

Evaluation of Student Performance in Field Practice

Theory and Assessment Tools

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Abstract

Throughout the evolution of social work, continuous effort has been made to develop methods of evaluating professional performance. Evaluation of student performance in field practice is the primary means of assessing their competence in their assigned roles. In this connection, two central issues arise: how can reliable information about the student's performance be gathered in real time, and what output, what qualities and what abilities are expected of her or him. This study presents the content, processes and criteria of a model for student evaluation developed at the University of Haifa.

Zusammenfassung

In der ganzen Entwicklung der Sozialen Arbeit hat man sich stetig darum bemüht, Methoden für die Bewertung beruflicher Leistung zu entwickeln. Die Leistungsbewertung von Studenten und Studentinnen in der Praxis ist das Hauptinstrument zur Beurteilung, inwieweit sie fähig sind, die ihnen übertragenen Aufgaben zu erfüllen. In diesem Zusammenhang treten zwei Hauptthemen in den Vordergrund: Wie können verlässliche Informationen über die Leistung von Studierenden in Echtzeit gesammelt werden und welche Ergebnisse, Eigenschaften und Fähigkeiten werden von ihnen erwartet? Diese Studie stellt den Inhalt, Prozess sowie die Kriterien eines Modells für die Bewertung von Studierenden dar, welches an der Universität von Haifa entwickelt wurde.

Schlüsselwörter

Studium - Praktikum - Praxis - Evaluation - Bewertung - Methode - Israel

1. Literature review

Social work education has become a sophisticated undertaking in which empirical and theoretical learning accompany, and are expected to be integrated with, learning in the field (*Bogo; Vayda 1999, Boisen; Syers 2004, Buchan et al. 2004, Giddings; Vode 2003*). Within that process fieldwork serves as the central component of socialization to the profession (*Goldstein 2000, Kadushin 1992*). Hence supervision that includes ongoing evaluation of the student has a central role in the educational process (*Birkenmaier et al. 2003, Bogo; Vayda 1999, Cournoyer, 2001, Karni 2003, Maroon 1997, Schneck et al. 1991*). What is supervision and what are we trying to achieve through

it? According to *Kadushin (1992)*, it is an objective examination of the supervisee's work performance in a fixed period, and a systematic process that focuses on observable and measurable behaviors (*Baretta 2004, Reid et al. 1996*). Evaluation is a formative process that provides tools for continued work, and, axiomatically, presents and interprets students' potential as well as their learning difficulties, as well as being closely linked to work performance and achievement in keeping with assigned objectives (*Dore et al. 1992, Furman et al. 2004*).

In general there are two principal approaches to supervision. One relates to evaluation as a systematic process of data gathering (*Guba; Lincoln 1981*), focuses on its judgmental aspects and sees its main function as deciding to what extent the student meets previously determined standards. The other approach opposes judgmental evaluation, seeing it rather as „a systematic examination of events taking place within an existing content framework and as a result of it“ (*Cronbach et al. 1980*). This approach is in essence relative, focuses on the extent to which previously established goals were attained, and avoids evaluating them.

Evaluation is valuable to the student in creating motivation, direction and integration of material studied. It also helps clarify where faulty performance lies and where future attention should be directed, thus making it possible to direct learning towards its goal (*Maroon 1997*). Continuity is a basic premise of supervision. Every time the supervisor nods in agreement or says: „Yes, you're right,“ or shakes his head impatiently, or says, „I'm not sure about what you said“, an element of evaluation is present, and each adds onto regular periodic and cumulative evaluations (*Carr 1991*).

Fieldwork evaluation relates simultaneously to quality of performance and learning achievement, the formative process and summative achievement elements tightly intertwined within evaluation. The formative element evaluates the professional qualities and skills and obtains feedback on the student's development and growth. The summative element involves objective evaluation of achievements vis-à-vis the goals set when evaluation commenced (*Bogo; Vayda 1999, Karni 2003, Wilson 1981*). Studies in the field are a traditional means of imparting skills and practical experience, and makes of the work place a learning environment. Hence evaluating student performance in the place where they obtain practical experience also involves evaluation of scholastic achievement as expressed in the areas

of skills and practice (*Bogo; Vayda 1999, Maroon; Matousek 2004*).

