Advancing Competency-Based Practice Research – An Innovative, Experiential Pedagogical Approach

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Background

Achieving practice-based research competency is an essential pillar of social work practice. However, learning research has not been a favored subject in social work education.

The research content is often not taught from a social work practice orientation.

Research is associated with dry lectures and incomprehensible statistics that may not reveal real life circumstances.

Background

Teaching research course is often antithetical to the pedagogical approach generally adopted in social work education, which engages students in examples and practical applications of real life situations.

Focus of this Workshop

Introduce a range of class and field activities in a 2-semester social work research courses, including

- Case studies
- Storytelling
- Field surveys and interviews
- Critical reflection activities

These activities are designed to increase graduate level social work students' competencies of practice research.

Strategies and Tools

I will share a range of tools and strategies to help enhance teaching effectiveness and evaluate the extent of students' attainment of practice research competencies. These tools include:

ଓ Use of guided discussion

ଓ Interview questionnaire

ଓ Assignment instructions

ଓ Assessment rubrics

Six Major Class Activities

(1) Formulating a practice-based research topic – a case study

(2) Using assessment templates for critical evaluation of published research

(3) Single subject research – a tool for evaluation of clinical practice

(4) Agency research capacity field assessment

(5) Design and implementation of a practice-focused class study project

(6) Class activity on presentation and dissemination of research findings.

1. Formulating a Practice-based Research Topic – A Case Study

Case Study – Extracted from Yegidis & Weinbach (2002)

Part 1

Research Problem Statement

During the past year child protection workers were receiving many more reports of possible child abuse by local professionals than in previous years. A very large percentage of the cases were never opened for services because the worker assigned to investigate had determined that they were unfounded. Form the agency perspective, there was a problem of inefficient use of worker's time. They were spending much of their day dealing with reports where no abuse had taken place, while not having enough time to devote to those cases where abuse was probable. The problem was too many unfounded cases.

1. **Formulating a Practice-based Research Topic – A Case Study**

Five Possible Research Problems

ര Social workers might be taking too many inappropriate referrals.

ര The social workers' behavior might relate to their inadequate training.

ര There might be too much missed child abuse by overworked child protection workers (erroneous unfounded conclusions)

ര There might be a tendency on the part of workers not to want to see the existence of abuse that had occurred for fear that a determination of founded cases would result in more work for staff.

ര Some workers might be more likely than others to perceive that abuse had taken place.

Class discussion - based on agency needs, practical and feasibility, and political considerations, which of the above research problems will you select to pursue? Why?

1. Formulating a Practice-based Research Topic – A Case Study

Part 2

Research Problem Selected from Part 1: *Some workers might be more likely than others to perceive that abuse had taken place.*

Research Questions

ഔ What laws and regulations govern child protection workers' decisions about whether a case is determined to be founded? Could recent changes in reporting procedures somehow be affecting whether a case is regarded as founded?

ഔ Could different working conditions in some way help to explain the different rates?

ഔ Could differences in education and training of workers somehow relate to the different rates?

ഔ Do clients perceive that some workers are more conscientious in their investigation than others?

ഔ How great an influence is supervision in worker determinations regarding reports of suspected abuse?

1. **Formulating a Practice-based Research Topic – A Case Study**

❧ Are community professionals somehow influencing the decisions of some workers more than others? If so, how is this occurring?

❧ Do some social workers perceive rewards for either founded or unfounded cases that other workers do not perceive?

❧ How might work experience of the child protection worker affect the way that a case is perceived?

❧ Does burnout somehow contribute to the different rates of founded cases among workers?

❧ Are the different demographic characteristics of workers (for example, age, race, sex, or parenthood) related to their determinations?

Class discussion - which of the above research questions to pursue? Why? In what way we can combine some of these questions?

Research question restated as: **Are characteristics of workers related to their determinations of whether a case is judged to be founded?** (Question 3, 7, 9, and 10)

1. Formulating a Practice-based Research Topic – A Case Study

Part 3

Research Problem Statement
Too many unfounded cases of child abuse

Research Problem Selected
Some workers might be more likely than others to perceive that abuse had taken place.

Research Questions Selected
Are characteristics of workers related to their determinations of whether a case is judged to be founded?

- Are different demographic characteristics of workers (for example, age, race, sex, or parenthood) related to their determinations?
- Could differences in education and training of workers relate to the different rates?
- Do some social workers perceive rewards for either founded or unfounded cases that other workers do not perceive?
- Does burnout somehow contribute to the different rates of founded cases among workers?

