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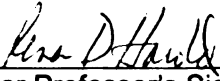# University

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND
ABILITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL
PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONERS

By

Shelley D. Schuurman

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ABILITIES THAT CONTRIBUT TO COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONERS

By

Shelley D. Schuurman

Accurately describing competent professional performance is a complex task. An individual's ability to "perform" requires the application of acquired knowledge, which is a process that is impacted by the personal characteristics and abilities of the individual. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the phenomenon of professional performance, specifically, as it relates to the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. Using a semi-structured interviewing format, four social work educators, four field instructors, and four social work practitioners were asked to describe the individual characteristics and abilities of a student or practitioner whom they believe exemplifies competent professional performance. Grounded theory analysis of the qualitative data collected during the interviews revealed the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. Each category contains multiple distinct themes and sub-themes. A conceptual framework describing the building blocks to competent professional performance was also developed.

Knowledge gleaned from this study is of potential benefit to social work educators as it contributes to the body of knowledge on professional performance and provides a framework that may serve as a starting point for developing criteria for

evaluating professional performance and for conducting research examining the

educational context and learning methods that most effectively facilitate social work

students' mastery of these individual competencies.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Bertha Capen Reynolds, Virginia Robinson and Charlotte Towle, three social work practitioners and educators who were committed to excellence in social work education. All three women considered the mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to be an essential foundation to competent professional performance and developed teaching strategies to nurture the development of these skills in the classroom. Reading their work fueled my interest in this area and inspired me to explore how social work educators address this topic in the 21st century.

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Additionally, it needs to be acknowledged that I could not have completed the PhD. process without the generous love and support of my husband, Don Schuurman, whose amazing and unfaltering belief in me enabled me to grow my tiny wings and fly. Lastly, I would like to thank my mom, Judy Bruechert, who showed me that women can be smart and introduced me to the field of social work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social work education is not only about the acquisition of new knowledge and skills; it is also about the acquisition of a new identity-- an identity as a social work professional. This new professional identity comes with rights and responsibilities, including the responsibility to practice social work in a professionally competent manner according to the knowledge, skills, values, and ethics of the profession. In order to demonstrate competent professional performance, social work students must successfully transfer classroom learning to the field practice setting.

Why is it that some students successfully transfer classroom learning to the field practice setting and others struggle to do so? Goldstein (2001) pointed to the primarily theoretical content of most social work courses as a possible stumbling block to the successful application of classroom learning to the field practice setting. He viewed the dominance of the scientific method, specifically, that only empirically supported methods of treatment should be provided to clients and taught in the classroom, as an underlying rationale for this theoretical emphasis (Goldstein, 2001). While acknowledging the value of a specific treatment method, he emphasized that it is a living social worker, a human being, who is applying the treatment method (Goldstein, 2001).

This living social worker, with his unique intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics and abilities, is the instrument that applies the scientific theory and accompanying treatment method. In this real world scenario, thinking (classroom learning) and doing (field practice) are integrated and inseparable. Goldstein (2001) suggested the use of experiential learning strategies in the classroom, focusing on the

development intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies as a means to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to increase the likelihood that students could successfully transfer classroom learning to the field practice setting.

Clearly, professional performance is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon. It requires that the practitioner possess *the ability* to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom in a variety of social work practice settings with individuals, families, groups, organizations and/or communities made up of diverse individuals facing unpredictable challenges. While research literature on this topic is quite limited, there is consensus that the successful application of acquired professional knowledge is influenced by the specific characteristics and abilities or limitations of the individual practitioner (Boyatzis, 1982, 1995; Goleman, 2002, 2006; Schön, 1983, 1987; Shulman, 2005).

Recent studies in social work education substantiate this finding, indicating that an individual's poor interpersonal skills, rigid thinking, judgmental stance, inability to establish healthy boundaries, and personal mental health problems are the most common reasons for less than competent professional performance in field education (Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr, 2006; Gibbs, 2000; Miller & Koerin, 2001; Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006). There appears to be some agreement on the individual characteristics, abilities and behaviors that contribute to problematic or failing field performance. However, identifying and defining the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance remains a complex issue that social work education has yet to fully elucidate.

