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Learning through Meaning Making: Applying Job Crafting in Field Learning

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ABSTRACT

Job crafting makes people's work rewarding through meaning making. This article discusses the ways in which a field director may use job crafting to address a common challenge in field education. Field placements are based on various institutional expectations; however, many students have preconceived notions of what social work and social work education should be, and they complain that their placements are "not clinical" enough. Through the application of job crafting, students can reframe their field learning experiences in a meaningful way. Using the case study method, this article demonstrates one way to support MSW students, highlighting common challenges and practices at a large public northeastern university.

KEYWORDS

field education; field director; social work students; meaning making; job crafting

It was on a busy Tuesday afternoon, 3 days into the field practicum, that I saw a shadow outside my office door. It belonged to Beth, a foundation-year MSW student. She asked hesitantly, "Are you busy? Can I come in?" She waited outside my office until I made a gesture inviting her to sit down. She took a deep breath and said, "I know you are very busy, and I don't want you to think I'm complaining. I thought about this all weekend. My concern is about my field placement: it's not clinical, and I want to change it." She then exhaled deeply and looked me in the eye. I then took a deep breath and asked her to give me some context so that I could assist her better.

Beth is 35 years old, identifies as a White woman, and has recently returned to school to change her career. Prior to moving to a large northeastern city, she was born and raised in California and relocated to the northeast to attend a prestigious liberal arts college, where she majored in journalism. After graduating college, she worked for a financial firm, but she left that career because she wanted to help people. After she graduates with her MSW, she plans to work for a community mental health agency, and after passing the clinical social work licensing exam, she plans to develop a private psychotherapy practice. I thought that she described her plan with great passion and certainty.

Many students entering MSW programs arrive with preconceived notions of what social work is and should be. These notions may come from a variety of sources, including previous experiences with a social worker, general perceptions of the profession, and/or the desire to become a psychotherapist in private practice (D'Aprix, Dunlap, Abel, & Edwards, 2004; Probst, 2010; Specht & Courtney, 1994). As was the case with Beth, such students bring these beliefs with them into their classrooms and placements. In my experience, most social work educators have stories of students who were certain they wanted to pursue work with one population or method but who moved to an entirely different method or population by the time they graduated. One way to conceptualize these changes is through understanding how students make meaning in their field learning assignments as they work through their professional educations. Students who hold tightly to their preconceived notions may shut themselves off from the educational process because the meaning-making process remains static (Buck, Bradley, Robb, & Kirzne, 2012; Zeff, Kaersvang, & Raskin, 2016). Such rigidity represents an impediment to the educational process and is one reason why field educators are so reluctant to allow students to change their practicum assignments, especially very early in the process (Buck et al., 2012; Zeff et al., 2016).

I would posit that students can play a key role in their educational experiences by making learning their own. When students pay attention to meaning making in their field placements, they learn on a deeper level than would otherwise be possible. To help with this meaning-making process, one might suggest they apply job crafting. Job crafting refers to “the ways in which employees utilize opportunities to customize their jobs by actively changing their tasks and interactions with others at work” (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzeniewski, 2007, p. 1). By modifying their perceptions about their field assignments, job crafting can help students create new meanings. Indeed, through the use of job crafting, students have the potential to reframe their field learning in meaningful and rewarding ways.

Beth's experience is a composite of several master's-level foundation-year social work students, and her case is used to demonstrate an innovative way to help students who are experiencing difficulty in their field learning. Beth's case is examined to highlight common themes and practices in a large graduate social work program.

Literature review

Field placements: Managing expectations

Field placements are the cornerstone of the social work educational process, and students, supervisors, social work educators, and social work field education departments bring certain expectations to the process (Shaffer, 2013; Zeff et al.,

2016). The field director is responsible for setting the expectations for field placement agencies and for monitoring the quality of students' learning experiences in their field education (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015). The key responsibilities of a field director are to manage the various expectations of the student, the school, the placement agency, and the accrediting institution (Bradley & Buck, 2016; Buck et al., 2012; Shaffer, 2013). Field education is the signature pedagogy of the profession (CSWE, 2015), which makes the students' concern about their placements extremely important.

