

THE SELF, THE STUDENT, AND THE CORE CURRICULUM: LEARNING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

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Consistent with the resolutions adopted at the San Antonio conference, the 1989–1990 midwinter meeting of the National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology (NCSPP), in this chapter we elaborate the position that, whatever the substantive content of the core curriculum, it is critical during training to provide systematic attention to the nature of the relation between the self of the student and the work of professional psychology. This position rests on the acknowledgment of reflexivity, a fundamental characteristic of both human psychological activity and the discipline of psychology, which is the process through which one may step out of the ongoing flux of living and, with a “reflective glance” (Gergen, 1982, p. 18), examine actions and behaviors (including doing psychology) in the past tense (Smedslund, 1985). This is the observing ego function in psychoanalytic theory.

Personal–professional reflexivity is the process through which one systematically examines personal experiences of professional activities and training (see Peterson, chap. 3), potentially integrating them into the larger context of the self: the examination of self-in-role.

There have long been those who advocated attention to the education of the self about the self in clinical training. The original notion, psychoanalytic in origin, was that clinicians must become cognizant of the ways in which their own biases, needs, and countertransferences (i.e., the propensity to perceive and react to clients in ways that stem from the psychologist’s internal processes rather than from the characteristics of the current situation or other people involved) might affect their clinical work. Personal

therapy, process-oriented supervision, and training groups are some of the vehicles that training programs have typically promoted as ways of achieving this goal.

This focus on the self, primarily in the clinical context, seems narrow today, particularly in view of the varied roles filled by professional psychologists, of our current understanding of the processes of professional education and adult development, and of our awareness of the social meaning, role, and power of psychology as both a profession and a science. These issues have been particularly well articulated by social constructivist theory and feminist theorists. However, even with the limited goals and methods previously described, education about the self in professional psychology typically has been either attended to haphazardly or neglected and seen as peripheral, secondary to, and less worthy of systematic thought, systematic inclusion in the curriculum, and academic credit than content or technique-oriented courses. Our experience is that in times when resources are in short supply, the pieces of professional training programs relevant to the self of the student tend to be cut back first.

In our view, however, the education of the self should be at the very center of the core curriculum in professional psychology, providing its backbone. This is especially so for our discipline, addressing as it does the understanding and change of human behavior and experience. It is also true from the perspective of our obligations to all three of our profession's constituencies: our students, our profession, and the general public.

In what follows we further articulate what we mean by education about the self, indicating why we believe it is central to professional preparation and offering some suggestions for enhancing the relation between the self of the student and the work of professional psychology. We also describe some techniques for integrating education about the self into the professional psychology curriculum and explore some of the dilemmas that arise in this practice. Essentially we are talking about enhancing the process of professional socialization in its broadest and richest sense.

Concept of Role

A key linking concept is the notion of role: in its organizational sense, denoting the work tasks one is authorized to perform and for which one is held accountable; in its social sense, reflecting relationships (e.g., parent, friend, consultant, therapist); and in its sociopsychological sense, describing the informal, often unconscious, socioemotional functions individuals may come to serve (e.g., clown, nurturer, scapegoat, conscience, rebel) in families, groups, and organizations at a given time.

Another key concept is *self-in-role*: This refers to the way in which differing professional and organizational tasks, roles, and dynamics foster the expression or suppression of differing aspects or facets of the self—what is stimulated in us by our activities and contexts—for better or worse (Lawrence & Miller, 1976). We do not experience ourselves the same way in all circumstances and with all people. Understanding the evocative pull of differing ways of and contexts for being a psychologist is important learning for the emergent professional psychologist.

Task of Professional Education

We are pleased with the operational definition of the task of training in professional

identifications with key figures, and developmental tasks—need to be expressed in work and professional life at any stage in one's ongoing adult development.

Other aspects of adult development also affect students' experience of professional training. Some will be starting a doctoral program in their 20s; others in their late 30s or early 40s. Some will be using graduate school as a means of exploring possibilities for new ways of being in the context of a transitional period in their development; others will be using the same program to consolidate and build a new and stable life structure as the result of just having gone through a developmental transition or crisis (Singer, 1982).

