Chapter 2

BEGINNING PROCESSES IN FIELD INSTRUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE

The educational task...[involves] balancing giving and demanding, taking care not to give too much at once in too great detail. This entails giving first things first, with a realistic expectancy that they be mastered. It also implies helping the learner put them to use and holding him [or her] accountable for doing so. (Towle, 1954, p. 33)

Preparing for the Arrival of Students

Setting the stage for learning entails pairing and balancing expectations with realistic goals. The manner in which the placement starts sets the tone and affects how next steps are taken (Dettlaff, 2003; Nelson, 1990; Nisivocer, 1974). How we prepare ourselves and our agencies for students has a far-reaching impact on students and a direct effect on how students understand what is involved in beginning with assigned tasks and responsibilities. As the teacher/learner relationship develops, engagement of clients in professional working relationships is modeled. This parallels the student’s work with clients and client systems (Dore, 1993). Just as some clients have limited understanding of the helping process and unrealistic expectations of social work students, social work students may be unclear about the process of field instruction and
have unrealistic expectations of us as field instructors (Kahn, 1979; Mattinson, 1975; Searles, 1955). It stands to reason that just as it is good social work practice to teach students to tune into beginning processes, there are similar positive effects on learning when we prepare ourselves for educating students using this same technique.

Reynolds refers to this entry period of field instruction as “the vestibule to learning” (1985, p. 214). She proposes that beginning the field instruction relationship requires different skills and attitudes from later on in the field instruction relationship when the foundation has been established. Initially students come with understandable uncertainties, fears, and concerns. These may not be dissimilar to our own concerns as field instructors. Anxiety is a shared, necessary, and natural part of the process—the anxiety of being a student and the anxiety of being a field instructor. More specifically, being an evaluator and being evaluated emerge as issues. Students worry about being evaluated—and about assessing client systems. Unsurprisingly, questions surface from these varying perspectives such as: “What will be expected of me?” “Will I be able to meet the demands of this setting, this field instructor, or these clients?” “How will I be evaluated?” “Will I meet my own expectations and achieve my goals?”

Since these dynamics are inherent and are expected to arise (Gelman, 2004), it is possible to manage them through anticipatory planning and preparation. One mechanism that achieves containment of this anxiety is an agency orientation. This is not to recommend a fixed approach to this beginning phase. On the contrary, field instruction should move at an appropriate pace to allow the process to unfold. Each student will require a somewhat different approach, yet the beginning phase can be enhanced by paying attention to some basic factors. Understanding the differing expectations of the agency, of the social work program, and of students is a critical aspect that affects decisions about what form the formal and informal orientation will take.

In summary, before students arrive in the agency, we can best prepare by planning ways to orient our students about the:

• Agency, from its physical layout to its policies, procedures, and place in the continuum of services to the population and community served;

• Clientele served by the agency and needs of the community; and

• Purpose of social work in the setting, including the student’s expected role and function.
Preparing the Agency for the Student’s Arrival

Students are assigned to an agency/organization, not just to an individual field instructor. Everyone in the setting has a role to play in the overall educational experience. Some agencies assign staff to work as educational coordinators responsible for organizing student assignments within the agency and student orientation programs. However, preparing the agency/organization for students is frequently our responsibility as field instructors. Drawing on our own experiences and recalling what it was like when we began field placements or started new jobs is a helpful way to tune into the issues involved. However, it often happens that we can only fully appreciate what is required of the agency and ourselves after the first experience of working with a student. Discussions with other, more experienced field instructors within the agency are a useful way to pool expertise.

The structure of students’ time in the placement—specific days, location, and length of field instruction meetings—needs to be considered. For example, it is important to determine what staff meetings or discussion groups are essential for student participation and which need to be built into students’ field instruction experiences. In this way, answering the question, “What are the necessary components for a healthy and stimulating learning experience within this setting?” initiates consideration of the practicalities of the placement and provides a foundation for what else needs to be incorporated into the agency orientation. In addition, the following factors can assist us in preparing for students’ arrival.

• What has been the experience of this agency with students in the past? What is the agency’s attitude toward students? Is there a commitment to provide professional training?