Students entering an MSW program tend to arrive with varying expectations about the educational process, and they bring different levels of skill and experience (Zeff et al., 2016). The field director is the one who is expected to manage the objectives of the field education department to ensure the quality of field learning opportunities for all students. Field directors must do this while tending to students' individual concerns and complaints, as there has been a shift in the culture of higher education toward valuing student satisfaction (Buck et al., 2012). These competing needs create tensions between field education departments, students, faculty, and placement agencies because each tends to have a somewhat different set of expectations (Bradley & Buck, 2016; Buck et al., 2012).

A field education department works with many placement agencies, and the quality of each placement often varies (Bradley & Buck, 2016). Increasingly, some placement settings have been treating students more like employees and therefore may be allocating less time for field instruction and field learning (Buck et al., 2012). Because of this trend, students sometimes are expected to "hit the ground running" to perform at a level that is deemed satisfactory to their placement agencies. In addition, high turnover among agency staff (who serve as field instructors) frequently makes it challenging to maintain a sufficient number of experienced field instructors (Bradley & Buck, 2016; Buck et al., 2012).

Social work schools and their individual curricula influence the selection and development of field placements, and field directors are expected to work closely with faculty to ensure that coursework and field placements create reciprocal learning opportunities. Overall, the field director plays an important role in implementing school policies and in managing the expectations of the institution and both its faculty and students (Bradley & Buck, 2016). Any disruptions in these field placements will likely cause dislocations in the students' educational processes; therefore, field directors are charged with evaluating each student scenario to develop solutions to challenging situations (Bradley & Buck, 2016; Zeff et al., 2016). Students' main learning objectives are to cultivate their social work knowledge, values, and skills and to learn to use professional judgment in their practice to help their clients effectively (Poulin & Matis, 2015). Although students' field learning assignments are supposed to meet these requirements, students' activities

within these placement agencies of course also must meet the needs of the agency and the clients they serve (Williams, King, & Koob, 2002).

In addition, one of the most important roles of a field director is to manage the expectations of accrediting bodies such as CSWE (Bradley & Buck, 2016). The literature regarding the work of field directors and field education offices is limited in scope. Although many studies address the administrative implications of the role, few address field directors' relationships with students or how the students experience these relationships.

Students' contributions to the field education process

Upon entering social work school, students bring certain expectations with them, which may influence their field learning experiences (Zeff et al., 2016). For instance, the strong preferences of some students to be placed in a particular setting may only serve to complicate this process (Zeff et al., 2016). Recent trends in MSW students' career goals also have impacted their educational and field placement experiences. Some students now see the degree as the quick way of becoming a psychotherapist (Probst, 2010). Instead of obtaining a doctorate degree in clinical or counseling psychology, many choose an MSW degree. However, some social work educators frown upon this path to becoming a psychotherapist because it does not always align with the traditional values of the social work profession (D'Aprix et al., 2004). Because of this desire on the part of some students, traditional agency-based field learning opportunities may seem less attractive to them, leading to student dissatisfaction with their field learning assignments (Buck et al., 2012). This can be problematic because students tend to thrive in field when their tasks are meaningful and are well aligned with their professional goals (Fortune, Lee, & Cavazos, 2005).

A number of students also enter field learning with some level of apprehension, anxiety, and stress, and the way they feel about their field placement often influences the eventual outcome of that experience (Gelman, 2011; Kanno & Koeske, 2010). Rosenthal, Gelman and Lloyd (2008) surveyed 204 first-year students, before entering their field placements, to measure the level of their self-perceived anxiety and found that students reported some level of anxiety relating to their field learning experiences. The study suggested that if students' anxieties were viewed as an integral part of the learning process, rather than as an impingement on that process, their learning experiences could actually be enhanced. In addition, when field instructors are aware of their students' anxiety regarding their field placement, they are better equipped to support their students' learning (Gelman, 2011).

To date, the literature regarding students' field learning experiences has mainly addressed student satisfaction. However, field experiences are so complex that this narrow focus ignores other important elements of their experience. In addition, most studies are based on educators' views of student experiences. Consequently, such studies do not address students' feelings about their experiences, as well as some of the personal factors that may influence the course of their learning.

