenkle, D H 2007, Toward A Common-Factors Approach To Supervision, Journal of Marital & Family Therapy, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 1-17. | Morrison,T. (2001).Staff supervision in social care: Making a real difference for staff and service users. London: Pavillion | Thangavelu,R. (1975). Field work Supervision: Its Place in Social Work Education. Indian Journal of Social Work. Vol.35(4) Jan; 359-366 | . _____(1981). Report of the second review committee on social Work Education. New Delhi: UGC. |