

**SW 703: Developing Practice Skills Through Role-Play and Simulation**

**Fall, 2014**

**Fridays, 9-12**

**Instructor: Scott Weissman**

**1. Course Description**

In this seminar, students will apply multiple techniques for developing, performing and analyzing client simulations at the individual, family, group, and community level. Through these simulations, students will deepen their understanding of clients' lives, explore research and clinical literature relevant to the problems and issues of the simulated client systems, apply evidence-based practice methods and analyze the social justice issues implicit in the simulations. This seminar will place these techniques in historical context, critically examining how simulation and role play developed in theater, psychotherapy and other fields. Student's deep engagement with the characters they create and enact in the simulations will provide a forum for self-reflection and professional growth.

**2. Course Content**

Content of this course primarily centers on experiential learning via client simulation role-plays. First, the foundation for this kind of work in social group work, psychotherapy, and social theater is reviewed. Students are then introduced to techniques for developing client characters, mainly through experiential techniques. Students will also access other sources for development of client characters, including memoir, clinical literature, interviews, and experience with actual clients. Assessment concepts and skills for engagement of clients are then explored, via class simulations and written analysis of the assessment information gathered. In this phase of the work, techniques for analysis of internalized oppression and for promoting empowerment are then examined, primarily through readings by Boal on Theater of the Oppressed. The experiential techniques used to develop and deepen the client simulation performances are introduced in readings and will be reflected upon for both their effectiveness in promoting character development, empathy and awareness skills, and for their application in work with clients at various levels of intervention. Evidence-based practice models are covered, again primarily experientially as students will take part in simulations that apply evidence based practice models, as well as some that do not. This will allow critical reflection on the experience of clients when they encounter these various models, and the relative strengths and problems inherent in their application. Students will independently read literature relevant

to their clients social identities, the disorders and problems their client characters face, and the contexts they live within.

### **3. Course Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Become familiar with the history of the use of simulation and theater techniques in social work intervention.
2. Conduct an assessment of coping resources and strengths; biophysical, emotional, behavioral and cognitive functioning; intra-personal and environmental systems.
3. Deepen their understanding of the strengths and limitations of diagnostic categories in guiding interpersonal practice interventions.
4. Deepen their ability to communicate empathically, and help enhance the motivation for change, cultivate hope, and address ambivalence and internal and external barriers to change.
5. Describe the impact of the key diversity dimensions such as ability, age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation on the dynamics of intervention.
6. Identify one's own social and cultural identities and group memberships, and how these relate to working with diverse group members, colleagues, and other professionals.
7. Demonstrate their ability to critically analyze how power operates in interpersonal helping efforts.
8. Deepen their ability to reflect on how their own personal histories impact upon encounters with clients in interpersonal practice settings.
9. Develop role-playing and simulation skills that they can use in intervention situations with clients.
10. Critically apply evidenced based practice approaches.
11. Identify common problems that emerge in practice and strategies to resolve these problems.

12. Operationalize ethical codes (i.e. the NASW Code of Ethics and other ethical codes such as the ASGW) as they apply to value dilemmas that arise in direct social work practice.

### **Relationship of Course to Four Curricular Themes**

- *Multiculturalism and Diversity*: The key diversity dimensions have an impact on direct practice at all levels. In the simulated sessions, these dimensions will be attended to carefully. Processing one's performance, in the client role and the practitioner will provide numerous opportunities to experience how these dimensions shape practice interactions and in how these dimensions are attended to insure that clients needs are effectively met.
- *Social Justice and Social Change*: We will draw heavily from techniques developed to use theater and simulation for social justice work—primarily Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*. In addition, the simulations will provide opportunities to reflect on the how power differences impact the provision of service to clients and how the social worker can actively work towards client empowerment and autonomy.
- *Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation*: Though methods courses tend to emphasize treatment models, and this course is not an exception, the social theater methods and techniques used as pedagogical tools are themselves quite applicable to settings across the continuum of promotion to rehabilitation.
- *Behavioral and Social Science Research*: The course assignments require students to access and evaluate material on evidence based practice relevant to the client and practitioner roles they play in the simulations. A goal of competency in evidence-based practices is emphasized.

### **Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values**

Ethical issues such as client confidentiality, forced participation, and involuntary treatment are considered as they impact the simulation roles that students play. Since the course asks students to inhabit client roles in a sustained and realistic ways, the simulations will provide unique opportunities for students to explore the ethical issues that arise in practice delivery and to develop increased competency in understanding the client's standpoint in practice encounters. This will give richness and depth to discussions of ethical concerns in practice.