The supervisor-student relationship is another central and significant component (*Gelman 2004, Lager; Robbins 2004*). This requires of supervisors ability to teach curriculum requirements and, additionally, to serve as role models in the profession. One of the best predictors for effective supervision and for a high level of satisfaction is a good supervision relationship of respect, honesty, empathy and acceptance (*Anderson et al. 2000, Power; Bogo 2002*), Supervision must reflect student competence vis-à-vis the learning content encountered in practical experience (*Biggerstaff 2000, Buchan et al. 2004, Cournoyer 2001, Gelman 2004, Hackett 2001, O'Hare et al. 1998, Wilson 1981*). *Wilson (1981)* maintains that the evaluation instrument should translate learning goals into a computable operative mode based on clear and detailed criteria. The absence of clear qualitative and quantitative standards makes the evaluator more subjective and creates uncertainty as to whether goals have been reached (*Shulman 1994, Stake 2004*).

Today, instruments for evaluating social workers and students are generally based on main content areas, with emphases differing from stages to stage of the supervision. The areas are:

- ▲ the supervisee's ability to create and maintain meaningful professional contact with the client,
- ▲ professional knowledge and skill,
- ▲ functioning as an employee in an agency, understanding its administrative structure,
- ▲ harmonious relations with the staff,
- ▲ reciprocal relations with the community, using its resources for the clients' benefit,
- ▲ the supervisee in supervision and
- ▲ professional attitudes and behavior, work ethic.

According to *Kadushin (1992)*, theoretical evaluation is not enough: a graded scale of supervision components is needed as well. Such a graded evaluation form is presented here as a model developed in Haifa, complementing the theoretical dimension of evaluation models. There are several sources for essential evaluation data. Students' recording are most important, and should include documentation of the social service file and intervention, follow clear processes of data gathering, diagnosis, setting goals and carrying out the plan in regard to the client, the questionnaires students used, their verbal reports, observations of student work with the client at staff meetings and in daily routines, using recordings of conversations with clients (*Huffman 1990*).

2. A model for evaluating student performance

2.1 Introduction

The three years of social work education and training proceed in parallel tracks – classroom learning and field study. The evaluation framework is an integral part of the supervision plan with its different emphases at each stage. In the first, two-year stage, supervisory stress is on examining professional competence in applying social work methods, developing a systemic perception and a professional identity. The second stage focuses on whether students can function as independent professionals, applying intervention strategies and skills differentially and integratively in filling their various roles. Evaluation content is based on the theoretical literature (*Ben-Oz 1990, Gitterman; Gitterman 1979, Kadushin 1992, Shulman 1982, Wilson 1981*). The model is based on behavioral observation scales (*Latham; Wexley 1981*). Here the supervisor is asked to note the frequency of particular behaviors in the student. The behavior continuum for each item runs from 'outstanding' to 'failing level'. The scale directs observation to those qualities that determine performance quality. The great advantage of the model lies in that evaluation relates to qualities anticipated in and emerging from the role of the student, so there is no need for inferences or predictions. The model offers comprehensive evaluation information because it does not make do with just one behavior 'anchor' but requires specific evaluation of each behavior separately.

2.2 Types of evaluation in the plan: interim and final

▲ *Feedback* is an integral and permanent part of any fieldwork instruction and continues throughout the year. It is a formative type of evaluation and an essential element in the dialogue between supervisor and supervisee, serving to keep open their main channel of communication.

▲ *Educational assessment* describes the individual starting point and the learning characteristics of each student. A month after the start of fieldwork an assessment is made. It relates to the student's knowledge and learning abilities, notes his or her learning patterns and makes it possible to prepare a supervision plan.