In addition, joining a doctoral program involves major shifts that can be both stressful and demoralizing (Seashore, 1975). Adult students, especially, in essence enroll their families and some significant others in the program when they join, often inadvertently abandoning others for years. For those who enter a program as midcareer adults, there are shifts in status as they become junior practicum trainees rather than the senior, masters-level staff they used to be. There is also the experience of being de-skilled when one continually is working in domains where one has beginning rather than advanced skills. Without support, it is likely that high levels of emotional distress and casualties will emerge; with support, more students are likely to survive and thrive (Gopelrud, 1980). How can self-awareness and understanding of these developmental experiences be incorporated into students' training to help them navigate these waters and learn about themselves in the process?

There is also the matter of finding one's voice (Taylor, 1986, 1987): becoming able to participate in the clinical and academic dialectic or conversations through which knowledge is socially constructed (Gergen, 1985). This often poses problems for those—especially women—for whom differentiation is difficult and for whom a reworking of issues of status, competence, and authority turns out to be a necessary, although unanticipated, aspect of the return to graduate school. Taylor (1986) observed that the very processes of taking a point of view (standing fully and alone in the center of our subjectivity), articulating a point of view (occupying center stage), and giving voice to this point of view (taking the ball and running with it) run directly counter to stereotypical female socialization and indeed to the socialization of many men as well. Looked at another way, however, this is but one manifestation of the task of becoming senior—becoming a doctorate-level psychologist—faced by all professional psychology students. How may we work with students to help the self speak with the voice of authenticity as well as clinical and scientific authority by the time they graduate?

Responsible Use of Our Power as Professionals

The power of the psychologist to influence the terms, if not the reality of the clinical encounter, has been commented on astutely by many writers (e.g., Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971; Strupp, 1972). Our clients come to us in times of need and dependency, we control the settings in which we meet with them, and we are socially sanctioned as experts. Whether we take responsibility for this power in the relationship, it is there, and one may use it for good or for ill. This is also true in scientific psychology, although less intuitively obvious. The issues of what is discovered, what remains hidden from view, and the context in which knowledge is understood are profoundly influenced by the nature of the questions asked by the investigator, the methods used, and the framework within which the results are described and interpreted (Gergen, 1985; see also Peterson, chap.

3; Edwall & Newton, chap. 19). How can we work with students so that they may not only become aware of these issues of power, but also struggle with the moral, ethical, and political dilemmas posed?

Methodology for Education About the Self

There is little in the literature or in the clinical training lore to guide us in attending to the relation and fit between students' self and their experiences in professional roles during professional training. We propose that education of the self in professional psychology education involves several interrelated dimensions. First, there is the technology: examined experience of self-in-role. Second, there is the question of program culture. Third, there are issues of curriculum design. Finally, there is the question of faculty organization and structure.

Examination of self-in-role experience first and foremost requires that internal experience be considered a valid source of data. In this sense it is learning from the inside out. It also includes the process that Taylor (1987) termed "carrying the question." Examination of self-in-role involves taking the various experiences one has had, in the various roles within which one has had them, and continually asking questions such as: What does this say about me? What was stimulated in me by this situation? How may I best understand the parts of me—the behavioral patterns, the feelings, and the images—evoked by this experience? Why did I choose this course of action as opposed to others that were available? What can I learn from it about myself as a student and as a psychologist? What does it tell me about my vulnerabilities, blind spots, unfinished family-of-origin business, preferred roles and activities, and functioning in work groups as both leader and follower? What does it tell me about my own adult development at this point? How do my developmental needs as I am coming to understand them inform the choices I will be making in the program and when I graduate? How does all of this relate to what I am studying in course work?

Questions and Issues

Integrating the exploration of self-in-role into the core curriculum requires times and places where people come together to address the kinds of questions we have listed as well as an organizational environment that supports and values this activity. In our experience, one effective approach to structuring such work and setting a supportive cultural tone is to provide a credited, ongoing small-group professional socialization seminar, one of whose primary tasks is to work with students exploring experiences involved in or stimulated by (a) entering the program or leaving it, as the case may be; (b) joining and being a trainee in a practicum or internship setting; (c) the academic material and clinical techniques to which they are being exposed; (d) clinical work on practicum or internship; (e) functioning as part of a small work group or staff group—including the seminar itself—in which many if not most psychologists function these days whether in private or public settings; and (f) ethical dilemmas that arise in clinical or organizational settings; and so forth.