### **The Role-Plays**

The primary education in this class will take part in the form of 2 individual session role-plays, 1 family role-play, and 1 Group role-play. There will be one in-class "trial-run" role-play on Oct. 10. The actual individual sessions will all take part outside of class, while the Family and Group

sessions will take place in class. You will be developing a single client/character to be seen in 3 individual sessions with two 521 student – these students will be different than the student with whom you did the “trial run.” The first sessions should be completed between Oct. 10 and Oct. 24, the second sessions, between Oct. 24 and Nov. 7, and the third sessions, between Nov. 7 and Nov. 21. Just to clarify – you will have TWO first sessions, TWO second sessions, and TWO third sessions so that you have a total of SIX sessions with the two different practitioners.

**Class 1 (Sept. 5)**  
**The Integration of Theater and Social Work**

**Activities**

1. Building Trust Exercises
2. Introduce Simulation Work

*Assignment for Class 2: Complete Character Analysis Sheet (You can find this in the Schedule Section of Ctools for Jan. 15)*

**Readings**

Driskel, "Interview with Boal," *Latin American Theater Review*, Vol., 9, 71-78, Fall, 1975.

**Class 2 (Sept. 12)**

**Our Role As Practitioners: Critical Consciousness and Self-Reflection**

**Practice Skill**

Awareness of our own judgments, social constructions. How do they impact our "practice?"

**Activities**

1. Trust, Focus Exercises
2. Character Development Exercises

**Readings**

Johnstone, Keith. (1979) *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. New York: Theater Arts Books. 13-32; 75-108.

Locate and read 5-10 scholarly articles relevant to the disorder/problem your client character will portray (If you are actually reading a memoir, you only need to read 2-3 articles)

Given your chosen "character," Read a memoir and/or watch a film about someone with a disorder that your client character might have.

*Assignment for Class 3: See Assignment Instructions on Ctools in the Schedule Section for Class 3*

### **Class 3 (Sept. 19)**

#### **Character Development and Building Empathy I**

##### **Practice Skill**

Attentiveness and Attunement to the client

##### **Readings**

Given your chosen “character,” read a memoir and/or watch a film about someone with a disorder that your client/character might have.

##### **Activities**

1. Theater Games focused on the practice skills – presence, focus, attunement
2. Develop “snapshot” roleplays

### **Class 4 (Sept. 26)**

#### **Character Development and Building Empathy II**

##### **Practice Skill**

Understanding how family/cultural history impacts clinical issues

##### **Activities**

“Snapshot” presentations of client characters.

##### **Readings**

Zide and Grey, A Competency Based Approach to Assessment

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Snowden L. R. (2003). Bias in Mental Health Assessment and Intervention: Theory and Evidence. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93, 239-243.

Castillo: Chpt 4 “Cultural Assessment”

Please note: You can find the assessment guidelines on Ctools in the Schedule section.

### **Class 5 (Oct. 3)**

#### **Exploring Mental Health Issues and Character Development: Focus on Assessment**

##### **Practice Skill**

Assessment and engagement through playing the roles of “client” and “practitioner”

##### **Readings**

Boal, Games for Actors and Non-Actors – Chapters 1, 2

Snowden L. R. (2003). Bias in Mental Health Assessment and Intervention: Theory and Evidence. American Journal of Public Health, 93, 239-243.

Castillo: Chpt 4 “Cultural Assessment”

##### **Activities**

In-class assessments

**DUE: REFLECTION 1**

### **Class 6 (Oct. 10)**

#### **Exploring Mental Health Issues and Character Strengths Through the Lens of Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice I**

### **Practice Skill**

Assessment and engagement through playing the role of “client”

Raise awareness of the oppressive forces/social constructions alive in ourselves and our characters

### **Readings**

Boal, Augusto, Rainbow of Desire

Playing Boal, Theater, Therapy Activism, Daniel Feldhendler

### **Activities**

Practice Assessment sessions with 521 practitioners

Applying “Theater of the Oppressed” techniques to character development

### **Class 7 (Oct. 17)**

#### **Exploring Client and Practitioner Experiences in the Family Therapy setting: Development of Families and Family Systems**

### **Readings**

Kerr, “Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self,” The Atlantic Monthly