▲ The purpose of *formative evaluation* is to provide periodic feedback and to evaluate learning progress, to reinforce it and to improve what requires improvement. Formative evaluation proceeds concurrently with the learning process.

▲ *Summative evaluation* takes place at the end of the first & second semester. Its purpose is to report how well the student meets the standards required for the successful completion of a specific learning

process. Ultimately the learning process is summed up by formative evaluation.

2.3 Evaluation rating

The evaluation form is made up of sections, each representing an area of student function. Each is rated at levels from 5 to 1, in descending order. The first four represent passing grades, while the last indicates failure in practical work. To pass the course the student must obtain „needs improvement“ or a higher grade in more than half the statements in each section. Failure in one section means failure in field work. In the final section on work ethic and professional identity students must get a passing grade in all sections.

Definition of ratings:

▲ Outstanding = 5: The student's work performance far exceeds that usually expected of a student in this setting. This is the rating given to a student whose work effectiveness is considered superior by the supervisor.

▲ Very good = 4: The student's work performance consistently and fully meets all requirements of the work assigned. This rating is given to a student whose work effectiveness exceeds what the supervisor considers adequate and acceptable.

▲ Good = 3: The student's work performance meets and may occasionally exceed the requirements of the work assigned. The supervisor judges the student's work to be adequate and acceptable.

▲ Needs improvement = 2: The student's performance occasionally meets, but usually falls below, acceptable performance. The rating is intended as a notice to the student that the need for improvement in work performance is definitely indicated.

▲ Failing level = 1: The student's performance rarely if ever meets accepted levels.

Finally there is a formative evaluation designed to focus on and highlight the student's capacities and weaknesses, and to make recommendations.

2.4 Supervisor's evaluation of student function in the first stage of field practice

Evaluation is presented at the end of the first semester and of the academic year: Outstanding = 5; Very Good = 4; Good = 3; Needs Improvement = 2; Failing level = 1.

Working processes with individual and family

▲ Sensitivity to clients.

▲ Gathering and rearranging data regarding clients.

▲ Creating empathy- and acceptance-based ties with clients.

▲ Ability to map out clients' problem(s) and make a firmly based, integrative psychosocial evaluation.

▲ Drawing up a structured contract, based on the data, with clients.

▲ Using techniques and skills according to treatment needs.

▲ Intervention with community systems connected with the client, developing systemic thinking.

▲ Separation from the client, summing up, working through the separation.

Integration in the field work framework

▲ Getting to know the structure and function of the service.

▲ Understanding how the agency integrates with other community services.

▲ Contacts with other workers in the service.

▲ Participating in meetings and seminars of the service.

The student as supervisee

▲ Openness in the supervision process.

▲ Initiative in the supervision process.

▲ Using and applying recommendations for therapeutic needs.

▲ Applying what is learned.

▲ Prepared for meetings with supervisor and submits reports on time.

Work ethic and professional identity – the student as a professional

▲ Awareness of professional ethics and values.

▲ Success in bridging gaps, if any, between personal and professional values.

▲ Decision making and taking responsibility in work with clients.

▲ Readiness to give service in a crisis after work hours.

▲ Integrity and faithful reporting, transmits reliable information.

▲ Commitment to profession and to continued professional development.

Formative evaluation

▲ Performance in the various stages of therapy: data gathering, diagnosis, planning of therapy, therapy, separation and conclusion of therapy.

▲ Outstanding areas and abilities in the student's work.

▲ Weak areas and weak points in the student's work.

▲ The student's chances of continuing to learn and develop professionally.

▲ To the student: Do you agree or disagree with the evaluation? Explain.

2.5 Supervisor's evaluation of student function in the second stage of field practice

Evaluation is presented at the end of the first semester and of the academic year: Outstanding = 5; Very Good = 4; Good = 3; Needs Improvement = 2; Failing level = 1.