1. **Formulating a Practice-based Research Topic – A Case Study**

<u>Discussion:</u>

ભ How do we define staff characteristics?

ભ How to define staff determinations of whether a case is judged to be founded or not?

ભ How to proceed with the literature review related to this research question and variables?

1. What keywords to use in database search?
2. What sources of literature considered?
3. Outline of the literature reviewed?

2. Assessment Templates for Critical Evaluation of Published Research

Chart Summary of 10 Articles/Citing References using APA Citation Style

In your literature review, search for 10 articles (at least 6 scholarly, peer reviewed articles published in reputable journals) that you think will provide you with critical knowledge and understanding to your research topic and related questions.

2. Assessment Templates for Critical Evaluation of Published Research

	Article 1
Authors	
Article Title	
Year	
Journal Title	
Research Question/Hypothesis	
Subjects[1]	
Methods[2]	
Measures[3]	
Findings[4]	
Limitations[5]	

2. Assessment Templates for Critical Evaluation of Published Research

ↀ Subjects - Who was being studied? What was the population of interest?

ↀ Methods – Was this a survey or experiment? Was this a quantitative study, qualitative study, or were mixed methods used? How was study participants recruited?

ↀ Measures - What was measured? Did the researcher develop the questions or a standardized measure was used? Interview or self-report questionnaire?

ↀ Findings - What are the main results?

ↀ Limitations - What are the limitations discussed? Any additional limitations?

2. Assessment Templates for Critical Evaluation of Published Research

For government statistical reports, policy/concept papers, book chapters, research reports, etc., you will summarize the following from each of these reports:

- purpose of the paper/study
- what did the author(s) want to find out or present?
- What was/were the author(s) research question(s)?
- How was it/were they similar to or different from your research question(s)?
- How did the authors study the research questions?
- What were the major findings of these studies and how these findings informed your study?

2. Assessment Templates for Critical Evaluation of Published Research

Article Critique Assignment - Students are asked to apply their critical thinking skills and knowledge to complete this assignment. They select <u>one</u> of the three assigned articles to critique by addressing the following questions:

- What was the research question (s)?
- Were there any study hypothesis/hypotheses? If yes, what were they?
- Briefly describe the study design (qualitative or quantitative, cross-sectional, longitudinal, quasi-experimental, experimental, etc.)?
- What was the population of interest?
- Who did they use as the study sample?

2. Assessment Templates for Critical Evaluation of Published Research

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 What methods did they use to recruit/select their sample? For example, what type of sampling method did they use? Was it random or non-random sampling?

 What was their data collection technique (survey, interview, observation, chart reviews)?

 What did they use as study measures or data collection instruments?

 What were the key results/findings?

 What were the strengths of the study, either stated or in your opinion?

 What were the limitations of the study, either stated or in your opinion?

 What are the implications of the study findings, or future steps for research and/or practice?

 In your opinion, what was the overall quality of the article?

3. **Single Subject Research – a Tool for Evaluation of Clinical Practice**

The purpose of this assignment is to increase student's familiarity with the single subject design method and to build your confidence in your ability to use this type of assessment in social work practice.

Instructions for the Single Subject Research Project:

ॐ You will be evaluating yourself or someone you know in some manner for this project. Choose ONE target behavior/feeling/thought of the person that you will attempt to change. For example: cigarette smoking, soda intake, checking Facebook, lateness, weight loss, etc.

3. **Single Subject Research – a Tool for Evaluation of Clinical Practice**

ॐ Choose an intervention that will assist you in making that change

ॐ Define the target behavior/feeling/thought that you attempt to change in measureable terms by creating two measurable indicators (can be measured by frequency, magnitude, or duration), e.g. ounces of soda in a day.

ॐ Your indicator(s) must be specific enough to be measured, and can be measured frequently. Select a behavior or thought that has the potential to have a wide range of values, not just if it happens or not (yes/no).

3. Single Subject Research – a Tool for Evaluation of Clinical Practice

ରେ Create a graph with X and Y axes. The Y axis will measure your operationalized indicator for each attempt (what happened with that behavior/feeling/thought), the X axis will measure what day/trial this happened. I will circulate an excel file for you to plot the graph.

ରେ Take baseline measures for at least several days/times of your operationalized indicator.

ରେ After baseline, implement an intervention that is aimed at changing your target behavior/feeling/thought, and continue to measure it for at least 7-10 days to track the changes.

4. Agency Research and Evaluation Field Assessment

Class Discussion - What is my agency doing with data? What am I doing with this?