• Does the agency provide a culturally competent workplace environment, or is the student culturally isolated? For example, is the student the only person of color among an all-White agency staff serving a culturally diverse client population?

• What special accommodations are needed to facilitate students’ entry into the work environment?

• What are the agency’s attitudes or responsibilities toward field instructors? Does the agency provide support and flexibility to field instructors,
or are increased demands anticipated? Who can be relied on to support field instructors within the agency?

• If students are employees of the agency doing work/study internships, what special considerations are needed to support their transition to new roles as students versus employees? Are there written educational plans in place authorized by the school and the agency administrator that address field assignments and field instruction? Are all parties (students, job supervisors, field instructors, administrators, and the school) in agreement regarding the placement expectations and field instructors’ roles and responsibilities?

• If the agency has been experiencing difficulties, consideration as to how to create meaningful learning experiences is needed. This presents special challenges in the current climate of fiscal cutbacks facing many social service agencies. When staff turnover is high and staff morale is low, poor administrative choices or oppressive policies or procedures may exist. Discussions with the social work program’s field education department may be useful in determining a plan in these situations. Any concerns that emerge about the agency as a placement site should be discussed with the faculty liaison or field education department.

• When considering schedules, a time for orienting students and providing ongoing regular field instruction conferences needs to be secured. It often occurs that in some fast-paced agencies, securing a regular uninterrupted hour for supervision seems an unrealistic goal. In these situations, it may be possible to arrange less than one 1-hour periods more frequently than the traditional hour or hour and a half per week. Interspersing longer sessions throughout the academic year on a regular basis protects time for the development of thoughtful reflection rather than providing only short spurts of supervision that too frequently model a quick-fix focus on practice concerns.

• If there will be task supervision, collaborative relationships need to be established. Task supervisors are experts in the agency who will teach the student some particular task or aspect about social work practice or impart a special expertise (e.g., grant writing, lobbying activities, group work, family therapy, or welfare rights information). Three-way meetings with task supervisors should occur periodically to review how students...
are doing and to incorporate this aspect of the learning experience into the student's overall performance and learning goals.

- Establish what arrangements need to be made to ensure an adequate flow and balance of work for students well before the student arrives.

- Consider the implications of the work in the agency and whether students will be exposed to such issues as vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue. These issues are discussed in chapter 11, Teaching Challenges in Field Instruction.

**What Are the Agency’s Expectations?**

It sometimes happens that the idea and anticipation of having a student differs from the realities of this added responsibility. Therefore, assessing how the field instruction site will react to students is an important factor. Will students be accepted as professional staff in training, as free labor, or as outsiders? Given this knowledge, we play an important role in the protection and creation of conducive learning environments for our students. We can mitigate against some of the problems that arise by alerting agency staff to the following expectations:

- Students will be present at staff meetings and should assume more than an observational role;

- Students need space and the resources to do their work;

- Students need assignments that reflect their methods of study and program year;

- Students need orientation to the agency and its policies and procedures; and

- Students need assignments that extend their capacities. This may involve extending agency service and cooperation from agency staff.

**What Are the Student’s Expectations?**

Stepping into our students’ shoes helps our understanding of their fears and worries regarding field education (Gelman, 2004; Grossman et al., 1990). Remembering how it felt to be a student, who was instrumental in the facilitation of our learning, identifying anything special about the experience that is important now, and bearing in mind what assumptions underlie this information and how it
aids or blocks the tasks ahead are all important factors. In addition, providing time to appreciate students’ expectations is an important part of beginning.

Students expect us to be available to them, frequently in the beginning and less frequently as the placement proceeds. During this initial phase, the examination of strengths and learning needs that students bring to the field placement experience should be the focus of discussions. This is usually not an easy dialogue, and students may need help to give voice to the many concerns and uncertainties they experience in this early phase. Expressing interest in their work and life experiences gives reassurance that they will not be assessed separately from their achievements and abilities. Providing links from their previous experience to this new situation eases anxiety and provides encouragement to move ahead. These discussions naturally relate to field performance expectations, such as attendance, placement hours, assignments, recordings, learning goals, and our role in helping students meet these expectations.