Meaning making and job crafting

How do students "make meaning" during their field learning experiences, and how do they come to understand these meanings? The literature on meaning and meaning making suggests varying approaches. Park (2016) defined meaning as "the central issue of human existence" and explained that meaning making is the mechanism through which people who are experiencing stressful life situations cope. Humans have the need to make meaning and to understand this meaning so that they can transcend their experiences (Park, 2010). In other words, meaning gives humans purpose and helps them to better understand their relationship with the world. The motivations of humans are elevated when there is congruence between meaning and purpose in their lives, and they are more likely to pursue rewards when motivated to do so (Steger, 2009). Park (2016) further explained that meaning has three aspects—purpose, comprehensibility, and a subjective sense of one's life—and that global and situational perspectives interact to create experiences. Humans feel stress when their beliefs and worldviews are incongruent with a particular situation, which is sometimes referred to as cognitive dissonance (Park, 2016; Festinger, 1957). Park (2010) argued that meaning making is particularly helpful when confronted with cognitive dissonance. Accordingly, anxiety and stress can be reduced through meaning making, which in turn can help individuals adjust to the new meanings they must create (Park, 2010). Meaning making can be considered transformative because it helps people ultimately shift their point of view.

Mezirow (1991) claimed that adult learners make meaning of their experiences by integrating their prior and current learning experiences. Because learning occurs in a sociocultural context, learners do not come in with a clean slate; adult learners, in particular, have already formed their opinions and worldviews through their lived experiences. Thus, they must integrate any new information with what they already know, or what they believe they know. Through meaning making, adult learners use their previous frames of reference to integrate new information and transform this information into new views, knowledge, and behaviors. Mezirow further posited that people need meaning to understand the human condition and that through their

perceptions and cognitions humans create meaning, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Although the structures and processes of field education are unlikely to change quickly, how can field instructors help students to transform their field learning experiences into meaningful ones? In organizational psychology, Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, and Berg (2013) introduced a theoretical approach termed *job crafting* that looks at how workers change their views of work by altering its components and rethinking the relationships that surround their work. Historically, the literature in this area has focused on what managers could do to improve worker motivation. These efforts included increased training opportunities, job enlargement (where the employees were given a wider array of tasks), and job enrichment (where the employees were given more responsibility and decision-making ability) (Ramlall, 2004).

However, more recently, organizational scholars have begun to look at what employees themselves can do to make their work more satisfying and more meaningful. As noted, job crafting focuses on helping workers to find personal meaning by reinterpreting their roles and tasks and focusing on one aspect of their work that is particularly meaningful (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Because the meaning of work ultimately defines how employees experience it, this approach encourages workers to alter their perceptions of their work through meaning making (Berg et al., 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Job crafting creates a frame that allows workers to alter their tasks, relationships, and thinking with the aim of helping them to relate their work to their personal history and values and to fully recognize the aspects of work that are under the control of the worker rather than of the manager (Berg et al., 2007; Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Job crafting offers three ways to enhance the employee's motivation: (a) by modifying the ways employees perform their tasks, (b) by changing the quality of the relationships and interactions among employees, and (c) by creating new meaning about the job by helping employees alter the way they think about it (Berg et al., 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013).

One of the outcomes of job crafting is that, through meaning making, workers develop their identities at work (Berg et al., 2007). When workers find their personal attributes aligned with their work, they likely will find their work meaningful (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). While fostering workers' strengths and passions, cultivating meaning also can enhance their motivation and satisfaction and create a positive outcome for the organization (Berg et al., 2013). This approach is applicable wherever managers are open to their workers having some say in modifying their tasks. Job crafting may have meaningful implications for social work learning; however, because this approach was specifically designed for employees rather than students, its

application to higher education needs to be explored further before it can be successfully implemented.

Methodology

Case studies are often the most suitable method for examining the relationship between theory and practice (Al Rubaie, 2002). Hence, to determine the practical application of job crafting, this article uses the case study method. Although the quality and outcome of social work students' field learning experiences have been studied using quantitative approaches, these findings do not always illustrate the complex reality of the student situation. Students' field learning experiences tend to be complex and may require more than standardized questions or measuring scales to understand them. In addition, how students come to understand their field learning experience is often a subjective matter; therefore, surveys are not always appropriate instruments, because they are already pre-categorized based on the study's hypothesis.

For this article, a composite case study was used to respect students' privacy and maintain their confidentiality. Job crafting was applied to help students find meaning within their field learning assignments, allowing them to learn from the challenges they encountered regardless of their particular outcome. The resulting composite case was based on the author's practice notes rather than on actual student records. This case uses meaning making and student experiences in field learning as the conceptual framework for analyzing the applicability of job crafting to field work learning experiences.