Whether you are majored in clinical practice, group work, community organizing, administration, management, or any specialized field of practice (such as international social work, health or mental health, children, youth, and families, world of work, aging, etc.) we are constantly producing tons of information such as assessment records, client information, program assessment, program evaluation, community planning session, process recording, discussion groups finding, client observation records, etc. regularly in our employment or internship.

4. Agency Research and Evaluation Field Assessment

๏ What kinds of data does the agency generally do to collect, manage, classify/organize? How does your agency summarize and present the data and in what formats? What functions do these activities serve? Who primarily perform those functions?

๏ What tools does your agency use to manage and analyze data? Do they use any tools such as access, excel, statistical or other software to help with these functions?

๏ What roles and functions do you play with data (collect data only, manage data, or summarize data)?

๏ What do you perceive as important advantages/benefits to have (or create) a sound data collection, management, and analysis systems in the agency? What are the constraints that prevent the agency from doing so?

4. Agency Research and Evaluation Field Assessment

A short essay –

Consult or interview your agency supervisor or someone in your agency who is primarily handling data and reports to address the above questions. Write a brief report on what you have found and provide examples.

5. Design and Implementation of A Practice-focused Class Study Project

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Class discussion and select a group study project to explore perceptions and attitudes about terrorism and government monitoring program among general public

Best, S. J., Krueger, B. S., & Pearson-Merkowitz, S. (2012). Al Qaeda versus Big Brother: Anxiety about government monitoring and support for domestic counterterrorism policies. *Political Behavior, 34*, 607-625.

Cohen, P. et al. (2006). Current affairs and the public psyche: American anxiety in the post 9/11 world. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 41*, 251–260

5. Design and Implementation of A Practice-focused Class Study Project

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Instruction to Potential Participants

I am a student at the Touro College Graduate School of Social work and I am collecting data regarding perceptions and attitudes about terrorism and government monitoring program among general public for a class research project. There is no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your true opinions. Please do not put your name on this survey to maintain anonymity. Your completed survey will join hundreds of other anonymous surveys that we will collect to complete analysis and prepare a class report.

6. Class Activity - Presentation & Dissemination of Research Findings

You completed the perceptions and attitudes about terrorism and government monitoring program study with about 180 community members in New York City. You compiled the demographic profiles of these participants and assessed their perception, attitude, and feelings on terrorism and government monitoring activities. You had interesting findings about relationships between certain demographic characteristics of these participants such as their educational level, racial or ethnic background, immigration status, family background, etc. with their attitude, perceptions, and knowledge towards terrorism.

In a small group, you will discuss either Q1 and2 or Q3 and 4 in 20 minutes and then report the summary of your discussion in the class.

6. Class Activity - Presentation & Dissemination of Research Findings

附 Q1 Your research team would like to publish this study in a professional journal, what would you plan to do to prepare the paper, what else you need to know to strengthen the paper that can be potentially publishable?

附 Q2 You are invited to give a presentation for 30 minutes at a national psychology conference on terrorism, health, and mental health issues. Participants include mainly researchers, government and non-profit agency executives, health and mental health administrators, and seasoned practitioners. How will you prepare the presentation?

6. Class Activity - Presentation & Dissemination of Research Findings

  Q3 You are invited to conduct a presentation of your study in a regional interdisciplinary event with about 50 participants. The 1-hour workshop format will allow more instant and interactive dialogues between presenters and participants who are mainly practitioners from different disciplines including physicians, social workers, guidance counselors, psychologist, public health professionals, teachers, community advocates, paraprofessionals, etc. What is your plan to facilitate this workshop to share the findings of your study?

  Q4 Terrorism and national security is a hot topic recently because of terrorist attack in Paris. A local media reporter learned about your study and would like to conduct an interview with you and hopefully write an article about your study in a major newspaper. What would you need to know to prepare for the interview and what is your plan to share the findings of your study?

Discussion

Key Elements of An Innovative, Experiential Pedagogical Approach

“ It is a case-based learning and through examples and rich case descriptions, students learn about real-world research issues.

“ It is discussion-centered and research ideas flows fluidly between professor and students.

Discussion

Key Elements of An Innovative, Experiential Pedagogical Approach

℈ It is a collaborative learning process as students actively discuss about their practice cases they are studying and engage in constructive dialogues with each other.

℈ Finally cases chosen for learning and research are context-specific as students see the connection of social work research to day-to-day practice contexts.

Thank You!

- Questions?
- Comments?