Working processes with the individual and his family

- ▲ Ability to map out the client's problems, and make a sound, integrative psycho-social evaluation.
- ▲ Integrate theoretical material with applications.
- ▲ Construct a therapeutic plan derived from the evaluation and apply it.
- ▲ Use techniques and skills appropriate to the therapeutic process.
- ▲ Construct a plan having both long and short ranges, with flexibility for changes.
- ▲ Engage clients in setting goals of intervention at all stages of the therapeutic contact.
- ▲ Working through separation from the client, systematic evaluation of intervention.

Integration in the field work framework

- ▲ Familiarity with the agency and its links with other community welfare services.
- ▲ Internalizing social work goals and applying them in fieldwork.
- ▲ Integration in an interdisciplinary team, making a professional contribution.
- ▲ Ability to criticize. Examining work patterns in relation to the goals of the service, identifying defects and suggesting improvements.

Group work

- ▲ Gathering basic data, familiarity with the group in preparation for diagnosis.
- ▲ Drawing up a contract with the group on the basis of defined aims and purposes.
- ▲ Identifying and accelerating dynamic processes within the group.
- ▲ Tolerance for and understanding of differences within the group, coping with conflicts.
- ▲ Differential coping and relating to individuals, using varied intervention techniques.
- ▲ Working out an evaluation with group members and end of group work

Community work

- ▲ Identifying needs, sources and resources in the community, knowing its geography.
- ▲ Understanding external economic, political and cultural influences, as well as internal pressures within the community.
- ▲ Defining activity plans on the basis of identified

community needs, developing aims in cooperation with other bodies involved in the project.

- ▲ Functioning on the professional and interdisciplinary teams.
- ▲ Systematic, comprehensive follow-up in various stages of the project.

The student as supervisee

- ▲ Openness and self-criticism, raising questions and dilemmas.
- ▲ Initiative in the supervisory process.
- ▲ Applying recommendations for therapeutic needs.
- ▲ Focused and organized use of additional study sources.
- ▲ Assumes responsibility for learning, initiates introduction of new content.
- ▲ Comes prepared to supervisory sessions, submits reports on time.

Work ethic and professional identity: the student as a professional

- ▲ Is aware of professional ethics and values.
- ▲ Can bridge the gap, if any, between personal and professional values.
- ▲ Makes decisions and takes responsibility in working with clients.
- ▲ Is willing to give service after hours in times of crisis.
- ▲ Integrity and honest reporting, transmits reliable information.
- ▲ Is committed to the profession and to continued professional development.

Formative evaluation

- ▲ Ability to internalize, apply and use theoretical knowledge independently in treating clients.
- ▲ Professional conduct, ethics and identity.
- ▲ Outstanding areas and abilities in the student's work.
- ▲ Mature relations with the supervisor, self-criticism, ability to change direction, to stand up for personal opinion and develop self-awareness.
- ▲ Weak areas and weak points in the student's work.
- ▲ Potential for continued study and professional development.
- ▲ For the student: To what extent do you agree with the evaluation? Explain.

3. Principal results expected at the end of the field practice

The student will be able to function as an independent professional, and define intervention strategies that will help reinforce the coping and problem-solving powers of individuals, families and groups.

She or he will know how to use a variety of intervention methods and skills differentially and integrate them, and be able fill different related roles.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the study is to present the instrument for evaluating the field practice achievements of social work students. These are defined as the ability to apply theory in a real life setting as expressed in levels of acquired knowledge as well as professional attitudes and skills that will enable them to function as competent social workers. From personal experience as a supervisor using this plan, I find it a successful evaluation instrument in operatively ascertaining and measuring the student's professional competence, based as it is on clear and detailed criteria (Maroon; Matousek 2004).