Normalizing and validating the anxiety and nervousness that students experience at the start of a new placement requires a direct and supportive response. We may try a variety of ways to reduce anxiety, but we simply need to give students time before assessing their apprehension as excessive. Anxiety generally subsides gradually before being replaced with more comfort and growing confidence. However, anxiety that remains high over a number of weeks takes on a different dimension and will need to be examined as part of the educational assessment.

What Are the Social Work Education Program’s Expectations?

The initial requirements of social work education programs revolve around hours and workload, selection of assignments, written recordings for field instruction, initial assessments of learning needs, oral evaluations, and collaboration with faculty liaisons. These issues are generally spelled out in the program’s Field Education Manual, and students and field instructors should review these issues together. Understanding the social work program’s philosophy and mission includes examination of the following factors:

- Organization of the curriculum and its relationship to field teaching and expectations. Elective and specialization or concentration choices in the curriculum often reflect the program’s emphasis and practice orientation.
- Programmatic structures and expectations that affect student assignments
(advanced standing, work/study, second year, specializations, or double-
method students).

• Administration of field instruction as expressed through the organization
  of the field education department.

• Defined roles and responsibilities of faculty liaisons as central to balancing
  the agency’s and field instructors’ needs with educational requirements.

• School policies regarding accountability, collaboration, and grading of
  students. Faculty liaisons generally give the field work grade in consultation
  with the field instructor.

• Rights and responsibilities of the social work program, students, field
  instructors, and agencies.

• The social work education program’s calendar and holidays, religious
  holidays, sick leave policy, end-of-semester evaluation due dates, and relevant
  policies as they affect field placements, such as days and number of
  field work hours, and home visiting expectations.

Orienting Students to the Agency
and Organizational Life

Introducing students to the hierarchical structures and the formal and informal
communication patterns existing within the agency is an important teaching
component, as it aids understanding of agency systems and their impact on
service delivery. Agency orientations also help students to develop a sense of
belonging and identification with the agency and their new role. Although this
may begin through an orientation program that takes many forms, the orienta-
tion is an ongoing process that begins during the first few weeks in placement
and continues throughout the placement as the student is introduced to differ-
ent aspects of organizational life. Some orientation programs are agency-wide,
formal programs that are organized by a group of field instructors and agency
administrators. Some include a welcoming breakfast, structured lectures,
tours, meetings with key personnel, and handouts and literature. Still other
orientation programs are less formal and consist of the field instructor and stu-
dent walking through the agency, going to a staff meeting together, or having
the student shadow a worker for an afternoon.
The balance of how much information to provide and in what form requires careful thought. During the first few days of placement, students mostly want to know, “What will I be doing here?” “What will be expected of me?” “Will I fit in?” “Are there people who look like me here?” Addressing these questions translates agency functions and procedures into the kind of work students will be doing. Instructing students to read the agency policy manual without including other activities is not recommended. Policy manuals are often written in formal tones that may, more than likely, alienate students rather than acclimate them to the agency.

Orientation to the agency runs concurrent with beginning first assignments. In the beginning it is best not to overburden students with too much information too quickly, as it may increase anxiety. The aim is to give enough information so students can feel included and clued into the agency’s environment and culture, so that they can start with a sense of direction. This can be achieved by selecting what information is most important for students to have on the first day of placement, in the first week of placement, the second week, and so on. Students need to understand the agency they will be working in, but much of this understanding comes with incremental time and exposure. Partializing and developing specific, understandable explanations about the social work role, purpose, focus, and goals in the agency and in the profession gives a step-by-step method that gradually introduces students to the agency and the work. In this way, the information is broken up into what is needed to manage the placement from what is needed to manage the role students will be playing in the setting from what is needed to manage assignments. The following are some pointers about orientations for us to keep in mind as the work with students begins.

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**Components of Student Orientation to a Field Placement**

- Introduce students to agency staff, from maintenance workers to the executive director. If there is an agency reception area or main telephone receptionist, make sure students’ names, office locations, and schedules of placement hours are known.