<u>Rationale for the Study</u>

The field of social work has historically looked to educational institutions to train professionally competent social workers and to serve as gatekeepers of the profession (Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Miller & Koerin, 2001; Ryan, Habibis & Craft, 1998; and Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006). The Council for Higher Education Accreditation recognizes the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States of America and bestows on them the responsibility of promoting and maintaining a high quality of social work education, and thereby ensuring the preparation of competent social work professionals (Retrieved April 30, 2008 from http://www.cswe.org). The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) established by CSWE provide a road map for the curricular content and educational context required of accredited social work programs. This road map is grounded in the purposes of the social work profession and is based on specified knowledge, values and skills that are deemed requisite for competent professional practice.

Social work programs are required to make explicit the criterion used to evaluate a social work student's readiness for professional practice. The accreditation standards (EPAS) are delineated in four subsections with the third subsection titled, *Implicit Curriculum.* Section 3.2.7 of Educational Policy 3.2, titled Advisement, retention and termination, mandates that "the program spells out how it informs students of its *criteria for evaluating their* academic and *professional performance*, including policies and procedures for grievance (EPAS, 2008, p.12). Although research indicates that social work programs *do* have clear criteria for evaluating and terminating students based on

academic performance, a majority of programs *do not* have policies in place for evaluating or terminating students based *professional performance* (Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Ryan, Habibis & Craft, 1998).

Accurately describing "competent professional performance" is a complex task. An individual's ability to "perform" requires the application of acquired knowledge, which is a process that is impacted by the personal characteristics and abilities of the individual. Although the task of articulating and defining these characteristics and abilities is difficult, it is not one that can be ethically ignored. Schools of Social Work have a mandate to prepare competent and effective professionals. It appears that the development of a framework that identifies and defines the individual characteristics and abilities and that contribute to competent professional performance would be of benefit to social work educators and serve to fill the gap in knowledge needed to comply with the mandates of the EPAS.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of professional performance specifically as it relates to the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. The perspectives of social work educators, field instructors and practitioners have been analyzed to generate a grounded theoretical framework that identifies specific characteristics and abilities associated with the personal dimension of competent professional performance. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge on professional performance and provide a framework that may serve as a starting point for conducting research examining the educational context and learning

methods that most effectively facilitate social work students' mastery of these individual competencies.

This study is exploratory in nature and asks the primary question of how social work educators, field instructors, and practitioners describe the individual characteristics and abilities that they believe contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. This general research question led to the development of the specific interview protocol and questions (see Appendixes D and E) used in this study.

<u>Theoretical Framework</u>

The belief that knowledge is constructed through an individual's understanding of their interactions with others and the world around them, rather than an objective reality that exists apart from the individual knower (Charmaz, 2000; Greene, Jensen & Harper, 1996; Lee & Greene, 1999; Schwandt, 1994) led to the use of Social Constructionism as the theoretical lens which guided this study. The concept of professional knowledge was explored, followed by an examination of the education of social work professionals with a specific focus on professional performance. A Model of Effective Job Performance developed within the professional discipline of Business Management and Organizational Leadership was analyzed along with a framework centered on the individual characteristics and abilities associated with emotional and social intelligence.

Grounded theory methods (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1997) were chosen following the literature review because it allowed for a fresh and open minded approach to the existing problem of identifying and defining the individual characteristics that contribute to competent professional performance. The social constructivist perspective is congruent with the open and axial coding procedures

of grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LaRossa, 2005; Schwandt, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1997) which enabled the discovery of how the three distinct subgroups constructed definitions of specific characteristics and abilities, including an explanation of the context in which they occur and their relationship to one another.