Antioch New England Graduate School's 2.5 hour per week "Professional Seminar," in which students participate in various configurations throughout their program, is one such event. Another is "Stress and Transition in Adult Development," a required

weekend workshop at Antioch New England for entering psychology doctoral students. Taught by a team of core faculty and advanced students, this workshop is described by entering students as one of the high points of their first year. It provides didactic input, offers modeling by faculty and advanced students who explore their own experiences in the program in fishbowl format, and includes small-group discussion sessions in which the newly entering students explore their experiences of joining the program, returning to graduate school in midcareer, and so forth.

Of course, examination of experience of self-in-role may be encouraged as part of the discussion in any more traditional course or seminar.

The shared vision of the faculty as a work group collectively responsible for students' education rather than a collection of independently practicing educators is another requisite element. There needs to be a collective understanding of what the central tasks of professional training are all about and collaborative work surrounding whatever professional socialization vehicles have been devised so that they may be integrated effectively with the more typical courses and seminars.

Those faculty teaching professional socialization seminars themselves need a supportive professional socialization group for sharing dilemmas in working with students. In regular meetings, they can examine their experiences in their roles, learn more about themselves in the resulting discussion, enhance their skills as professional socialization group leaders, and keep tabs on students and their progress.

Finally, there is the need for a culture that promotes and values this venture and supports the notion that we all should be "carrying some questions" about ourselves in our various roles from which we will be learning (cf. Taylor, 1987). Without support from the program culture, specific curricular innovations will be relatively meaningless.

Certainly these proposals raise many questions. How does one make a cultural innovation? How can ownership of this task by faculty be secured? How can faculty be trained to provide leadership with students in the kind of work described here both in more traditional courses and in the small-group professional socialization seminars as previously described? Can faculty work with students in an intimate small-group seminar where a "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1965) needs to be created for exploration of self-in-role experience and also evaluate their performance without compromising either the learning or the evaluation? What is the boundary between professional socialization work—or exploration of self-in-role—and psychotherapy? These are thorny questions on which easy agreement is unlikely. Our own experience, however, prompts us to take a rather clear stand on several of these issues.

First, although what transpires in a professional socialization seminar and a therapy group might overlap at any given moment, the basic difference is the task that is being pursued. Clarity around task makes leader choices a bit easier in any group (Singer, Astrachan, Klein, & Gould, 1975). In the professional socialization seminar, the task is to help students become more effective and more actualized in their roles as psychologists and to better understand their role dilemmas. By contrast, in psychotherapy we attempt to reduce emotional distress, enhance functioning, and enhance personal actualization in a much broader sphere. Even a formulation as simple as this makes it easier, at least in principle, to decide what is in bounds and what should be out of bounds in a professional seminar. Unless it is relevant to one's functioning as a psychologist, material is not appropriate to the group; if it is relevant, then it is appropriate.

Second, we believe that evaluation is inherent in any training situation and, to the extent that this is so, it needs to be completely acknowledged and placed in full view. An evaluation-rich environment is ultimately the safest environment; one knows where

one stands. Students quickly learn whether they can trust an instructor, with what issues, and on what levels. In our view, to avoid evaluating students' capacity to function effectively in their professional roles and to learn from examined experience is to abdicate one of our key responsibilities as educators. Currently, most licensing laws are not competency based, so it falls to us to make these often difficult judgments. If we will not, who can or will?

Conclusion

In summary, effective and responsible education demands that future generations of professional psychologists themselves know what their chosen profession, their daily work roles and activities, and their clients are likely to evoke on a personal level. Furthermore, they must also be taught how to learn continually in these domains. Only with this knowledge may they choose wisely, consistent with their own personal well-being, among the many paths open to them, avoid responding to their clients in counterproductive if not destructive ways, become caring and collaborative colleagues, and pursue inquiry with full awareness of the social, political, and psychological consequences of their work.

Some educational techniques and structures for pursuing these goals have already been developed. We hope that the resolutions adopted at the NCSPP San Antonio core-curriculum conference will foster further thought, effort, and innovation in this direction.