

Role Conflicts of BSW Students and Instructors in Experiential Learning: Lessons From a Case Study

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Experiential learning is an important component of social work education. However, experiential learning contexts often place both students and instructors into multiple, conflicting roles. This paper uses a case study methodology to explore role conflicts experienced by BSW students and an instructor involved in a community change effort on behalf of minority residents in a rural Midwest town. This case suggests that, despite some risks, role conflicts in experiential learning make a positive contribution to social work education. Rather than avoiding or minimizing role conflicts, educators should incorporate these conflicts intentionally but cautiously into the learning experience.

An ongoing challenge in social work education is to provide learning contexts in which students can practice new skills and apply theory and knowledge in genuine social settings (Frumpkin & Lloyd, 1995; Rocha, 2000). Social work education has long had a history of developing curricula that balance the mastery of theoretical knowledge with experiential skill (Goldstein, 2001; Lucas, 2000; Papell & Skolnik, 1992). One of the specific challenges in achieving this balance is negotiating and managing the role conflicts experienced by both students and instructors. We define role conflict as the pressures that one experiences from the incompatible expectations attached to different roles a person is filling simultaneously (Coverman, 1989, p. 968; Siegall & Cummings, 1995, p. 31). In experiential learning contexts, both students and instructors may experience role conflicts when the learning experience thrusts them into roles with expectations that are incompatible with their primary educational roles. If experiential learning is to continue to be useful and feasible, attention must be given to the nature of these role conflicts, how they are experienced, and how

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we can learn from these conflicts and experiences in order to enhance social work education.

This article describes a case example of BSW students initiating a community change effort on behalf of minority residents in a rural Midwest town. Using this case, we can explore the processes of the change effort, how they were incorporated into the social work curriculum, and how both the students and instructor navigated the role conflicts in this situation. While this case did not originate as a research study, the authors adapted principles and methods from case study approaches retrospectively in order to explore these issues (Yin, 1994). To set the stage for the analysis, we review relevant literature and summarize how the case study approach was modified to focus our exploration and analysis. After describing the case, the article addresses the nature of the role conflicts experienced by both students and instructor, and then concludes with lessons and implications for social work education.

Literature Review

Social work educators have consistently faced the challenge of providing a professional, skills-based education within an academic context that focuses primarily on science and theory (Goldstein, 2001; Papell & Skolnik, 1992; Wheeler & Gibbons, 1992). As Donald Schon (1990) has pointed out, these academic models of education may actually be more detrimental than helpful, because, he argued, professional practice is as much art as science. Although field education has been one of the principle ways in which social work education programs have integrated practice and theory (Frumpkin & Lloyd, 1995; Goldstein, 2001), increasing attention has focused on experiential learning opportunities in course work as well (Rocha, 2000). For example, social work educators have joined other disciplines in incorporating service-learning models into their curricula (Lucas, 2000). Some educators have particularly noted the need to develop meaningful experiential learning opportunities to develop competencies in macro practice areas (Byers & Stone, 1999; Koerin, Reeves, & Rosenblum, 2000; Rocha, 2000). Goldstein (2001) defines experiential learning as a "humanistic and democratic model of education that prepares learners to respect, respond to, and find meaning in the impelling life experiences of their clients" (p. 7). Experiential learning is an approach that recognizes the limits of science for understanding the complexity of social life and attempts to balance the science with the art of professional practice.

Although these contributions are helpful, social work scholars have not addressed how these experiential learning opportunities might place students into situations in which they experience role conflicts. This is particularly relevant for BSW students because they tend to be young adults who face the developmental challenge of making the role transition from student to professional (Koerin, Harrigan, & Reeves, 1990). Some social work educators (Campbell, 1999; Kurland, 1990) have drawn attention to how instructors' appropriate

use of authority with students can model how students can use their own authority in ethical and constructive relationships with clients. Further, several authors have observed that becoming comfortable with conflicts and multiple roles should play a role in educating students to manage the stress and ambiguities associated with professional practice (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 1990; Kurland, 1992; Rice, 1999). More recently, Congress' research has focused on dual relationships in social work education and has brought to light the ethical dilemmas faced by social work instructors as they relate to their students in four ways: as a sexual partner, as a friend, as a therapist, and as an employer (Congress, 1996; 2001). Other than this work, virtually no attention has been paid to the role conflicts which experiential learning places on students or instructors in social work education.