Summary

Chapter One contained the introduction, as well as the rationale and purpose of the study. The research question and theoretical framework of the study were also introduced. Chapter Two provides the theoretical orientation and personal perspective that guides this study, as well as a critical analysis of the historical and current literature relevant to the phenomenon of professional performance. The research methodology is described in Chapter Three and the findings are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes a summary of the study and major findings, leading to a theoretical framework describing the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. Finally, a discussion of implications and recommendations concludes this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Orientation and Personal Perspective

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that centers on the nature of knowledge. A broad epistemological question is, "How do we know what we know?" Of particular interest is the relationship between the knower and what can be known. Epistemological assumptions about the nature of knowledge guide and inform the strategies of inquiry a researcher uses (Cresswell, 2003). Professional and personal perspectives can also influence the focus of a study and shape the process of data collection. In the following section, I will describe the theoretical, professional, and personal perspectives that informed the review of the literature and in turn guided the development of the research question.

Social Constructionism is the theoretical orientation that guided this qualitative exploratory study. Social Constructionism posits that an individual's generation of knowledge and ideas of reality originate from a social process rather than a solitary one (Lee & Gilbert, 1999). One's reality is constructed in part by the interactions one has with others, and in part by the individual's own interpretations of those interactions. Social constructionists believe that knowledge is socially constructed; therefore it can vary historically over time and differ across cultural groups that hold diverse beliefs. Given that values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and practices vary from one cultural group to another, so does the social construction of knowledge (Gergen, 1985).

Since meaning is co-constructed in dialogues that occur between people in which ideas are exchanged, the social constructivist perspective posits that language plays a

central role in the construction of knowledge (Schwandt, 1994). From the constructivists' standpoint, consensus on an idea or topic can be reached only after dialogue comparing and contrasting divergent ideas has taken place, and the group has reached a mutually agreed upon synthesis of all viewpoints (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The social constructivist perspective is mirrored in the data collection method utilized in this study. The responsive interviewing model places high value on accurately capturing the voices of the interviewees. This model allows the researcher to adapt questions and probes according to the individual nuances of each interviewee, therefore gaining data that has been co-constructed by the interviewee and researcher (Rubin & Rubin).

Professional perspectives can also influence and guide our understanding of the topic of inquiry. The phenomenon of competent professional performance is embedded in the context of professional education and an understanding of how professional knowledge is defined. According to Schön (1983), professional knowledge involves three things: an underlying discipline component upon which the knowledge is developed, an applied science component from which many of the day-to-day diagnostic procedures are derived, and a skills and attitudinal component that concerns the actual performance of service to the client, using the underlying basic and applied knowledge.

This appears to be an accepted definition of professional knowledge and accurately describes the common components of professional education (Boyatzis, 1982; Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, 1995). The literature review and research question regarding the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional

performance are informed by the parameters of professional knowledge and the subsequent required components of professional education.

Finally, my personal perspective on competent professional performance was a motivating factor in the development of the research question in this exploratory study. As a social work practitioner, I have been acutely aware of practitioners who appeared to possess keen theoretical knowledge, but struggled to apply this knowledge in an effective manner that was helpful to the clients we served. On the other hand, I have also observed practitioners for whom this application seemed like a natural process. Similarly, when I served in the role of field supervisor, I found that some students were quite challenged by the task of "applying" the knowledge, skills, and values they had learned in the classroom to unpredictable and messy real life situations in the field setting, while others seemed to do so almost seamlessly.

Most recently, in my role as a social work educator, I was again reminded of the difficulty in bridging the gap between the learning that takes place in the classroom and the application of that learning to the field practice setting. On several occasions as an instructor, I have known students who have completed social work practice courses and have mastered the material to a high degree. However, when these same students were in their field seminar course, it was very apparent that they were struggling to apply this information to actual encounters with clients in the field setting. This puzzle fueled my desire to better understand the "application process" as it appears to be a stumbling block for some in the attainment of professionally competent performance.

Literature Review

The limited knowledge base in social work education related to the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to the successful application of acquired knowledge guided the path of the following literature review (Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr, 2006; Gibbs, 2000; Goldstein, 2001; Miller & Koerin, 2001; Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006). I begin by examining the literature from early social work education, and discuss four early social work educators who spoke directly to the topic at hand. Next, the phenomenon of competent professional performance is discussed within the context of current social work education, followed by a critical analysis of the two most current research studies that speak to the individual characterisitics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. Finally, because the topic of competent professional performance has been given significant attention in the discipline of business management and organizational leadership, this literature review concludes with an overview of two business models that specifically examine the individual characterisitics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance and critical analysis of their relevance for social work education.

