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PRELIMINARY REPORT OF AN EXPERIMENT TO MEASURE FIELD WORK PERFORMANCE

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THE lack of an adequate systematic quantitative measurement of the field work performance of students in schools of social work is hindering at present many noteworthy projects in search of scientific knowledge regarding the (1) selection of candidates for professional training in social work; (2) accurate relation between classroom instruction and field work instruction; (3) accurate relation between satisfactory performance in a school of social work and satisfactory performance in a social work agency; (4) changes in the personality of students subject to field work instruction; (5) rating and clas-

sification of the various types of field work instructors; and (6) the wise choice of content for field work instruction.

The dearth of systematic rating tools in the areas of field work performance which is perhaps the area which above all distinguishes professional social work training from training in other social sciences fields has prevented the establishment of a good criterion against which to set the determination of relationship with other variables of concern to the profession. It is the presence of association or correlation between two scores which makes prediction possible and the accuracy or efficiency of such prediction is a function of the degree or strength of the relationship that exists.

Field work has had to be excluded as a measurable variable from many study designs because of the absence of a consistent objective tool to assist the supervisor in measuring and evaluating said work. This want has imposed a great limitation upon the nature of the findings because of the great reliance the profession of social work places on field study as evidenced by nearly half of the student's scheduled time being devoted to it.

At the School of Social Work of the University of Puerto Rico there are six full time faculty members who serve as field work instructors in public social service agencies. Since most of these faculty members carry too, other responsibilities such as classroom instruction, student advising, research-project advising, interviewing candidates for admission to the School, extracurricular activities in community organization, membership in various faculty committees, etc., their workload is quite heavy and there is always a backlog of pending tasks.

When the writer brought to this harassed faculty in 1952, the *Field Work Rating Scale for Social Work Students*, (Form E and F) developed by psychologist Allen H. Frankle of the Des Moines Child Guidance Center, as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, School of Social Service

Administration,¹ five field work instructors agreed to give it a trial if only to ascertain its expediency value. The writer availed herself of this opportunity to point out how the lack of an adequate measure of the performance of students at a School of Social Work had stopped her from determining the predictive value of three psychological tests and consequently the sensitivity of each test to satisfactory social work performance.² Since field instruction is built on the premise that it provides the student with the opportunity to apply a wide range of theory under careful guidance and enables him to develop his own manner of relating himself to people and their problems as they are being served by the social agencies in which he is placed, it is most urgent to find a way by which to measure this variable.

With this introductory knowledge at hand, the following design was set for experiment.

Methodological Design

The Acting Director of the School at that time, Miss Georgina Pastor, who is at present the Assistant Director, was to choose three "anchorage cases"—field work reports or evaluation reports written in the past by field work instructors who were not included among the five full time members of the faculty who were willing to give a trial to the *Rating Sheet*. These reports were duly disguised in order to prevent recognition of any identity and then were distributed to the five field work instructors with the understanding that they were to read them and, on the basis of their content, would use Form E and F of the *Rating Sheet* to rate the behavior or characteristics described in the narrative report.

¹ Frankle, Allen H., *Rorschach Human and Quasi-Human Responses as Indices of Real Life Interpersonal Relationship of "Normals"* (Doctoral Dissertation), University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.

² Marín, Rosa C., *The Relationship of Three Psychological Tests to Grades Earned in Classroom Courses in the School of Social Work of the University of Puerto Rico*. (Doctoral Dissertation) 1953, School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh, pp. 21-23.

Results

In a meeting held in December 1952, the results of this attempt were reported verbally to a meeting of the whole faculty of the School. These results could be summarized, thus:

1. There was total agreement as to rating of the following ten items:

Form E.

- Item 8: Makes strikingly good impression on both clients and co-workers. Case 2.
- Item 11: Student demonstrates appropriate application of theoretical concepts to specific cases. Case 2.
- Item 12: Succeeds very well in gaining the cooperation of workers in other agencies. Case 3.
- Item 19: Very keen in analysing client's motives. Case 1.
- Item 22: Overdependent on supervisor for emotional support. Case 1.

Form F.

- Item 5: Projects own standards and attitudes on clients without being aware of it. Case 2.
- Item 6: Maintains excellent poise in most case contacts. Case 3.
- Item 9: Student is keenly sensitive to client's feelings: tactful and considerate.
- Item 11: Shows acute observational powers, recognizes and records significant cues in client's gestures, expressions, mannerisms, vocal inflection, etc.
- Item 24: Student clearly perceives own strength and weaknesses.

2. There were 16 items which elicited a widespread divergence of ratings:

Form E.

- Item 3: Works hesitantly, cautiously or fearfully. Case 2 and 3.
- Item 4: Under pressure of time shows capacity to discriminate

- between what is important and what is insignificant. Case 3.
- Item 5: Student appears fearful of aggressive clients. Case 2.
 - Item 8: Makes strikingly good impression on both clients and co-workers. Case 1.
 - Item 10: Shows unusual capacity to accept clients and respect them as persons despite their problems or limitations. Case 1.
 - Item 14: Clients are put at ease, but interviews often show lack of focus. Case 3.
 - Item 16: Comprehend client's overall problem adequately, but lacks skills in practical handling of specific details. Case 1.
 - Item 20: Recording of interviews shows not only good structure and accuracy, but has a "living" quality reflecting two personalities in interaction. Case 3.
 - Item 23: Very alive and spontaneous personality. Case 1.
 - Item 24: Student has much to give clients emotionally: rich psychic resources, depth and breadth of personality. Case 2 and 3.
 - Item 25: Very well balanced emotional makeup; genuinely warm and responsive with adequate stability and control. Case 1.