McGoldrick (1999) Genograms-assessment and intervention, Chapter 2

**(This chapter is meant to help you in the development of your own genogram for family development next week. It is extremely helpful, but does not need to be read (in full) for class.)**

Brown, Neil, D., Samis, Michelle D. (1986-7) The Application of Structural Family Therapy in Developing the Binuclear Family, Mediation Quarterly, 1986-87, 14-15, 14-15, 51-69

Keim, J., Strategic Therapy

O'Hanlon, "The Third Wave" pp. 19-26, 28-29

**Due: Client Assessment**

**Class 8 (Oct. 24)**

**Exploring Client and Practitioner Experiences in the Family Therapy setting:  
Development of Families and Family Systems**

**Practice Skill**

Family Systems Therapy

**Activities**

Developing families for the family therapy roleplays

**Class 9 (Oct. 31)**

**Exploring Client and Practitioner Experiences in the Family Therapy setting:  
Development of Families and Family Systems**

**Practice Skill**

Continuing an exploration of family systems therapy

Applying Boal to family systems therapy

**Readings**

Goldenberg and Goldenberg, Family Therapy Overview

Family Therapy contemplation Document (please bring to class)

**Activities**

Continue family therapy roleplay development

**Class 10  
(Nov. 7)**

**Exploring Client and Practitioner Experiences in the Role of Client: CBT/Family Systems**

**Activities**

Processing the family sessions and the individual sessions

**Readings**

Theory of Cognitive Therapy, Ch. 6

Techniques of Cognitive Therapy, Ch. 7

Applications of Individual CBT to specific disorders, Ch. 8

**Practice Skill**

CBT - experienced as “client,” processed as “client” and “practitioner”  
Family Systems Work – experienced as “client” and as “practitioner”

**Class 11 (Nov. 14)**

**Exploring Character through the Lens of Family and Developing Clinical Family Skills**

**Activities**

In-class family therapy roleplays

**Practice Skill**

Family Therapy techniques

## **Activities**

Family Therapy Lecture

Family Therapy Roleplays

**Due: Reflection 2**

**Class 12**

**(Nov. 21)**

**Exploring Character through the Lens of Group Work and Developing Clinical Group  
Work Skills I**

## **Practice Skill**

Group therapy techniques

## **Activities**

Group Therapy Lecture

Group Therapy Techniques

## **Readings**

Group Counseling, Ch. 5

**Dec. 5  
Class 13**

**Wrap-up**

**Final Reflection Due**

**Class 14  
(April 16)**

**Wrap-up**

**Due: Reflection 3: Client Evaluation/Final Reflection**

## Assignments

### **I. Reflection 1: Character Development (20%), Oct. 4**

In this initial reflection, consider what you have learned during the actual process of developing your character.

1. Please detail and discuss the sources that you used to develop your client/character - memoirs, movies, clinical articles, etc.
2. Consider what you have learned about your client/character's diagnosis or problem. As noted under the "Class 2" in the syllabus, please incorporate what you discovered from reading the 5-10 scholarly articles about your character's possible diagnosis or problem. You might ask yourself if there is any one diagnosis that is truly accurate for your client/character? Would a clinical diagnosis limit how a clinician might view your client/character? Would a clinical diagnosis help your client/character better understand her or his life experiences? What other frames or ways of looking at your client would be helpful?
3. Incorporate a discussion of what personal and professional experiences you called upon to develop your client/character, both respecting client confidentiality and only sharing personal material that you feel comfortable sharing. We certainly welcome the kind of personal reflection that helps you to integrate how this character exploration impacts you in your personal and professional lives.

Approx. 5-7 pages

### **II. Reflection on In-Class Client Assessment (25%). Due: Oct. 18**

Using the assessment format on C-tools, or another one of your choosing, reflect on your experience in the practitioner role during the assessment exercise during class. Also reflect on your first experience in the client role - being interviewed by both your 521 practitioner and fellow student from 703.

First, please write a professional assessment, from the perspective of a social work practitioner, of the 703 client you have interviewed in class. This assessment may be abbreviated if there was not time to complete the interview.

Second, consider your experience as "practitioner." Please reflect on the following:

- What did you learn about yourself as a practitioner? What strengths did you note? What areas did you identify for improvement?
- What did you learn about the "practitioner" role from your experience in the "client" role.
- What would you need to learn more about to more effective in this assessment role?

- What learning goals might you now set for yourself, given your experience of the assessment?