Professional Performance in Early Social Work Education

In the late 1800's, the profession of social work was emerging through two very distinct social welfare movements, the Charity Organization Societies and Social Settlement Houses. Although both groups embraced the mutual goal of eradicating poverty, their differing philosophical views about the causes of poverty influenced the type of services they provided. The Charity Organization Societies provided home visitors who went to individuals' homes to meet with them and discuss the issues

surrounding their poverty. These trained visitors believed poverty was due to individuals' own shortcomings and hoped to assist them in correcting their character flaws (Popple & Leighninger, 2004). Mary Richmond, a key figure in the Charity Organization Societies (COS), took on the task of articulating and defining the specific skills needed to perform charity work and advocated for the creation of training schools (Popple & Leighninger, 2004).

Unlike the COS's, the Social Settlement Houses viewed poverty as largely the result of environmental factors. Their aim was to confront the environmental causes of poverty by living in poor neighborhoods, offering support in the form of daycare, lectures, and other events, as well as advocating for legislative reform and social change (Popple & Leighninger, 2004). Jane Adams was a key figure in the Social Settlement movement, founding Hull House on Chicago's west side, a neighborhood brimming with immigrants. Jane Addams tirelessly advocated for social justice by bringing key issues to the forefront of the political arena and fighting for legislative changes.

By the early 1900's, formal training for case workers began with a one-year program at the New York School of Philanthropy. The first year's generalist approach to social work education was widely accepted; however, there was a debate in progress about the curriculum content for the second year, specifically, whether the focus would be on social policy and social welfare reform or on specialized training in case work and field education with social service agencies (Austin, 1983). At the 1915 National Conference of Charities and Correction, Abraham Flexner's keynote speech addressed the question "Is Social Work a Profession?" In his final analysis, he proclaimed that social work indeed did not fulfill the criteria for being called a profession. Flexner's

proclamation had a profound influence on the developing educational policy of the time (Austin, 1983; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

During this period, social workers were frequently viewed as amateurs by the doctors and lawyers with whom they worked side by side; additionally, universities were being asked to consider adding social work as a legitimate academic discipline in order to establish themselves as professionals in the community and in the academy (Austin, 1983). Individual case work seemed more likely to aid social work in gaining acceptance as a profession and a scientific discipline worthy of the academy, so the focus on social reform and political advocacy diminished and casework, along with a field training component became the dominant focus of social work education. Social work curriculum rapidly adopted Freudian theory, and psychiatry became the guiding paradigm they emulated in hopes of gaining status as a credible profession in the community and the academy (Austin, 1983).

A review of literature regarding the philosophy of some of the early social work programs and their faculty revealed a noticeably present focus on the personal nature of professional competence. Four early social work educators distinctly spoke about the need to address the individual characteristics and abilities of students as it relates to their ability to demonstrate competent professional performance. A brief discussion of each of their writings follows.

<u>Mary Richmond</u>

Richmond (1917) addressed the role of personal and professional competency in the social work practitioner in her book *Social Diagnosis,* when she discussed the issue of the social worker's state of mind and the personal and professional predispositions that

arise from it. She suggested that social workers must be on guard against these predispositions because they, along with all the feelings and thoughts with which one approaches new problems, could be problematic in that they can limit knowledge in one direction or the other. She summarized by saying, "It is the worker's very *awareness* [her italics] of his special predisposition on which depends the reliability of his judgment. Once he brings his prejudice into the light of day, he can offset its influence on his thinking" (p. 94). It appears that when referring to the caseworker's "special predisposition," she was referring to the personal characteristics, abilities, beliefs and values that make each of us uniquely ourselves. It also would appear that Richmond believed an *awareness* of one's personal characteristics, abilities, beliefs, and values was needed so that they did not influence one's judgment. Although she does not explain these ideas further or provide a format to assess whether students have gained this capacity, her belief in the need to address the personal characterisitics and abilities of the social work student was evident.