Literature and theory on role conflict provide only partial guidance about such conflicts in social work education. Typically, theory and research on role conflict (and related concepts such as role ambiguity, role overload, role strain, and role stress) have focused on two contexts: the stress of role conflicts on employees within various occupational settings (Siegall & Cummings, 1995), and the stress and coping associated with the conflicts of multiple life roles (such as parent, spouse, employee, student), particularly for women (Coverman, 1989). Theories of role conflict are rooted in the theoretical contributions of social psychologists, who have posited that the conflict associated with roles stems from the expectations that are attached to particular roles and the importance of these roles shaping a person's sense of identity (Heiss, 1990).

One of the challenges in researching role conflict has been the conceptualization and operationalization of concepts (Siegall & Cummings, 1995). In part due to these challenges, research has produced mixed findings. For example, it is unclear whether role conflicts are associated with enhanced or diminished job performance (Jones, 1993; Tubre & Collins, 2000). The lack of clarity in operationalizing role conflict and the relative lack of attention to role conflict issues in experiential learning suggest a gap in our knowledge. It seems safe to assume that social work professionals will experience various role conflicts and associated work stress throughout their careers (Jones, 1993; Kurland, 1992). Attention to role conflict issues in experiential social work education can contribute to social work educators' ability to prepare students more fully for the demands of professional practice.

Adapting Case Study Methods Retrospectively

Our study utilized a single embedded case study design. As conceptualized by Yin (1994, p. 39), this design involves only one case but has multiple units of analysis. Further, following Stake (2000), we classify our study as an *instrumental* approach because the case is examined not simply to understand it in depth, but to understand how a particular case sheds light on other similar cases. For our purposes, the case is defined as the class participants' experiences

and involvement on behalf of minority residents, and the units of analysis are the students and the instructor. As reflexive participants (Papell & Skolnik, 1992), we reflected on our experiences as they occurred. But, contrary to conventional practice in case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994), we focused our analysis of this case "after the fact," rather than planning it as a research study beforehand.

This strategy has a number of limitations (de Vaus, 2001). First, it limits inclusion of relevant data simply because there was no prior plan for collection. Second, it increases the likelihood of selection biases, since we did not follow suggested protocols for case selection. Similarly, retrospective studies do not permit causal explanations because there is no opportunity to select cases in which there is variation on the variables or phenomena being studied (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, pp. 136-148). Finally, while qualitative research generally rejects the "objectivity" standard of positivist or post-positivist research (Punch, 1998; Rubin & Babbie, 2001), there is greater danger that researchers will be unable to demonstrate "fairness" in interpreting the data (Patton, 1990; 2002). Despite these limitations, the authors believe that the specific methodological techniques of case study research can be adapted in order to study our experience and provide an opportunity for others to learn from it.

We developed the following procedures for our analysis and interpretation of this case. As in virtually all rigorous research in the social sciences (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000, chapter 2; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991, pp. 187-194), the development of relevant research questions forms the foundation of case study research (de Weerd-Nederhof, 2001; Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) noted that case study research is especially well-suited to address questions in settings that the researcher cannot manipulate experimentally and for which it is necessary to understand the contextual influences on the phenomena of interest. Accordingly, we developed the following research questions:

1. What was the nature of the role conflicts in these experiences?
2. How did we manage and resolve them?
3. How did these experiences enhance or hinder our learning?
4. In what ways does the discomfort (or "dissonance") associated with role conflicts prepare learners for gaining new insights?

