

SOWK 696 Advanced Practicum Journal #6 (March)
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How are you different as you bring this chapter to a close?

It is quite challenging for me to accept that this structured part of my learning process is over, at least in this format. Over the past few months I've come to realize that I do not think the length of this program is sufficient in terms of preparing me for the work I want to do. At the same time, I also know that this is only the beginning of what will likely be a life-long experience in developing skills, acquiring new knowledge, integrating theory and practical experience, and on-going reflexive practices.

I feel and am very different at the end of this chapter of my learning. I was not a therapist at all at the start of this process. I had a dream of being a therapist, but I was terribly afraid. I had not practiced as a therapist at all in my previous years as a social worker. I was a stay-at-home mom to three kids for nearly 12 years before I began this program of study, and my time in social work prior to having children consisted for a few years spent in residential additions counselling, research assistantship, and community outreach work. My exposure to therapy was exclusively through my own extensive personal work in therapy, which I know see was extremely valuable.

Today, I am well on the way to being a therapist within the postmodern and collaborative framework of family therapy. That is so amazing to me. I am committed to continue developing skills and abilities in this field, which is difficult because relational and systemic therapy work is not something that is commonly done in agencies. I am also aware that it is very tempting to shy away from clinical practice, particularly in a private setting, and all that is involved in establishing such a practice. This is my goal. This will take time and commitment, and keeping the dream alive somehow. I am a bit worried about that, but I hope I can search out the supports I need outside of this structured learning experience.

There are so many ways that I am different today... I can say today that I have courage to take risks and make mistakes in a way that I wasn't sure I was able to do. During this practicum, I took on many challenges that were very scary for me: being supervised and receiving feedback from many very experienced clinicians, including people you are in every family therapy textbook out there, like Dr. Tomm; I received supervision from clinicians whose styles are very different from my one and who I don't agree with; I worked with many families, nearly 30 in total, on various issues and in various circumstances, and I managed the challenge of not knowing; I developed my own style in therapeutic work, and learned to facilitate conversations towards healing. I learned about working within some legal constraints, and I grew familiar and am on the way to being confident in our Social Work Code of Ethics.

How has this process, your Master's program, impacted how you see yourself as a person and as a social worker?

The program has helped me to identify strengths I really was not able to see in myself. I feel that I have found a passion and a talent that I was not fully aware of. This opportunity to explore family therapy, to study, discuss, write and reflect on the works of postmodern therapists and thinkers, to chance to spend time learning from important figures like Dr. Karl Tomm – these

have been amazing gifts and it will take me some time to fully integrate and make the most of all my learning.

I am changed by the families I met, too, and the conversations we had. Sitting in the chair of the therapist is such a privilege and opportunity to learn, to listen, and to identify, name, and make meaning of the issues and troubles presented, with the intention to maybe move towards healing in some way. There are not quick solutions, or immediate explanations. Often the process is one of slowly searching and sorting through experiences people share. I feel so much more at ease with this realization – that this process requires times, patience, generous attention, and careful, gentle exploring together.

I am also changed by the process of working with supervisors and colleagues whose perspectives are often very different from my own. Learning to hear the multiplicity of voices in the therapy room, in the collaborative processes with colleagues and supervisors, and even within my own heart and mind, has been a very important take-away from this program.

I take these skills with me into my relationships outside of my social work practice as well – into my leadership role in the Calgary Threshold Choir, for example, and the community work we do in the agencies that serve the dying, as well the community at large.

What will be different having gone through this process?

I hope that my career path will unfold towards becoming a Clinical Social Work practitioner, perhaps even part of the Clinical Registry. Eventually, I would like to establish a private practice in family therapy, working with addiction, mental health, and with end of life issues.

For the time being, my dream is to find part-time work supporting families and individuals, and to undergo further training in CBT, groups, and Narrative Therapy. I'm interested in Hakomi training, and when resources permit, I would like to explore training in Jungian analysis. I am looking forward to exploring some of these training opportunities in Calgary and elsewhere, as circumstances permit. I would like to develop some specific therapeutic skills to add to my repertoire.

I see myself as a new and different person, as I arrive at the end of this journey. I am glad that I was brave enough to pursue this accomplishment, and I am proud of all my learning. I have accomplished a lot different things in my life that I am proud of, and my MSW degree is a chapter of this amazing journey! Thank you for your support and guidance, Patrick. It has been a privilege.

Sincerely,

Agnieszka Wolska