<u>Virginia Robinson</u>

In 1936, Robinson taught at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, where the focus on the practitioner's personal self was a central component of the educational process. She stated,

> "Education for any profession aims not only to teach the specific knowledge and skills necessary in its practice, but it undertakes also to make over the personal self of the "lay" student into a professional self. This is particularly true in education for social case work whose helping function demands the most conscious and responsible use of a professional self (Robinson, 1942, p. 3)."

During this time period, professional training in social work was thought to include knowledge learned in the classroom, technical skills learned through the fieldwork experience, and the controlled use of the capacity to relate oneself and one's service to people in need (Robinson, 1942). The comprehension of psychological theory was viewed as an important component of classroom training; however, the students' capacity to develop specific characteristics and abilities in the areas of self-reflection, self-control and interpersonal skills was a central theme in her theory of professional development

A specific course referred to as the "Personality Class" was designed, where students concentrated on "experiencing their own feelings and genuinely experiencing the feelings of another without becoming personally lost in that experience" (Robinson, 1950, p. 140). Robinson acknowledged that there were numerous characteristics and abilities which need to be developed in order for an individual to be equipped to practice social work, but deemed "the balanced acceptance of self and acceptance of difference" as fundamental (Robinson, 1950, p. 140). She viewed the classroom as the place where this training began and field work as the arena where students could hone these individual characteristics and abilities toward the goal of demonstrating competent professional performance.

Bertha Capen Reynolds

Bertha Capen Reynolds, a social work educator and a contemporary of Robinson's, had her own unique approach to teaching the "art" of social work practice. Reynolds (1942) likened the practice of social work to the practice of any art and said that just as living involves the whole person, so does learning, especially learning an art

which is intimately the person, using sensitivity and judgment in relation to adapting knowledge and skills to a real situation (p. 57).

In her discussion of teaching and learning in the profession of social work, Reynolds (1942) spoke to the significance of the personal "use of conscious attention" and posits that learning this skill requires that one progress through five distinct stages. They are as follows: 1) the stage of acute consciousness of self, 2) the stage of sink-or-swim adaptation, 3) the stage of understanding the situation without power to control one's own activity in it, 4) the stage of relative mastery, in which one can both understand and control one's own activity in the art which is learned, and 5) the stage of learning to teach what one has mastered.

Reynolds (1942) continues her discussion of the individual characteristics and abilities of social work students, saying that the professional use of the personality cannot be left to chance. She references her colleague, Miss Robinson, as the person who brought attention to the fact that the professional use of the personality is the dynamic center of professional work (p.150). Reynolds suggested that although it may be difficult to define emotional maturity and the type of intelligence needed to be an effective social worker, she believed that after 17 years of teaching case work classes, she was able to identify nine distinguishable individual characterisitics and abilities that are essential to good social work practice. She stated them as follows:

1) Ability to use all the senses in keen observation, with a new range of appreciation of what is significant.
2) Ability to express in accurate words, or in other ways, what is observed and the meaning of it.

3) A flexible mind, capable of associating quickly and easily.

4) A richly associating mind, drawing on a wide range of perceptions, making comparisons freely, sensing the general in a mass of particulars, and the particular application of generalities.

5) An analytical mind, breaking up masses of concepts and stereotyped ideas into parts which can be grasped and used.

6) A synthesizing mind, picking out of a mass of associations what are significant and belong together in relation to the present purpose.

7) Ability to identify with a variety of people in many situations, yet without loss of personal integrity.

8) Ability to feel appropriately in relation to the situation without losing the ability to see the situation in the perspective necessary to help the people immersed in it see beyond.

9) Ability to express warmth of feeling in appropriate ways (p.151).