Case study research employs multiple sources of data, both qualitative and quantitative (Gilgun, 1994; Tellis, 1997). Though they can include almost anything, types of data fall in three general categories: existing records, interviews, and observations (Yin, 1994). Within each, there are various (and almost infinite) possibilities for gathering the required data. The key, according to Yin (1994, pp. 90-99) is to utilize multiple sources, to develop a plan that logically matches the study questions, and to keep accurate records of the data collection processes. We utilized the following procedures for gathering data. First, we col-

lected data that were already available. This included students' reflections on course assignments and projects, student evaluations of courses, and the instructor's personal journal. In addition, we gathered information about the case from media sources, meeting minutes, and other documents from the various committees. Finally, we shared drafts of our paper with class members and invited their comments and interpretation. This last method also served to enhance the study's validity via reviews by key informants (Yin, 1994, pp. 34–5).

Our analysis strategy began with a chronological reconstruction of "the story" of the case. This follows suggestions from a number of qualitative researchers to begin with description and then move to interpretation and explanation (Patton, 1990; 2002). Following this reconstruction, and guided by our research questions, we identified experiences of role conflicts and grouped them into categories or themes. Next, we examined the particular experiences and contexts of each of the types of role conflicts to generate implications, lessons, and interpretations. Finally, following the guidelines suggested by many case study and qualitative researchers (King et al., 1994; Stake, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Yin, 1994), we assessed the relevance of these findings against the theories reviewed in the literature.

James Drisko (1997) suggested six criteria for evaluating the integrity of qualitative research in social work: (1) choice of epistemology, (2) identification of audience and objectives, (3) specification of method, (4) identification of biases, (5) maintenance of social work ethics, and (6) consistency between the study's approach and its conclusions. We believe that our use of a qualitative case study methodology, adapted and within the limits as we have described above, meets these criteria and makes a useful contribution for social work educators, particularly at the baccalaureate level. Perhaps the biggest challenge is clearly acknowledging our own participation in this case, while at the same time giving a fair and balanced analysis and interpretation of the data. Key to data analysis is a logical and transparent process of reasoning that demonstrates a fair, thorough, and accurate rendering of the data (de Weerd-Nederhof, 2001; Gilgun, 1994; Marshall, 1999; Patton, 2002; Yin, 1994). Within these guidelines, we trust that we have provided sufficient information to permit readers to judge whether we have met these expectations.

The Case

Most rural communities in the Midwest are overwhelmingly populated by people of European heritage (90% or higher Caucasian according to the 2000 U.S. Census). In the past decade, however, increasing numbers of immigrants have moved into rural communities in the Midwest to meet the demands of businesses eager for workers during a labor shortage (Paul, 2001). This development has posed challenges for communities trying to integrate growing minority populations into their homogeneous and traditional rural citizenry

(Belsie, 2001). The rural town where this case took place came face to face with this issue when the local college sought to expand its campus by developing land being used as trailer housing for predominantly Hispanic residents.

Spanning two school years and in the context of two social work classes, BSW students organized a campaign to educate the college and the community and mobilize community members to develop solutions for these families. These efforts began in the fall of 1999 when junior social work students became aware of the plight of the trailer court residents and, as part of a social welfare policy course, organized several campus meetings to raise awareness about the problem. These meetings resulted in the establishment of a community-wide ad hoc committee led by the deacons of one of the denominations in town.

The students' involvement continued in the fall of 2000 when those juniors who had initiated the awareness campaign the previous year ago were seniors in a community practice course. The students agreed to use a course project to understand and analyze the community dynamics and develop strategic alternatives for change in three communities related to this event: the trailer court community, a nearby town where a proposed new trailer park cooperative was planned, and the town in which the college and the trailer court were located.

Following the model adapted from Cox (1995), students, in teams of three, were required to visit their assigned community, meet with key informants, and develop a detailed analysis of the community. In addition, using the well-known framework developed by Rothman and his colleagues (Rothman, 1995), students were required to propose a community change strategy following one of three approaches: locality development, social planning, or social action. This involvement was different in a number of ways from their involvement in the social welfare policy course the previous year. First, the activities were not as spontaneous, but built into the requirements of the course. Involvement was limited only to students taking the course and did not include student involvement from outside the course or the major. Further, the tasks were more focused, with clearer parameters and expectations for both students and instructor. Nevertheless, ambivalence and uncertainty were also present. As described below, students experienced different kinds of challenges related to their multiple roles in these communities.