Composite case study

As mentioned, Beth had numerous concerns about her placement not being sufficiently clinical. I was not entirely sure how Beth felt about having a conversation with me, but she seemed to be choosing each word carefully before she spoke. Just when I was about to ask more questions, she added, in a firmer tone, "I don't mean to be ungrateful, but I am paying my tuition, and I want my education to be worth my sacrifice, and I know exactly what I want." The more she spoke, the more she appeared upset. I found her tone demanding and therefore felt uncomfortable as tension built up between us. Therefore, I felt that it was best for me to listen rather than to lecture. She spoke for another 10 minutes about what she did and did not do in her field placement and how this would not prepare her for a career as a therapist.

At that point I became disinterested in her story because I have heard students saying similar things before, which made it difficult for me to listen without judging her. She must have noticed that I was nodding but not saying anything because she asked me, "So, what do you think?" I thought Beth might have picked up on the fact that I was losing interest in what she

was saying, and I felt slightly guilty. I was sure that I needed to be very careful about what I said to Beth, so I responded succinctly. I first thanked her for sharing her concerns. I then informed her that it was very important that she have a solid learning opportunity and that the school would be there to support her learning. Before responding further, I wanted to think more about the request by Beth to change her field placement, which she presented, and to reach out to her field instructor to obtain more information. However, Beth then asked, “So, you want me to stay in this placement? Can’t you just change my placement?” I responded by saying how important it was for the school to address this matter in a way that respected the roles of both the agency and the field instructor. For progress to be made, Beth’s field instructor needed to be part of the discussion.

During my attempts to detail the next steps needed to address Beth’s concerns, the tension between us heightened. Beth started to sob and to plead with me to change her field placement. As I passed her a box of tissues, I realized that she and I had been meeting for almost an hour. I feared that Beth would stay until I gave her the answer she *wanted*. So, I worked toward wrapping up the meeting and made sure that she was comfortable enough to leave my office. When she stood up to leave, I thanked her again for bringing her concerns to me. I also told her that I had learned a lot about her field experience from her and wanted to have a day to think about how to help her. Beth also thought that this was a good idea and then asked me in a pleading tone if I would be calling her the next day, so I assured her that I would. She asked if she could come see me then, and I responded that meeting again would be a good idea, encouraging her to continue going to her field placement so that she would not miss hours that she might have to make up later. Although she appeared uncertain about the plan, she reluctantly agreed. After she left my office, I closed my door so that I could have some time to decompress. Exhausted and perplexed, I sat down at my desk and thought, “What’s next?”

The meeting with Beth had been very intense and had brought up various emotions in me. As I looked at the chair where Beth had been sitting, I thought about what had transpired between us. The meeting with Beth brought up my usual dilemma of being both a social worker and a social work educator. Although these roles are similar, they have two very different functions. As a social worker, I was unsure about Beth’s expectations for the profession because I found these expectations to be myopic and to have little or no connection to her clients’ well-being. However, as a social work educator, I knew I should be supportive of a student and should refrain from dismissing her concerns by labeling her as “difficult” or “overly anxious.” It can be unusual for field directors of large institutions to work with students directly, but it is also common for field directors to take on such a role when there may be concerns that are interfering with student

learning. Although Beth had been assigned to a placement coordinator and a field liaison, she brought these issues specifically to me because she wanted to change her placement. As a part of my role, I am expected to listen to her perceptions. My initial intention was to hear Beth's concerns and redirect her to one of the placement coordinators. Given Beth's intensity regarding the issue, I consulted with her placement coordinator and field liaison. We decided that it would best for me to continue with Beth because she had already started working with me, and she seemed to develop a sense of trust when speaking with me. We felt that referring her to another field staff member would only exacerbate her anxiety. (Beth, after all, was firmly convinced that she needed a new placement.) Upon consultation with the staff, we concluded that my working with Beth would give her the most support while I kept others abreast of the situation.

Beth's concerns about her field placement also surprised me because that agency was known to provide students with good learning opportunities, and field instructors at the agency were seasoned social workers who had received positive feedback from students in previous years. I wondered what could have made Beth feel the way she did. After only 3 days, she concluded that her field placement was "not clinical" and wanted to leave. Was it fair for me to say that Beth was an "entitled" student who wanted things to be a certain way and would accept nothing else?