- A tour of the agency with students helps them achieve a sense of the
physical layout and how clients are accommodated in the agency. A
tour of the community with students, or arranging such a tour for students,
gives them a broader view of the external environment and provides a
context for understanding accessibility of resources, the culture of the
community, and the organization's place within the community, where it
is located. For these reasons, community tours are strongly encouraged.
Tours can come later in the placement depending on the nature of the
student's beginning, timing, and agency constraints. Following these
activities, students can be asked to expand on their perceptions, observa-
tions, and feelings about the agency and community. This exercise
introduces the student to the framework that all activities within the place-
ment are sources of learning. Arranging for students to sit in and observe
the waiting room of the agency is another orienting possibility.

• Brief descriptions of agency staffing patterns, services offered, popula-
tions served, the role of the social worker, funding sources, agency rules
and regulations, and how to answer the telephone are all helpful pieces
of information. Deciding which pieces of information are usefully dis-
cussed as opposed to given in prepared handouts is another way of
breaking up the flow of information to be absorbed. Available agency
brochures, organizational charts, and mission statements are useful
guides.

• Understanding the organizational culture, significant agency procedures
that the student will need to know, such as rules and norms, formal and
informal communication systems, dress codes, and lunch break details,
are important. Do not forget such essentials as bathroom keys, supplies,
mailboxes, identification or name tags, and safety precautions.

Orientation to a student's role within the agency includes:

• Gathering information in a folder that helps the student understand the
agency and provides references to pertinent information that will facilitate
adjustment to social work practice in the agency setting. A glossary of terms,
agency telephone extensions, examples of completed agency forms, an
organization chart, and articles regarding practice considerations regarding
the population served are several examples of items to be included.
• Regarding safety issues, students appreciate information presented in a sensitive, clear, and caring manner. Students need to know discretionary practice protocols as they relate to safety, both in the agency and in the community. Discussing the realities of practice and the specific implications this places on work in this setting provides students with necessary information with which they can protect themselves and exercise appropriate discretion.

• Reaching for students’ reactions and expectations of field placement helps them take one day at a time and trust that they will be listened to and that understanding comes with time and exposure.

• Providing direction and helping students practice how to introduce themselves as social work students or interns immediately connects them to the professional code of ethics regarding honesty and the prohibition against misrepresentation of skills (Feiner & Couch, 1985; Miller & Rockwell, 1997). Helping students practice their introductions to clients is a useful exercise to see how well they can articulate their understanding of their role and function within the agency. Ideally, the function of the agency should be stated in non-jargonized, operational terms, e.g., “We provide help to drug-addicted individuals who have been recently discharged from an in-patient psychiatric hospital and are in need of housing, psychiatric clinic follow-ups, and counseling” versus “We provide intensive case management to MICA patients.”

• Introduction to the types of agency records students will need to complete as part of agency requirements provides structure to what is expected. This discussion should include the uses of these recordings, amount of time allocated for recording in the agency, and field instructors’ plans for their review.

• It is never too early to discuss “worst case scenarios” or special situations that may arise in the course of agency work. This gives students permission to voice their fears and devise problem-solving skills in crisis situations. For example, do the agency and social work education program have policies on home visits? What safety measures are taken into consideration for home visits? What is the procedure to be followed when
clients threaten to hurt themselves or others? Plans should also be discussed around how students should handle illnesses or emergencies of their own. Lines of communication should be clarified, as well as to whom students should turn in the absence of their field instructors. Above all, we should provide an atmosphere where it is permissible to consider a balanced discussion of all these circumstances.

There is a great deal for students to absorb in the beginning, and we should take a moment to consider the first day for students in its totality. How long will it be? How balanced will it be between didactic material and activity or student participation? What provisions will you make to meet with students individually? Even if briefly, and even if a group field instruction meeting of students is planned, meeting individually with students goes a long way toward establishing the student/field instructor relationship. This meeting confirms that field instruction is a place of containment in the midst of all that students are trying to manage.