The story, or perhaps a chapter in it, came to an end in the fall of 2001. By June 2001, the students had graduated, the last family had moved out of the trailer park, and the college began work to redevelop the land. Many of the issues brought to light by these events remain, including lack of affordable housing for those who are economically disadvantaged, assimilation adaptation of immigrants into rural, White communities, difficulty in balancing the legitimate needs of a college for expansion with its obligations to the wider community. Notwithstanding these important issues, at the close of this chapter of the story, we took the opportunity to reflect on our experiences as instructor and students, and examine how they provide lessons and insights for baccalaureate social work education.

Role Conflicts in Experiential Learning

Student Experiences of Role Conflicts

We grouped the students' experiences of role conflicts under two themes. The first theme included students struggling with the process of becoming empowered as change agents. This theme can be captured by the question: What power do I have to be an agent of change? The second theme centered on issues of legitimacy and authority. A question characterizing this theme would be: What "right" do I have to play this role?

Empowerment The theme of empowerment emerged frequently in several different types of experiences. In general, students struggled with becoming comfortable with a role that was new to them and, therefore, awkward and uncomfortable. One way in which this was manifested was in students' self-perceptions as part of an academic institution. For the most part, students' educational experiences have been as passive consumers of learning. Students are "empty vessels" and instructors, the "experts" who "fill them up" with knowledge. The expectation in this role is that students generally follow the rules with little thought of questioning or challenging them.

This experience challenged that passive role. Students worked alongside the instructor to brainstorm strategies, plan agendas, and facilitate meetings. This experience led students to see themselves in a way that was generally new to them: as persons who had something useful to contribute and expected to participate.

Similarly, when students initiated meetings with college and city administrators, they were confronted with two images of themselves. On one hand, some administrators treated the students paternalistically, which reinforced students' roles as passive receptacles. On the other hand, students also experienced, somewhat to their surprise, that city officials were responsive and took seriously the students' concerns. This responsiveness was particularly highlighted when the college's president and vice president for business accepted an invitation to attend one of the ad hoc committee's brainstorming meetings. At this meeting, students played a lead role in asking challenging questions of these two college officials. Because of this experience, students said they began to feel capable of challenging systems in which they had previously felt powerless.

While these experiences were generally positive, there were other instances when students doubted their capacity to influence systems on behalf of those who were disadvantaged. The students felt disempowered in two ways. The paternalism they experienced from some college administrators, mentioned above, reinforced to students that they were young and inexperienced. One student reported feeling like a "little girl and just a student," while others expressed that at times they felt somewhat intimidated by the city and college officials.

Students also experienced powerlessness in the transient nature of their membership in the community. That first fall, some students began to recognize

as the semester's end drew near that they were not in a position to continue attending meetings or putting pressure on the college and other systems to respond to the trailer park residents' plight. The vast majority of the student participants were not from the immediate community. Facing a holiday break, a new semester with new demands and priorities, and, even further on the horizon, the following summer's break and graduation, students began to realize that, unlike permanent members of the community, they were not there for the long haul. One student expressed this sentiment clearly in a document she prepared as a summary of the social policy classes' activities:

The students who are involved in addressing this issue feel that it is time for it to be taken on by others in the community who know political processes and laws more clearly. Students are temporary citizens [of this town] and they come and go, therefore their power in this issue is limited.

This realization led to a sense of frustration that they would not be able to finish what they had started and to a sense of uncertainty about what would happen next. In addition to heightening students' sense of powerlessness, they also began to question their legitimacy, as we discuss further below.