<u>Charlotte Towle</u>

Towle (1954) is another early social work educator whose writings elucidate learning and educational processes and their application to teaching social casework. She emphasized the need to include social worker students' personal characterisitics and abilities as an essential component of social work education, and Towle (1954) advocated for the emotional development of the student to be given equal attention in the educational process as the acquisition of knowledge and skills. She also pointed to the student's capacity for developing and maintaining relationships as a critical factor for consideration in professional education, stating that student's level of self-awareness and

receptivity for increased self-understanding are determining factors in their ability to do so successfully. She warned that students who do not assume the responsibility of deeply engaging in self-understanding will be limited in their ability to understand others.

Finally, Towle (1954) asserted that the practice of social work is inextricably related to the life experience of the learner, so that it is impossible to isolate the learning experience from an examination of one's own life-experiences. Social work education requires the learner to acquire new characteristics and abilities and in the process relinquish or modify the old ones (Towle, 1954). Some of the individual characterisitics and abilities Towle (1954) posited as essential for successful completion of social work education were: adequate ego development, the ability to manage the gap between acquired knowledge and skill, the ability to manage anxiety, the ability to think objectively in situations where emotions are activated, the ability to regulate one's emotional responses, the ability to tolerate feeling transparent, the ability to display compassionate attitudes while engaging in objective thinking, the ability to make intuitive judgments while also making well-thought out ones, and the ability to engage in speculative thinking while simultaneously engaging in precise thinking which is supported by evidence. Towle (1954) was the last social work educator to write extensively on the importance of the development of specific individual characterisitics and abilities that are essential to competent professional performance.

The literature on early social work education revealed that social work educators engaged in classroom teaching aimed at developing the individual characterisitics and abilities of students as they relate to competent professional performance. This finding substantiates the significant role that the individual characterisitics and abilities of

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students play in the development of competent professional performance and supports this study's research question, how do social work educators, field instructors, and practitioners describe the individual characteristics and abilities that they believe contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners?

The focus in contemporary literature on social work education addresses this issue from the perspectives of gatekeeping and field education. The following section provides a contextual overview of contemporary social education and briefly reviews the areas pertinent to the discussion of the individual characterisitics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. In closing, a critical analysis of two current research studies that speak to the individual characterisitics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance are presented.

<u>Professional Performance in Current Social Work Education</u>

<u>National Association of Social Workers</u>

An important event in the development of the social work profession was the establishment of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1955. Prior to this, social work professionals were separated by factions that focused on their area of specialization, such as psychiatric social workers, medical social workers, group workers, and community organizers (Popple & Leighninger, 2002). The development of this national organization brought unity to the social work profession and for the first time in its history, social workers with varying specializations, belonged to one organization. Shortly after its inception, the Association developed and adopted the NASW Code of Ethics, as well as additional general and specialized practice standards.

The NASW Code of Ethics offers a set of values, principles and standards to guide the decision-making and conduct of social workers when ethical dilemmas arise. All social worker practitioners and social work students are required to be familiar with the Code of Ethics and to adhere to its standards. The Code of Ethics has six core values, each of which has a corresponding ethical principal. For example, of one of the six core values is the dignity and worth of the person. The ethical principle that accompanies this value states that social workers must respect the inherent dignity and worth of each person, treating them in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences, and cultural and ethnic diversity (NASW Code of Ethics).

The standards of conduct outlined lined in the Code of Ethics have a direct bearing on the exploration of the individual characteristic and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. In order for a student to demonstrate competent professional performance, they must also demonstrate adherence to the Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics provides one of the contextual parameters in which the development of characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance takes place.

<u>Council on Social Work Education</u>

As previously mentioned, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States of America. The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) established by CSWE provide the road map for the curricular content and educational context required of accredited social work programs. This road map is grounded in the purposes of the social work profession and is based on specified knowledge, values and skills that are deemed

requisite for competent professional practice. Minimally, every seven years, the EPAS are reviewed, and modifications and changes are made when deemed appropriate. Recently, in April of 2008, a revision of the EPAS was approved; it reflects a significant pedagogical change to competency-based education.