Evaluation of orientation programs introduces students to evaluation processes from the very start of placement. Legitimate questions include: “How did the orientation go?” “What worked?” “What was useful??” “What did not work?” “What might be done differently?” “How did the first day go?” “How did the first individual meeting or group meeting with students go?” “Did anything unanticipated occur?” “What needs have not been met?” and “What questions remain unanswered?” Such specific questions address whether students have the information they need to begin their assignments and whether there are aspects of their assignments that remain unclear and they yield important information for the progression of the work and learning ahead. These questions provide useful information for future orientation programs. These early opportunities for review and feedback also establish a model of field instruction in which mutual feedback and collaboration is an expectation.

The education of students in the field provides a different lens from which to view the agency, and this new lens yields new information. In this regard, gaining information on how students are experiencing the orientation provides information on which to base understanding of their learning needs as well as what type of information is required, and in what form, to facilitate adaptation
to the agency and to the student role. As students become more familiar with the agency—its culture, its services, and its philosophy toward service delivery—we should ask them to comment on the strengths and gaps in service delivery, and how different or similar they experience this agency in comparison to other agency experiences. These formulations help students develop their ability to move from one agency perspective to a professional stance regarding service provision.

**Orientation and Planning for Advanced Students**

Not all students are beginning-level students. The orientations for more experienced students may be handled differently and adapted to their needs. In addition, attention needs to be paid to the special circumstances of students who use their place of employment as a placement and the tendency to assume that because they work in the agency, orientation is not vital. For example, work/study students may have considerable experience but will require assistance making the transition from employee to student. It cannot be assumed that these students will not benefit from orientation.

Students currently employed in the agency may not need an orientation to the agency’s structure but will need an orientation to their new role of student and to their role within a new department or assignment. Students who have had other careers, or developed skills and knowledge over time, need support to translate this knowledge into their new social work role and function. This requires attention to bridging or transferring learning from one situation to another. Drawing attention to the nature of the learning task ahead in relation to previous life and work experiences gives students reassurance that they will not be viewed as a blank slate but valued for what they already possess and bring with them into this new field instruction experience.

Open discussions of students’ previous paid or volunteer work or placement experiences encourages the development of an individualized learning plan. In addition, the social work education program’s transfer summaries, placement planning forms, or any other written materials received on students shape educational assessments and ideas about possible assignments. Directly discussing this information with students provides a foundation on which students understand that learning needs will be mutually discussed and assignments will be shaped in relation to their learning needs and interests.
Orienting Students to Field Instruction

As mentioned above, it is important to meet individually with each student on the first day of placement even if only briefly and even if there are multiple students in the placement. At this meeting parameters are set for the field instructor/student relationship. A first step in establishing this relationship is to involve students in developing an educational plan that includes an assessment of the student’s present level of skill, identification of learning objectives, and design of appropriate learning experiences. Ways to initiate and clarify this task include:

- Establishing the contract for work, including purpose, expectations, and formats and procedures for field instruction conferences and process recordings, journals, or logs.

- Spelling out the social work education program’s criteria regarding weekly supervision time, recording requirements as distinguished from agency recording procedures, types of recordings, the number and format of recordings expected, and the use of agendas in field instruction conferences.

- Clarifying lines of communication and responsibilities, particularly if other supervisors or task supervisors are involved. Discuss the availability of back-up staff for emergency questions or issues that arise between field instruction conferences. We should remember that we are not the only source of learning for students, and they should be encouraged to use as many resources within the agency as possible.

- And, finally, eliciting students’ reactions and expectations of field instruction thus far.

In summary, setting the stage for field instruction involves understanding the respective expectations of students, agencies, field instructors, and social work education programs. It involves welcoming and orienting students to their new setting and prearranging appropriate assignments. It involves preparing for students, paving the way ahead in the agency, and anticipating potential obstacles. The orientation process begins with the establishment of initial learning contracts and engages students in learning relationships that entail mutual exchanges.
Orientation for a First Assignment

Background information. A 1st-year, Hispanic, 37-year-old, male student. His field placement is in a large urban hospital on a medical service. He is placed with a new field instructor who is in her early 30s, is a French Caribbean Black woman with 6 years’ post-master’s experience.