Legitimacy and Authority Students also experienced role conflicts that led them to wonder if they had legitimacy and authority for new roles as change agents and advocates. This brought role conflicts for one student in particular who was a lifelong member of the community:

I was also very much a member of my hometown throughout my college education. Thus I often fell somewhere between the locals and the students. As a visible speaker in the trailer court work, however, this position took on a whole new level of difficulty.

This conflict represents both an "interrole" conflict, in which a person feels contradictory expectations from playing two or more roles, but also represents "inter-sender" conflict, in which a person's perception of their role conflicts with others' expectations (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This student stepped into one of the key leadership roles right from the beginning during the policy course. Later, in reflecting on her experience in the community practice course, she disclosed that she had felt uncomfortable with the way some of her classmates had approached this problem:

At the inception of the project, I had my doubts about the whole thing. I strongly preferred to stick to our scheduled class work and not even deal with the whole mess. The roots of the college are strong and deep with[in] the community and as a shaky member of both, I could see that this was not going to be easy. My classmates shared another vision however, one of helping those in need regardless of the difficulties. While I worried about

what was going to happen, they dreamed of what we could accomplish. Then the discussions started about what we could do. Several class members piped up with wondrous plans of storming the campus authorities and notifying townspeople and alumni of the horrible acts occurring in the trailer court. Perhaps it was my own hesitancy with the project and perhaps it was my own hometown pride trying to avoid being squashed, but I began to find holes in every possibility. It seemed that no matter what my classmates would suggest, I could point out something wrong with the idea.

Her experience of conflict peaked when her name appeared in a newspaper article describing a neighboring town's rejection of the trailer park residents' proposed cooperative (Siebert, 2000):

When the paper hit stands, a family member was one of the first ones to notice that my name was in the paper. She immediately called my mom saying with some sarcasm, "I didn't know we had an activist in the family." This started the whole mess with my family over again. Stress levels went through the roof. Conflicts and tears abounded again.

In this student's experience, being both a social work student and a member of the local community put her into painful conflict with her family and local community members who knew her. They questioned the legitimacy of her role as an advocate and spokesperson for people they regarded as "outsiders."

Another way in which students felt role conflicts about their legitimacy was when a team of three students had to find a way to contact residents of the trailer park for their community analysis project. Several weeks after the project had been assigned, the three students requested a meeting with the instructor. After making initial contacts with some of the families in the community, they expressed doubts about their ability to offer anything useful or relevant to these families. As one of the students commented:

Why should they trust us? Why should they even let us into their homes? What can we tell them when they ask if we can help them? What can we do? We've already tried to do things, and it hasn't worked. They think we can make the college change its mind. They tell us about their problems and think we can just go the college and do something about it. One woman said she can't hang out her wash anymore because there's a huge pile of dirt from the construction and her clothes get dusty, the dust blows in the house, and she has to keep all the windows closed all the time. What can we do about this? They think we're [the college], but we're just students.

In this experience, the students felt a lack of legitimacy based on their feeling of powerlessness being "just students" and being outsiders in the community. After spending more time with the residents and listening to their stories, students recognized that what they could offer was simply a willingness to listen and offer

a nonjudgmental and sympathetic ear. In part, this sparked recognition that their contribution was not simply in accomplishing tangible tasks, but also providing a process for reflection.

Instructor Experiences of Role Conflicts

The instructor's experiences of role conflicts can be grouped into three areas. The first raised conflicts related to balancing the incompatible expectations of multiple professional roles. The second area focused on relational conflicts associated with different leadership approaches. Finally, the third area of role conflict can be labeled personal role conflicts and concerned the difficulty of prioritizing and satisfying many role expectations. This last type of role conflict is similar to what role theorists have termed role overload, in which the role demands exceed one's capacity to fulfill them (Coverman, 1989, pp. 967-8; Heiss, 1990, p. 97).

Professional role conflicts One of the first role conflicts the instructor experienced centered on the role of teacher versus other professional roles. This became apparent in one of the class sessions when students first became aware of the problem.