Competency-based education is an outcome performance approach to curricular design. CSWE (2008) articulates that the goal of using this approach is to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The EPAS (2008) define competencies as: "measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, and skills," and identifies ten core competencies which programs are required to use to design their professional curriculum. Included with each core competency is a "description of characteristic knowledge, values, and skills, and the resulting practice behaviors that may be used to operationalize the curriculum and assessment methods" (EPAS, p.3).

Several of the practice behaviors associated with the core competencies require the individual to not only demonstrate acquired knowledge and skills, but additionally, require that the individual demonstrate the mastery of specific personal characteristics and abilities. Educational Policy 2.1.1, entitled: *Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly* is an example of intrapersonal competencies as indicated by the specific practice behaviors aligned with this competency. These are: 1) practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development, 2) attend to professional roles and boundaries, and 3) demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance and communication (EPAS, 2008). Educational Policy 2.1.10(a) entitled: *Engagement* is an example of interpersonal

competencies as indicated by the specific practice behaviors aligned with this competency which are: social workers 1) substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities, 2) use empathy and other interpersonal skills, and 3) develop mutually agreed upon focus of work and desired outcomes (EPAS, 2008). Four of the additional competencies also contain specific personal characteristics and abilities (See Appendix F).

The shift to competency-based education may renew social work educators' interest in the role that students' individual characteristics and abilities play in their ability to demonstrate competent professional performance due to the fact that many of the ten core competencies require the mastery of specific individual intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities. In the very least, the shift to competency-based education reinforces the need to identify and more clearly define the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance and supports the rationale for this study.

Field Education

The literature in contemporary social work education reveals that the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance are primarily addressed in field education within the context of the student's supervisory relationship. A positive and trusting relationship between the supervisor and the student is one of the most critical components of the learning experience in social work education, and is at the heart of the supervision process (Caspi & Reid 2002). The supervisor's emotional support is seen as a key ingredient in creating an atmosphere

where the student can feel safe to engage in self-reflection and in which they can have open discussions regarding their subjective reactions to encounters with clients.

The goal of supervision is to develop an increasing level of self-awareness in the student, so he or she can act in a deliberate and disciplined manner in the worker-client interactions in order to optimally benefit the client (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Because the field supervisor's role holds a place of vital importance in social work education, it is of concern to note that cuts in government funding, cost containment measures, an increase in privatization and managed care, program downsizing and restructuring, and a weak economy have all generated agency constraints, resulting in decreased availability of placements and field instructor time and energy (Jarmen-Rohde, McFall, Kolar, &Strom, 1997; Miller & Koerin, 2001).

The supervisor/student relationship has historically been the venue where students' individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance have been addressed. In fact, research tells us gatekeeping responsibilities related to nonacademic criteria and/or a student's personal characteristics and abilities, or lack thereof, primarily occur during field education (Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr, 2006; Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Miller & Koerin, 2001; Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006). A recent study describing this issue in detail will be analyzed at the end of this section.

Gate keeping

The primary intent of gatekeeping is to protect the public who are left unsuspecting and vulnerable when an unsuitable student graduates and is sanctioned to practice (Gibbs, 1994, 2000). Traditionally, gatekeeping takes place during the

admissions process, the completion of coursework, entry into the field practicum setting, and sustained performance in the field setting, as these are the primary points throughout a social work program where a student's academic and professional competency is assessed. Despite gatekeeping processes prior to admission and throughout social work programs, it is often not until a student reaches their field practicum that their unsuitability for the profession becomes evident (Miller & Koerin, 2001). It appears that the ultimate locus of gatekeeping is in the field practicum setting, making it one of the functions of the field instructor (Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr, 2004; Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr, 2006; Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Miller & Koerin, 2001; Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006).

Often field instructors are being asked to fulfill multiple roles as mentors, teachers and evaluators. Many field instructors report confidently fulfilling their role as mentor and teacher; however, they report feeling unsure of their role as gatekeeper and state they are often unaware of it until a student exhibits a problem. (Miller & Koerin, 2001). Given that field education is the signature pedagogy of social work education, it is vital to attend to the field instructors' role as gatekeeper and to equip them with the needed tools to evaluate all aspects of students' professional performance.