Conference. The field instructor gave a first assignment to her student the second day in placement. He had a tour of the hospital and the floor on which he was to work and was given an orientation to the medical charts, chart materials, a medical dictionary, and a tour of the patients’ rooms. He was introduced to some medical and nursing staff and shown how to locate the doctors and nurses caring for the patients. The field instructor told him she would go over the above information again with him, as she knew it could be overwhelming. The student was also briefed about the role of the social worker in hospital, the sources of referrals, and what to expect when interviewing in a patient’s room.

The patient, Ms. B., was referred by her doctor to the field instructor for help with financial problems. The patient had been in the hospital 3 days because of renal failure, secondary to systemic lupus. The doctor told Ms. B. that the field instructor would be seeing her. After reading the chart, it was decided that this would be an appropriate assignment for the student. The field instructor informed the patient that a social work intern would speak with her that afternoon.

The student was given the referral information and it was explained that, although the referral was being made for financial problems, there may be other problems presented by the patient or picked up during the interview, and that it was necessary to get an understanding of what the patient’s medical problems and limitations are. The student was told that the medical chart would tell him about her medical condition.

This was the student’s first experience in a hospital. He was given some literature that explained the patient’s disease in simple language, including its symptoms and prognosis. He asked questions about the illness, some of which the field instructor was able to answer, but he was told that medical and nursing questions could be answered directly by the doctor and nurse caring for the patient or by using the medical dictionary.

The field instructor and student went together to the patient’s floor so that they could read the medical chart together and discuss what there was to do.
The field instructor started off by showing him where to obtain data from the chart. He was then asked to comment on what information he identified as pertinent. He reported the patient’s age, address, and marital status. He was shown other information that was important and why.

He was shown how to read the progress reports on the patient. From his body movements, the field instructor noted that he was anxious. This was not commented upon; instead she pointed out that they would go over what he did not understand and again stated that he could ask the nurse or doctor for clarification of chart notes if needed. The student asked whether she understood the scribbled notes. The field instructor replied that sometimes they are difficult to decipher. He asked if all the charts are similar. The field instructor responded that most are. He was reassured that after reading the doctor’s notes it is possible to get the gist of what is being said. He continued with several questions about the notes, especially abbreviations and medical jargon. He read the chart on his own, and other medical information regarding the patient’s condition was discussed.

He was asked what he thought the next steps might be. He answered that he would see the patient to find out what financial problems she had. He was asked if he had any other questions. Silence. He was asked what he thought someone in the patient’s condition might be experiencing. He mentioned that the nurse’s admission sheet noted that the patient had young children; he commented that it must be hard for her to be away from them. The field instructor said that was a good observation and helped him focus on the children. He was asked if he would ask the patient about her children. He replied: “I don’t know.” The field instructor explained that since the patient had young children, their ages would be important to know as was how these children were being cared for while their mother was in the hospital. The state laws regarding child neglect and our obligations as social workers to make sure that the home situation was safe for the children were reviewed. It was suggested that he may want to find out what it is like for the patient and children to be separated during the hospitalization. He was asked to consider what he thought the patient might be going through. He was silent and did not seem to know. Again he seemed to be getting anxious and he began to shift in his seat. The field instructor shifted the conversation to the identifying data sheet, which noted that the mother is disabled and on Medicare. This means she was out of work for some time, and that it may be helpful to find out how being disabled and unable to work was affecting her.
The student added that she was separated from her husband and that may be why she is having financial problems.

What was known for certain was summarized. What was important to consider for discussion during his first contact was reviewed—her children, her medical condition, her physical functioning, her role as a mother, what assistance she gets from family, what support systems she has for herself, and her financial situation—and that it might not be possible to do everything in one interview. He was told to focus on what the patient saw as her problems and what she feels she needs.

The student asked if he should just walk into the room and start asking questions. He shared that he felt uncomfortable going in and asking questions of the patient. He questioned how he should introduce the topics. He asked what he should do if the patient refused to talk with him, or if she had nothing to say about her financial problems. What was involved was reviewed again. The student wanted to know what was required of him in writing a process recording on this interaction. This was discussed, and the field instructor explained that she would be available after the interview for supervision that afternoon.