The students in my class became impassioned and indignant and wanted to organize to do something about it. I had to make an on-the-spot decision: steer students back to the course schedule, or use the course to facilitate organizing. I chose the latter. Despite what I knew were the risks (not covering the material, raising controversies, antagonizing the college administration), I felt in my heart that squelching the students' passion and not using the opportunity would have been contrary to the goals of the social work profession, but more importantly, inconsistent with my own values.

The role conflict crystallized in the incompatible expectations of two roles: as an instructor and employee of the college, and as a member of a profession that placed a high value on the well-being of disadvantaged groups. This conflict was heightened when a number of faculty colleagues questioned the instructor's role in this issue, and suggested that my time was better spent "teaching, and not wasting time on stuff that we've [the college] already dealt with."

Relational role conflicts A second area of conflict came in the complicating demands of negotiating different types of relationships with students. This is similar to Congress' (1996) discussion of dual relationships and, in particular, her description of the dual role of friend or, as the instructor's journal describes it, as "peer":

I asked myself, "Who am I in this new context?" In previous community organizing contexts I worked with adults who I considered my peers. Here, my

role with students is as instructor, teacher, giver of grades, and thus I did not consider myself to be a peer in the same sense. But, in the face of a campus- and community-wide social problem, this was an issue in which our shared values moved us to be more of peers ("how shall we get this done?").

One way the instructor managed this conflict was to consciously adopt a specific role as a locality development community organizer (Rothman, 1995). In this role, the organizer does not take a central and visible position in a change effort, but rather, focuses on facilitating the target client group—in this case, the students—to develop the capacity to do it for themselves. Thus, the instructor was available "behind the scenes" to organize meetings, plan agendas, and develop strategies, but it was always the students who acted as chairpersons of meetings and spokespersons for the groups, and who sent out notices and documents on behalf of the group. Playing this locality development role, the instructor was able to both support and facilitate students' efforts on behalf of the trailer park residents, and still remain within the role expectations as a social work instructor and college employee.

Personal role conflicts A final type of role conflict was juggling multiple priorities. As noted above, this might more accurately be conceived as a situation of "role overload," which is defined as a situation in which the expectations of multiple roles outstrip the resources a person has to fulfill these demands or, as Coverman (1989) puts it, "too many role demands and too little time to fulfill them" (p. 967). For the instructor, giving time to facilitate students' organizing efforts conflicted with other professional and personal demands. The necessity to set appropriate boundaries between professional and personal demands particularly was difficult, as described in the following journal entry:

This issue is boundaries and limits, and being realistic—I can't solve all problems. Even though I can agree that they *are* problems, that doesn't mean I have to take responsibility for solving them. But, what's the balance between "not my problem" and taking on too much?

A related challenge occurred when the fall semester ended with no concrete plans for continuing efforts after the holiday break. In the new semester, both students and faculty asked the instructor, who was perceived to be the "leader," when meetings would start again. In response to these queries, the instructor had to wrestle with the obligation to restart the process or let it "die":

After the semester ended, the organization took off in its own direction, independent of whatever solutions the students and I had imagined. I was content to let it go, and was satisfied that our contribution had not been solutions or structures (i.e., committees or task forces) but rather, that we had started a process that began to create its own energy and began to self-organize and evolve beyond what we'd imagined (or could control). And, I felt amazingly comfortable with the feeling of not having to control it.

The instructor's choice of being comfortable with "letting go" was a resolution of the multiple demands of several roles. It is no secret that social workers are particularly prone to burnout, and researchers have demonstrated that role conflict and role ambiguity are both factors leading to burnout (Um & Harrison, 1998). Given these findings it will continue to be important for social work educators to find ways to manage the role conflicts that arise from experiential learning.

