Combining Social Work Education and Intervention Research: Lessons Learned from a Multi-Methods Course

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Agenda

- Rationale & Description of Course
- Discussion of Multi-Methods
  - Traditional classroom
  - Experiential
  - Online/technology
  - Integrative assignment
- Challenges & Hurdles
- Lessons Learned
- Questions & Discussion
Evaluation of a Child Maltreatment Prevention Intervention

- Advanced research elective

- Requirements:
  - Clinical or Management/Community Organization Concentrations
  - Family & Children or Mental Health specializations
  - Screening interview with PI
  - Ability to work in four hour blocks each week
  - Access to vehicle
  - Willingness to work in the field

- Integration of research and educational goals
Purpose of Course

- To provide students with opportunities to explore critical research questions, methods, and results related to the prevention of child neglect.

- Students helped to implement a follow-up study with children and families who had received home-based services 5 – 7 years prior to this course.
Course: Goals & Objectives

- Knowledge:
  - Protection of human subjects & research ethics
  - Data collection Methods
  - Documentation of research activities
  - Data entry
  - Data analysis
  - Literature review
  - Report Writing
  - Working as part of a research team
Course: Goals & Objectives

- **Attitudes:**
  - Commitment to using research to strengthen social work practice
  - Increased awareness of how family structure, race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic and social class status impact families in the community and how to examine these effects with social work research
  - Awareness and sensitivity to the scientific method and how research may be used to inform social work practice in the community
Course: Goals & Objectives

Skills:

- Using existing research practice literature to locate and obtain information regarding variables that impact the care of children by families living in poverty.
- Performance of research tasks including searching for, recruiting, obtaining informed consent from caregivers, and interviewing research participants.
- Use of assessment measures, including standardized self-report scales and observational measures, to evaluate the efficacy of a community based preventative intervention.
Family Connections

- Family Connections was specifically designed to:
  - reduce risk factors associated with neglect and
  - enhance protective factors that may help families more adequately meet the basic needs of their children.

*Family Connections* program—Original data collection: 1997-2001

(DePanfilis, 2002; DePanfilis & Dubowitz, 2005)
Research Project

- Following Family Connections: A Longitudinal Follow-Up Study of a Neglect Prevention Program
  - Five Year Follow up: 2004-2005
    - Four standardized instruments (BSI, PSI, CESD, CBCL)
    - Family Assessment Form (observational measure)
Instructors and Resources

- Faculty
  - Diane DePanfilis & Heather Girvin

- Graduate Research Assistants
  - Anna Hayward & Fatima Mirza

- Administrative support
  - Center for Families staff, computers, telephones, workspace

- Funding
  - Grant from the Lois and Samuel Silberman Fund
  - Faculty Grant Program; Support from the UMB Center for Families
Teaching Methods

- Traditional Classroom
- Experiential Learning
- Online/Technology Enhanced
- Students’ field of practice
- Integrative Paper
Rationale

- Social work students may be reluctant to take required research courses, anxious about research content, and may not see the link to SW practice. (Green, Bretzin, Leininger, & Stauffer, 2001)
- Experiential learning, real-world applications have been suggested. (Green et al., 2001)
- Reality of “real world” research requires flexibility & ability to respond to changing circumstances.
Traditional Instruction: Lectures

- Course expectations and requirements
  - Introduction to Blackboard™ (online resource)
- Overview of Family Connections Research
- Participating on a research team
- Ethical principles/Human subjects
  - Informed consent
  - Privacy & confidentiality
- Principles of administering research interviews
  - Engagement with participants
  - Structure and style of research interviewing
- Review of standardized and observational measures
  - Inter-rater reliability
- Data analysis
- Writing about empirical research
Traditional Instruction: **Activities**

- **Skill building exercises**
  - Role playing research interviews
  - “certification” by research staff

- **Small group activities**
  - Group rating of case scenarios using observational measures.