**DISCUSSION**

This example demonstrates that much is expected of students and they frequently have to hit the ground running. It also depicts the tendency to overload a student with practical information in the beginning of a placement. The flavor of the interchange results in a task-oriented atmosphere in which the field instructor attempts to prepare the student with every eventuality but provides little space for reflection. Let us consider how the orientation of this student could be handled differently. We have the dual task of orienting students to the setting while simultaneously preparing them for a first assignment. Addressing the student’s anxiety with support could help prepare the student for success in this new role. We could join the student in conducting his first intake and case assessment, or we could allow the student to observe us complete the assessment. We need to be creative in thinking about methods and techniques that support students in assuming their tasks and roles. We should also pay attention to cultural and gender factors that should be addressed from the beginning of the field instructor/student relationship. Giving students adequate information to start with and ample time to consider the expectations of the role and function within the setting is necessary. Sometimes students ask appropriate questions, but their need to know gets lost amid the many different...
demands of the agency. Sometimes we respond to student questions with concrete answers rather than taking the opportunity to develop their ability to search for possible answers or to develop confidence in their own sense of how to proceed. We need to take a questioning stance rather than an answering stance in order to stimulate critical thinking skills in students.

Summary Points on Beginning Processes in Field Education

BEFORE THE STUDENT STARTS PLACEMENT:
PRE-PLACEMENT CONTACT

• Initial questions regarding workload and field instruction expectations

• The specific location and directions to the placement

• Date and time of expected arrival on the first day of field instruction; a description of what can be expected during the first day

• Overview of a typical day/workload

• Organizational norms and rules such as those about appropriate dress, hours of agency operation, etc.

GETTING STARTED

• Brief explanation of agency, its services, goals, population being served

• Brief discussion about expectations and responsibilities: the student’s, the field instructor’s and the agency’s

• Beginning of the educational contract and identification of student’s objectives and goals

• Brief clarification of field instructor’s style of supervision

• General discussion of agency culture, general questions and answers
FORMAL ORIENTATION

- Agency overview—work-related policies, procedures, staffing hierarchy, roles, community resources
- Agency required tasks, responsibilities, and knowledge needed:
  - documentation and record keeping
  - protocols for and lines of communication both written and verbal, ongoing and in crisis
  - tone of facility and organizational culture (dress code, appropriate behavior, do’s and don’ts)
  - introductions
- Field instructor/student/school tasks and responsibilities:
  - review of student’s educational objectives and school performance expectations
  - requirements of process recordings, logs, or both
  - process for review, feedback, and evaluation
  - practical expectations: hours, absences, lateness, time off, supervisory times and other required meetings
  - expectations of field instructor and field instructor’s responsibilities
  - communication protocols with school, field instructor, and faculty field liaison

ONGOING ORIENTATION NEEDS

- Agency overview continued:
  - workload-specific requirements
  - identification of advocacy needs
  - role of agency within the community
  - funding patterns, gaps in services, and implications for service delivery
Field instructor/student/school tasks and responsibilities continued:

- identification of student's learning needs
- ongoing bridging communication among field instructor, student, and school
- preparing for review, evaluation, and liaison contact

Orientation to assignments:

- role and function
- case-specific information
- anticipation of possible obstacles
- information and identification of resources that are case specific

**Tips**

- Express interest in students' previous experiences, cultural backgrounds, world views, and motivation to enter the profession.

- Explore areas of specific interest, expectations of field instruction, and any difficulties or disappointments with supervision in the past.

- Accept a student's need to shadow a worker as part of orientation. This can be a helpful tool for anxious students, observational learners, or beginning students with no previous social service experience.

- Clarify possible conflicts between educational expectations and the realities of agency-based practice. For example, the student may express specific interest in developing a community assignment, but the agency may not be able to provide this experience.

- Listen carefully; create a structure that supports listening through the provision of a protected, regular time for supervision.

- Provide support and reassurance that taking one day at a time will produce understanding and adjustment.

- Set the stage by early provision of balanced feedback that includes praise, reinforcement, and encouragement as well as constructive criticism that points to the growth and development of professional social workers.