I tried to understand Beth's rationale for her conclusion, but I had a difficult time relating to her. After all, if this were a job, her decision to leave after 3 days might be considered premature and reactive, especially when nothing egregious had happened. After speaking with her again, I managed to get her permission to contact her field instructor so that we could work together to find the best way to help Beth continue her field education.

Curiously, Beth's field instructor, Karen, had had no idea of how Beth felt about her field learning experience. Karen noted that Beth required instructions for every task and was surprised because this need was not what she had expected from a student with such an impressive educational background and work experience. Karen had concluded that Beth's learning needs were shaped by anxiety and would improve as Beth became acclimated to the agency. Karen and I agreed to suggest to Beth that she stay with the placement for another 4 weeks before deciding whether to change it. When I met with Beth again, she surprised me because she was open to the idea and agreed to stay and give the placement a chance. We also agreed that a new placement was not off the table if she continued to be dissatisfied with her field placement.

For the next 4 weeks, Beth and I met weekly at a scheduled time. Beth's field instructor and I also spoke each week to discuss Beth's progress. Considering my position as a field director, I tried to be mindful of my

role and not interfere with the boundaries between Beth and Karen. Given my genuine interest in her professional growth, I tried to function as a “mentor” for Beth. Initially, she continued to appear anxious, particularly about her career goals, because she had difficulty seeing how her current field experience could help her prepare for the future. She had put a lot of pressure on herself, and there was a real sense of urgency; this in turn may have kept her from seeing this learning opportunity as a potentially rewarding experience. Considering the source of her anxiety, I believed that Beth would benefit from using job crafting to focus on developing her professional identity as a social worker and finding a deeper meaning in her field learning assignments. During this process, my aim was to support Beth’s learning by exploring her intrinsic motivation and the meanings she assigned to her field learning assignments. My goal was not to convince Beth to stay in the current field placement; instead, it was for me to help Beth to reframe her understanding of her field assignments in ways that would be meaningful to her.

Instead of changing the external conditions of the learning environment, job crafting encouraged Beth to reflect on and reframe both her educational and professional goals. Identifying common meaning in her field learning experience was conceptualized as a way to teach Beth how to apply these meanings to various subjects. The process was designed to require Beth to connect to her tasks through the intrinsic meanings she had attached to helping, serving, and learning. Accordingly, Beth would have the opportunity to reflect on the impact of her work through her interactions with clients as well as through the larger lived experience and meaning of her work.

Initially, it appeared that Beth was having difficulty conceptualizing what she brought to her field learning experience and assignments; in addition, her expectations for her field learning were limiting her ability to perceive the meaning of these assignments. Thus, I made Beth’s reflections on her field learning experience the focus of our sessions together. At every meeting, I asked her to share the most memorable moments of the week at her field placement. In this way, Beth could identify what interested her so that I could draw the meanings from them. I encouraged her to define “memorable” in whatever way she chose, with limited emphasis on the “positive” or “negative” qualities of these experiences. By asking Beth questions, I helped her create meaning for both the tasks and how she approached them. One day, she told me that she had been intrigued by a particular client’s story and said, “She should write a book about her life.” Beth thought that the client’s story was so inspiring that others would benefit from knowing it. I wondered how Beth would make meaning out of this experience, so I asked her if she would like to write about the client; I noted that only Beth herself could make clear why the client’s story had seemed so significant to her. When we met again, Beth shared with me what she had learned from writing about the client and her story.