- **Classroom discussions**
  - Experiences in the community
  - The role of a researcher vs. social work practitioner
  - Integrating research data with literature reviews
    - (integrative assignment: final research paper)
Experiential Learning: Research Activities

- Ethics training
- Locating families (telephone & internet)
- Contacting families
  - Telephone calls
  - “Drive by” searches
- Interviewing families in the community
  - Home visits
  - Structured interview
  - Observational
- Data Entry
- Literature Reviews
Online Learning: **Content**
(via BlackBoard™)

- Personal home pages
- Instructor contact information
- Research project background material
- Reading material
- Weekly lectures (PPT)
- Grades
- Announcements/messages from instructors
Online Learning: Activities

- **Required** weekly participation on Blackboard™
- Discussion groups
  - Rater questions (observational measure)
  - Course content questions
  - “Find a partner”
  - Debriefing
  - Instructor feedback
- Assessments (including non graded quizzes)
- Schedule coordination
- Digital drop box
Rationale for Integrating Online Content & Activities

- Continued dialog and learning between class sessions
- Allowed for coordination of complex schedules
- Instructors were immediately available to answer questions
- Students provided feedback, discussion and assistance to each other
- Participation can be quantified and measured
- Immediate feedback from assessments
- Consistent with a trend toward using technology to support research
Online Social Work Education

- Increase in online education since the 1990’s (Palloff & Pratt, 2001)

- CSWE acceptance of distance learning (Elbert, Jennings, Conklin, & Napoletano-Flynn, 1998).

- Online courses (or online-supplemented courses) have been developed within all areas of the social work curriculum (Moore, 2005)

- Increase access by non-traditional students, or those in remote areas (Hick, 2002; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000)
Incorporating Best Practices into Online Education

- Evaluation studies measure student satisfaction and learning/content retention with mixed results, suggesting online education is not compatible with all content, students, or instructors (see Biggerstaff, 2005; Bushfield, 2005; Faux & Black-Hughes, 2000; Harrington, 1999; Petracci, Mallinger, Engel, Rishel, & Washburn, 2005; Wolfson, Magnuson, & Marsom, 2005).

- Particular success (student participation, satisfaction, linking field and learning) with integrative practice seminars (Bushfield, 2005; Wolfson, Magnuson, & Marsom, 2005).

- “Guide on the side” not “sage on the stage” & constructivist approach (Rice-Green & Dumbrill, 2005).
Best Practices

- Need for interaction (Stocks & Freddolino, 2000)
  - Content
  - Students
  - Instructor

- Training for students

- Developing a learning community

- Trained, knowledgeable, available and receptive instructor on the “other side” of the virtual classroom.
Purpose

- Students integrate research observations, quantitative data, literature review and area of interest in the field.
- Integration of various learning tasks throughout the semester

Assignment

- Develop caregiver profile based on research interview
- Analyze profile based on two identified constructs related to child and family well-being
- Consider implications for field of practice
Grading/Assessments

- Research Tasks
  - Quantity
  - Quality
    - Review data entry
    - Expert review of FAF rating

- Attendance
  - Classroom
  - Online
  - Lab hours
    - 4 hours per week

- Final Paper
  - Statement of the problem
  - Search (literature review)
  - Summary of family
  - Analysis of risk and protective factors
  - Implications
Logistics

- **Office space**
  - Overlapping schedules
  - Access to phones & computers

- **Training**
  - Use of technology
  - Research instruments
  - Interviewing skills

- **Scheduling**
  - Students
  - Instructors (supervision)
  - Research participants
Challenges/Hurdles

- IRB delays
- Students not ready to interview
- Inability to locate respondents
- Maturity and experience of students
- Ethical Issues
  - Incorporating students in research
  - Preparedness for the field
Lessons Learned

- Need for support
- Time commitment for supervision of:
  - Students
  - Research tasks
  - IRB compliance
  - Conduct in the field
- Need for flexibility
- Multiple instructors
  - Consistent instruction to students
  - Communication
- Technological savvy of students
- Interview/practice skills of students
Questions & Discussion
References


University of Maryland Center for Families

Promoting safety, health, and well-being for children, families, and communities through community and clinical services, research, education, and advocacy.
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