Other thoughts or feedback about this experience.

After you have finished this reflection, please give a copy of the "assessment portion" to the client you have interviewed. She/he will need this for the Final Reflection.

Approx. 6-8 pages.

### **III. Family Development and Family Therapy Reflection: Character Performances, Due: Nov. 15 (25% of grade)**

As you reflect upon the family development work, please, address the following questions:

1. Using the character development sheet that you used for your client character, write a 1-2 paragraph describing your family therapy client. What happened in the roleplays or in classroom exercises to inspire these discoveries?
2. What brings your family in for therapy? What is the “presenting problem?” How does YOUR character see the problem? What strengths have you discovered about your client/character? What strengths have you discovered about your family? What resources in your “eco-map?”
2. What have you discovered about your character and family based on your family-of-origin exploration? Based on your structural family therapy map?
3. What have you discovered about the practitioner role from your experiences as client?

Length: 6-8 pages

### **IV. Reflection 3: Client Transfer/Final Reflection (30%) Due Final Day of Class**

#### **Part I: Client Transfer**

One approach to this assignment is to imagine that you are the supervisor at the agency where your client character was being seen. The practitioner assigned to your client character has left the agency. You will be making a referral to another resource, either within or outside the agency. To do this, you have the following resources at hand:

- a. The initial assessment done for the client character (please get this from the 703 student that did your evaluation)
- b. Practitioner notes on the sessions that have occurred (includes interviews with other student practitioners in other classes and our own.
- c. An “interview” with the client character to discuss the transition and to add additional assessment information to guide the referral.

The above are all “imagined” except that you will have an actual assessment that a classmate wrote about the client. You can assume a composite beginning point for your client character that has now evolved through the additional experiences from the semester.

Write a summary that will guide the practitioner who will work subsequently with this client. This can include updating assessment information (see outline used for the assessment), a description of the progress of the work that has gone on so far, and a discussion of issues/concerns that the new practitioner should be aware of. This may include an evaluation of the fit between the client and the previous practitioner and suggestions for addressing this in the transfer process. Consider group or family options as possibilities in your transfer/follow-up recommendations. You can imagine the agency setting to be whatever best fits for your paper.

This section should be 3-4 pages

## **Part II: Final Reflection**

Please reflect on what you have learned in the class and what you learned about the Practitioner Role. Your previous reflections and other papers will be good sources for your final reflection. You are welcome to integrate/combine the two parts of the assignment, but I have separated the prompts into two parts. Among the key areas to discuss:

*The overall classroom experience:*

(A reflection on your participation over the semester)

1. How did you contribute to the class learning environment? What might have improved your participation this semester?
2. What you learned from the client role that you will apply in the future to your own practice.
3. How well did you meet your learning goals this semester? What main objectives did you accomplish? What learning experiences most contributed to your learning? What barriers did you encounter? What would have improved the learning experience for you?
4. What recommendations would you make overall for future seminars using the simulation techniques we applied this term?

*The Practitioner Experience*

1. In the 703/703 assessments, and in the in-class improvisations, what qualities did you bring to the role of practitioner that you and your clients found most helpful?
2. What parts of the client-interviews and the in-class improvisations were the most revealing or challenging for you? What was revealed? Why did you find them challenging? What did you learn about yourself and about the practitioner role from these revelations and challenges?
3. During the course of the semester, if you:
  - a) were using a particular intervention modality; or
  - b) experiencing a particular intervention strategy in the client role, (CBT, Motivational Interviewing, Family Therapy, etc.),what did you learn about this set of techniques? What did you learn about your own personal "fit" with this set of techniques?
4. Given your experiences over the course of the semester, what advice would you have for practitioners?

This section should be 4-5 pages

### **APA FORMAT AND ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Please refer to the **American Psychological Association Publication Manual** (often called the APA Style Manual) in the preparation of your writing assignments. The current edition is the fifth, but using an earlier edition is acceptable. I think you will find having your own copy a valuable resource over the next two years. You can find out more at <http://www.apastyle.org/pubmanual.html>.

It is critical to reference all sources of information or ideas you use in your writing, to do otherwise is academic dishonesty. Direct quotes in particular should be identified as such. Situations of apparent plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be reported and handled according to University policy.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you need an accommodation for a disability, please make an appointment with me at your earliest convenience. Many aspects of the course including the assignments, class activities, and my teaching methods can be modified to fit your circumstances.