This process with Beth created a positive learning opportunity for both of us. Initially, she thought of her tasks as “helping clients sort out bills and coordinate their medical appointments.” Beth and I together explored her clients’ stories and what had brought these clients to her. As a journalism major during her undergraduate years, Beth showed an inherent ability to capture life stories, a skill that eventually helped her see her field learning tasks in a different light. Beth and I understood that there were limitations in her freedom to alter her field assignments, but she was allowed to take a unique approach to her cases. Recognizing and utilizing her story-creating skills, Beth showed improvement in her writing and recording. Her meetings with clients to “sort out bills” began to focus on more than concrete, practical tasks. Accordingly, Beth began to understand how her work impacted her clients’ lives and how they experienced her as a social work intern. She began embracing the educational process as reciprocal—learning while serving—as she learned a great deal in the process of serving her clients. By the end of the 4th week, Beth described her field learning assignments very differently than she had before, noting that she had provided the clients consistent and empathetic support through case management. Based on their work together, Beth derived meaning from the empowerment she observed in her clients. After the 4 weeks were up, I asked Beth if she still wanted to leave her field placement. To my surprise, she decided to stay. Beth shared with me candidly that changing her field placement would not guarantee the positive outcome of her field learning experience. Since she started her MSW program, she had learned that providing psychotherapy was just one of the ways to help others. When she weighed the pros and cons of her situation, she decided to stay because she knew what to expect of her and what would be expected if she stayed at her current placement. Clearly, her field experience was not what she initially had in mind, but she discovered the value in her work and her role. Although she was unsure if she wanted to continue working with this client population or in that setting, she was having a meaningful learning experience. The field instructor also reported changes: Beth began taking initiative, her attitude changed, and her clients began responding to her positively. Job crafting allowed Beth to explore ways to engage with clients, the agency, and the surrounding community because creating new meaning had required her to reflect on both the immediate and the long-term impact of her work.

Discussion and implications

“It’s not clinical”

There are several factors that may negatively influence a student’s field experience, especially at the beginning of the process. As noted, the assumptions that students have upon entering a social work program initially color their experiences, especially toward field work. At first, Beth stated that her placement was “not clinical”—possibly because she had imagined that *clinical*

meant helping people in one very specific way—but her subsequent experience convinced her otherwise. The discrepancies between Beth's expectations and her initial experiences caused her anxiety, so Beth felt an urgency to change her field placement. In her own mind, she wanted to help the population of her choice in the specific way she had imagined and stick to the self-imposed time line she had imagined for herself to become a psychotherapist. Nevertheless, it is common for entering students to experience anxiety regarding the field placement processes, and this initial anxiety and ambivalence toward field learning may contribute to the quality of their subsequent learning experience (Festinger, 1957; Kanno & Koeske, 2010; Rosenthal Gelman & Lloyd, 2008).

The gap between student expectations and educational pedagogy can create a great deal of tension, as well, for a field director. Students who return to school as career changers tend to want to hasten the learning process, sometimes unreasonably (Buck et al., 2012). In addition, many students view themselves as consumers and therefore expect field education staff to deliver exactly what they want (Buck et al., 2012). To complicate matters further, many students who express the career goal of becoming psychotherapists—and who consequently want to be placed at psychotherapy training institutes—may not be prepared by the graduate curriculum to develop these skills (Buck et al., 2012). To respect the school's relationships with its agencies, the field education department attempts to screen students to find the best possible matches. However, students sometimes view this process as the field education department preventing them from achieving their dreams, and they feel judged and rejected by the very people who they thought would be their advocates.

We would posit here that Beth had two options. She could change her placement to one that was more consistent with her expectations, or she could stay in her current placement and apply job crafting to create new meaning from the assignments. Beth's field learning experiences had to be educationally focused, and closely monitored by her field instructor, so the ability to adjust these assignments was limited. For Beth to be reasonably content with her field practicum experiences, she needed to find a way to close the gap between her expectations and what the agency could reasonably accommodate and provide.

I was aware of Beth's skepticism toward me as a mentor: She thought I was trying to keep her at her current placement so that I would not run the risk of jeopardizing the school's relationship with the agency, or take on the task of finding a new placement for her. Some students assume that the field education department values its relationships with placement agencies over its responsibility to ensure that each student receives proper field learning opportunities. Although such assumptions may be valid under certain circumstances, it is also true that changing a field placement frequently will cause a disruption in the students' educational progress (Bradley & Buck, 2016; Zeff et al., 2016). Moreover, finding a solid field placement in the

middle of the semester is hard because the several accredited social work programs in the area all are competing for placements. Finally, removing a student from a placement without an acceptable reason can in fact damage the relationship between the school and the agency in question.