Two points stand out in my work as a supervisor. One is that the supervisor-supervisee relationship is highly significant, and may impair one's objectivity, leading the supervisor into subjectivity that is misplaced here. As a suggested solution, criteria that reflect the supportive function of supervision should be added to the evaluation, reducing in parallel fashion the quantity of detail reflecting administrative and educational functions. A second difficulty is that supervisors rely chiefly on what students submit, which may be misleading, incomplete and subjective. Hence it is important to introduce additional information sources that concentrate on three main components: process recording, observation of students when working with clients and at meetings, and recordings by the students (Bogo et al. 2004).

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Rundschau

► Allgemeines

Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz. Im August diesen Jahres trat das Allgemeine Gleichbehandlungsgesetz (AGG) in Kraft. Das neue Gesetz schafft für die Bürgerinnen und Bürger mehr Rechtssicherheit als bisher. Die Ausgestaltung der Antidiskriminierungsarbeit bekommt dadurch einen verlässlichen Rahmen. Der Gesetzgeber bringt mit dem AGG zum Ausdruck, dass in einem Rechtsstaat Diskriminierung und ungerechtfertigte Ungleichbehandlung von Menschen wegen ihrer Rasse oder ethnischen Herkunft, ihres Geschlechts, ihrer Religion, ihres Alters, ihrer Behinderung oder ihrer sexuellen Identität nicht nur inakzeptabel, sondern auch rechtlich unzulässig sind und damit verfolgt werden können. Diskriminierungen jeglicher Art sind kein Kavaliersdelikt. Ob am Arbeitsplatz oder in sonstigen Bereichen des täglichen Lebens (beim Einkauf, bei Verträgen, gegenüber Versicherungen etc.) – das AGG bietet Schutz vor Ungleichbehandlung. Der Senat von Berlin hat Anfang letzten Jahres eine Leitstelle gegen Diskriminierung aus ethnischen, religiösen und weltanschaulichen Gründen eingerichtet, an die sich Bürgerinnen und Bürger wenden können, die diskriminiert wurden oder sich diskriminiert fühlen. Das neue Gesetz wird die Arbeit der Leitstelle erleichtern. Sie wird künftig eng mit der Gleichbehandlungsstelle des Bundes zusammenarbeiten. *Quelle: Pressemitteilung des Beauftragten des Senats von Berlin für Integration und Migration vom 18. August 2006*

Kompetenzzentrum Ehrenamt. Um Mitgliedsorganisationen des Deutschen Paritätischen Wohlfahrtsverbands, Landesverband Berlin, unterstützend und beratend zur Seite zu stehen, hat die Paritätische Akademie ein „Kompetenzzentrum Ehrenamt“ geschaffen. Die Einrichtung ist Ansprechpartner, wenn es um die Themen Ehrenamt, Freiwilligenarbeit und bürgerschaftliches Engagement geht. Sie bietet Beratung und vielfältige Möglichkeiten zur Fort- und Weiterbildung. Unter anderem werden Anfragen zu Forschungsergebnissen im Ehrenamtsbereich auf Grundlage aktueller Daten beantwortet. In Zusammenarbeit mit der „Paritätischen Gesellschaft BürgerAktiv“ arbeitet das Kompetenzzentrum an der Weiterentwicklung eines Ehrenamtsnetzes, um eine breitflächige Vernetzung zu erreichen und Informationen zum Thema Ehrenamt zu verbreiten. Weitere Informationen: Ina Kant, Tel. 24 63 64 43, E-Mail: kant@akademie.org *Quelle: Paritätischer Rundbrief, Landesverband Berlin, 7-8.2006*

Visionen sozialen Handelns. Menschlich + fachlich + wirtschaftlich. ConSozial 2005. Hrsg. Joachim König und andere. Allitera Verlag. München 2006, 404 S., EUR 22,- *DZI-D-7563*

Dieser Dokumentationsband der ConSozial 2005 stellt die aktuelle Diskussion zu dem Kongressthema „Visionen sozialen Handelns“ zusammen. In ihm finden sich der Plenumsvortrag „Der Weg zum sozialen Dienstleister am