Lessons and Implications

The central purpose of our reflections on this case was to determine the extent that role conflicts we experienced enhanced or hindered learning. Overall, we would conclude that the role conflicts we experienced and our struggles to resolve and manage them were not tangential, but central to our learning and growth. Initially, it would be tempting to conclude that the discomfort of role conflicts is a distraction from the "real work." Upon reflection, however, we conclude that the dissonance of these conflicts, and the energy and processes to resolve them, were, in fact, the most important work we could have done and the primary way we learned from these experiences. This confirms findings that suggest role conflicts may actually be advantageous rather than detrimental to professional practice. For example, Um and Harrison (1998) found that while role conflict was associated with burnout, this did not necessarily lead to job dissatisfaction. Other researchers have also found that role conflict is not associated with reduced job performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000) and, in some cases, may be the stimulus for increased energy and productivity (Jones, 1993). If this is the case, and if we accept the idea that role conflict is the rule rather than the exception to social work practice, then it seems reasonable to conclude that avoiding experiential learning opportunities because they might place students in role conflicts is counterproductive to their learning.

Goldstein's (2001, pp. 4-7) discussion of experiential learning and reflective thinking hints at our experience. He perceptively notes that human life is exceedingly complex and unpredictable, and that theories and science alone are insufficient in determining how to help others who are in trouble. Reflective thinking is exactly what is necessary when students come to the realization that prescribed methods and theories seem unrelated to real problems in real life and are forced to ask themselves, "Now what do I do?" In our case, when students confronted the contradictions between their sense of powerlessness and empowerment, they were forced to think reflectively rather than prescriptively. And when students struggled to justify their own legitimacy as advocates, they were able to identify and assess their own strengths and limitations.

Recognizing the value of these role conflicts for learning should not minimize the difficulties, however. In our experience, these role conflicts brought pain, criticism, self-doubt, and discouragement. It is essential, therefore, that careful attention be given to decisions about whether and how to respond to

such opportunities. Although the spontaneity made the experiences more "real" and therefore more meaningful for some students, for others it was not as successful or useful. Some students voiced hesitation or resentment about the instructor's role and about the use of class time for "outside" issues. Others felt uncomfortable with the approaches and strategies and felt manipulated and coerced to participate. This raises several practical questions that instructors must address when weighing whether and how to incorporate experiential learning opportunities into courses: To what extent is the experience a distraction from the "real" curriculum? How does one handle students who choose not to participate? How much of the course (in the form of class time, assignments, evaluation, etc.) should be given to the experiences? How will students (and instructors) be supported through the conflicts that come with these experiences? What types of relationships are likely to develop between students and instructors and how will these be handled ethically?

Aside from these general questions, our experience also highlights that spontaneous versus planned experiential learning activities present different challenges for experiential learning. The spontaneity of the first semester experience was both a strength and a weakness. While most students felt that it was more realistic because it was unplanned, the uncertainty also led to discomfort for some students. Spontaneity also brings other challenges. Evaluating student performance is difficult, the timelines typically do not correspond with the parameters of course schedules, and the boundaries between course activities and students' other activities become blurred. The second experiential learning, which took place in the community practice course, was incorporated within the framework of existing course activities, and thus led to much less uncertainty and discomfort for students. Planning this activity ahead of time allowed the instructor to negotiate with students the nature of their roles and expectations for their involvement with the communities, and it provided greater clarity about how students would be evaluated. While this led to a greater sense of familiarity and safety for students, some students felt, as noted above, that the lack of spontaneity also made this experience somewhat less real and more fabricated. Further exploration and research into the costs and advantages of spontaneous versus planned experiential learning activities and their relationship to role conflicts will contribute to instructors' capacity to respond to and incorporate such opportunities when they present themselves.

Overall, our experience confirms the value of experiential learning to social work education. Specifically, our case suggests that role conflicts are not simply byproducts of these experiences, but in fact make a significant contribution to the learning potential of real-life experiences. But the limitations of our study make this conclusion tentative. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between role conflicts and learning outcomes. If professional social work practice is both art and science (Wheeler & Gibbons, 1992), it seems likely that experiential learning will continue to play a central role in social work education. Given the ubiquity of role conflicts inherent in practice, it behooves

educators to be proactive in using role conflicts to enhance experiential learning opportunities for students.

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