Making meaning in helping

Initially, Beth focused on what she felt was not present in her field learning assignments; she also did not see her ability to initiate change. Be that as it may, focusing on capacities and resources is more effective rather than dwelling on problems and obstacles in such a situation (Rapp, Saleebey, & Sullivan, 2005). As a solution, identifying and emphasizing Beth's strengths became an entry point for her learning. Meaning making then may help students to cultivate their professional values and identities while they learn and serve their clients. Student assignments need to be consistent with an agency's mission—not with the students' prior assumptions or desires—and job crafting provides a way to alter the significance of the learning assignment without changing the intrinsic factors of the assignments themselves (Williams et al., 2002). Emphasizing meaning making in her current field placement gave Beth an opportunity to discover significance in her field assignments that had not been apparent to her before. Berg et al. (2013) explained that job crafting is worker driven and emphasizes the “meaningfulness” of work rather than focusing on the specific tasks themselves. Beth was anxious about her lack of prior social service experience, so I concentrated on what she did have experience with—journalism. I focused on the storytelling aspects of journalism so that Beth could better relate to her field learning assignments and to her clients. This reframing took what she already knew and helped her create new meaning from it. Mezirow (1991) argued that adult learners bring their prior life experiences and knowledge into new learning; in addition, when work is integrated with a person's own self-attributes, he or she finds greater meaning in the work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). In short, the process of meaning making can be used as a tool to engage workers. For example, Berg et al. (2013) suggested that emphasizing tasks connected to workers' own interests can help them create meaning from these tasks.

Beth had difficulty seeing how her field learning tasks could possibly relate to her future career, which illustrates the fact that simply learning how to perform tasks will not necessarily make these skills transferrable to future assignments. In Beth's case, though, it was successful: She now could better engage with her clients and feel more comfortable because she had gained a sense of purpose in her work. Job crafting altered her relational boundaries and the meaning of the relationships themselves (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013).

Parallel processes and their meaning

Beth's claim that her placement was "not clinical" highlighted the importance of the relationship between the field experience, the student, and the student's clients. Clearly, Beth and I were at an impasse when she first came to my office; we both had strong feelings about our expectations of ourselves, each other, the field education department, social work education, and the profession as a whole. The way Beth approached me, with politeness and forcefulness, prompted me to seek meaning in my relationships with her, and I began to see the parallel between the relationships of field educators with their students and the relationships of students with their clients. The parallel process was an "unconscious replication in the supervisory session of therapeutic difficulties which a supervisee has with a client" (Williams, 1997, p. 425). I thought Beth was getting ahead of herself by thinking about her future career goals at that point, and I was getting ahead of myself by evaluating Beth's suitability for the profession, even though she still had 2 years of classes and learning ahead. Relationships that students experience in field instruction play an essential role in building their professional use of self (Ganzer & Ornstein, 1999). Beth needed to be where she was, and she needed to have positive relationships with her field educators. Finding the parallels between us prompted me to reframe what "student" meant to me. I worried that the way I initially responded to Beth would be repeated in the way she would later treat her clients. This concern made me think about what I wanted Beth to learn from our relationship.

Limitations and conclusion

It is important to discuss the limitations of the approach that I took with Beth. First, some field education departments may not have enough staff members to engage Beth in the way I did. Working with Beth did take more time than customary, and I was able to devote this time to Beth because I had able colleagues who were able to attend to other field-related issues. Nevertheless, it was important for the field department to respond to Beth in an innovative way. Telling Beth that she had to stay at her field placement might have only increased her anxiety and frustration. Second, the purpose of this case study is to provide an example of how job crafting can work when dealing with a specific student issue. Not all such student issues can be solved using job crafting, especially if students are not open to exploring meaning making while remaining in their placement. Third, this study does not offer a comparison with a control group for whom job crafting was not introduced. Finally, this case study provides only preliminary support for job crafting. To fully understand its effectiveness, it will be important to evaluate

its use with and without a contrast group to see how job crafting influences the way students make meaning in their placements.

Through field learning, students face self-discovery that leads them to reevaluate their motivations for committing to the social work profession. A proactive intervention model to prepare students entering field learning therefore merits being explored further. Moreover, beyond simply problem solving, additional study of innovative approaches to helping students needs to be conducted. We would posit that field education staff and field instructors both can benefit from receiving training in job crafting. Job crafting is indeed a new approach to field learning and may offer a new paradigm for practicum experiences. It is my hope that students like Beth will continue to seek meaning in their work and that this meaning will be part of why they ultimately choose to serve others through the choice of a social work career.

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