Form F

- Item 2: Shows a realistic flexibility without detriment to sound planning of work. Case 3.
- Item 15: Recognizes the obvious cause-and-effect relationships, but misses subtle ones. Case 2.
- Item 17: Fosters visible growth and independence in clients. Case 1.
- Item 19: Shows marked capacity for understanding supervisory criticism and incorporating it into future casework. Case 1.
- Item 21: Intellectually very keen; clear, productive orderly thinker. Case 1 and 3.

As may be seen, Item 8, Form E was included both in the areas of agreement and disagreement, although in respect to different cases.

The items which elicited the widest dispersion in rating with reference to the anchorage cases were discussed in order to attempt some revision and to eliminate any ambiguity.

The outcome of this preliminary experiment served to enlighten all the participants on

1. the need to continue exercising themselves in the objective evaluation of the overt verbal and nonverbal behavior of students as observed in field work;
2. the need to analyze each item statistically to determine whether the item discriminates between subjects differing sharply in the function being measured;
3. the need to revise the scales to add other aspects of behavior which were considered fundamental to social case work and social group work and had not been included, and in order to modify some items in accordance with a frame of reference in harmony to the cultural patterns of Puerto Rico;
4. the need to have uniform definitions of terms used in the evaluation of students;
5. the need to determine the reliability and validity of the scales finally adopted.

For the faculty members participating in this experiment, the knowledge uncovered by the studies of Mc V. Hunt *et al.*, (3) in the sense that caseworkers judging movement agreed with each other to an unexpectedly high degree and used a common core of criteria for judging said movement, has been very encouraging, since they thought that these traits singled out by these investigators might be extensive to other areas of judgment. Another finding of the above mentioned studies is:

...that agreement among workers can be improved by appro-

³ Mc V. Hunt J. and Leonard S. Kogan, *Measuring Results in Social Case Work*, New York, Family Service Association of America, 1950, pp. 10-11.

priate scaling procedures and by training to a point where caseworker judgment shows sufficient reliability to provide a promising measuring instrument which should be, at the same time, relatively inexpensive to apply with some regularity.(4)

This finding induced the participating staff to pursue this experiment further in order to be able to achieve soon this measure of the standardized judgment of the students in field work by professional social workers.

After this initial trial of scales E and F by the participating faculty, both scales have been used by all field work instructors of this School with all field work students for the second semester of 1952-53, the first and second semester of 1953-54 and the first semester of 1954-55. In the use of these scales each field work instructor gives a blank copy of each scale to each student that is to be evaluated, one week in advance of the date set for the evaluation appointment. The student is instructed to mark each item referring to himself as he deems most appropriate and then in the evaluation interview both the student and the field work instructor compare ratings and discuss differences of opinion. Sometimes out of this discussion, the field work instructor has changed his rating either moving it up or down to agree with the student rating of himself. Many students, who had had the experience in preceding sessions with the narrative report process of evaluation, claim the present form of evaluation with the aid of the scales is more objective and precise.

Some of the items in the scales have been modified in the course of these past academic sessions in order to eliminate prominent double barrelled statements, and new items have been added to cover additional field work content.

In the meanwhile the field work faculty has been working at the current operational definition of the terms used, following as frame of reference the tentative criteria for student pro-

⁴ Mc V. Hunt, J., Margaret Blenkner, and L. Kogan, *Testing Results in Social Casework*, New York, Family Service Association of America, 1950, p. 1.

gress in field instruction in social case work and group work adopted by this School in 1952-53.⁵

Once the outlined analysis is carried out and the desired measuring instrument is obtained, there are further plans to use it in ascertaining the relationship between satisfactory field work performance and some personality traits; between satisfactory field work performance and classroom instruction; between satisfactory field work performance and evaluation of the performance of the graduate as an employee of a social service agency.

All his knowledge is believed to be very relevant in gauging the objectives and nature of the curriculum at the School and thus the outcome of the study is expected to be of value to several endeavors.

As may be seen, this is an on going research project with a scope embracing both immediate and long range purposes. According to the participation of a large number of faculty members of the School as participant observers, it propitiates the organization of informal seminars within the faculty to elucidate the consistency of the criteria used as applied in judging sameness and relevance of contents and to disseminate the significance of logic and the scientific method with direct examples drawn from the body of professional knowledge.

⁵ This is the same criteria developed by a Committee of Social Case Work Field Instructors of the School of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Pittsburgh (1944-45). It comprises eight major phases:

- I — Understanding of Human Behavior
- II — Development of Skill in the Helping Process
- III — Development of Skill in Recording
- IV — Understanding and Use of Agency Function
- V — Ability to carry administrative responsibility
- VI — Skill in the Use of Community Resources
- VII — Awareness of Self and Capacity for Self-Evaluation
- VIII — Capacity to use Supervision