As mentioned earlier, CSWE mandates that social work programs make explicit the criterion they use to evaluate a social work student's readiness for professional practice. The accreditation standards (EPAS) dictate that "the program spells out how it informs students of its *criteria for evaluating their academic and professional performance*, including policies and procedures for grievance (EPAS, 2008, p.12). Although research indicates that social work programs *do* have clear criteria for

evaluating and terminating students based on academic performance, a majority of programs *do not* have policies in place for evaluating or terminating students based on *professional performance* (Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Ryan, Habibis & Craft, 1998).

Because it appears that criteria for evaluating professional performance would be a useful addition to any social work program, it is worth asking the question, "Why have many social work programs not yet developed criteria for evaluating professional performance, and policies and procedures for terminating students based on poor professional performance?" Studies suggest the reason may be three-fold: 1) the university's fear of lawsuits due to lack of a clear definition of professional performance, 2) the fact that the description of "professional performance" often includes personal characteristics and abilities that are hard to define and measure, and 3) the time-consuming nature of tasks associated with gatekeeping related to issues of professional performance (Cobb & Jordan; Moore & Urwin, 1991 as cited in Gibbs, 1994; Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; & Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006).

A cursory review of the literature examining the issues related to the fear of lawsuits is encouraging. Legal precedent indicates that if criteria standards and performance expectations are framed as *academic standards*, they will hold up in a court of law (Gibbs, 2000; Madden, 2000). Furthermore, desired professional characteristics and abilities *can* be framed as academic criteria. The lack of clear criteria for evaluating professional performance and the recent shift to competency-based education reinforce the need to identify and more clearly define the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance and support the rationale for this

study. Two key studies address the vital need to define the personal characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. These will be explicated in the following section.

<u>Key Studies Addressing Professional Performance</u>

Within social work literature there is broad consensus that criteria for professional performance should include individual characteristics and abilities of social work students, and that there is a dire need to identify, define and develop outcome measures in order to assess their level of mastery. Research studies examining the function of gatekeeping in social work education have shed light on this topic, as well as studies exploring the complexity of describing what competent professional performance looks like (Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr, 2004, 2006; Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995, 2001; Ryan, Habibis & Craft, 1997, 1998, Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2002, 2006). Two key research studies that address each of these areas will be explicated in order to provide an in depth look into the current literature on the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance.

Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak (2002, 2006) have conducted in depth studies examining gatekeeping practices in an Australian Baccalaureate of Social Work (BSW) program, specifically focusing on the relationship between admission criteria and performance in the field. The BSW program had recently adopted a new scoring system for determining admissions, and they wanted to ascertain whether the new criteria were correlated with positive field performance. A study was conducted which sought to

answer this question. The data were gathered over a six-year period from 1997 until 2002 and included a student population of 408.

The admission criteria used in the study were: academic record, grade point average, work experience, life experience, academic references, other references, discretionary points (these could be given for a second language, research experience, etc), and relevant subjects (courses in sociology, psychology, etc). Field performance was rated in ten key areas: professional development, interpersonal and interactional skills, assessment skills, intervention skills, work in the community, understanding of broader social work settings, ability to work in an agency, learning and analytical skills, writing and technical skills, and other skills for particular practice arenas. Evaluators were asked to keep these ten areas in mind when they rated the student's overall performance in field education on a five point scale where 1=unsatisfactory and 5= excellent.

The results found that the pre-admission criteria showed very weak correlations at nonsignificant levels with the rating of field performance (Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak 2002, 2006). However, a significant finding was discovered related to the 22 students who had failed their field placement. The placement sites reported three primary reasons for the student's failed placement: poor interpersonal skills, personal problems, and poor use of professional self (Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak 2002, 2006). Although the authors of this study were disappointed that the admissions criteria did not prove to be predictive of positive field performance, they now have a renewed resolve to identify effective ways of gatekeeping throughout the program. Ryan et al. (2006) conclude that it is imperative

for social work educators to continue to search for gatekeeping methods which include a focus on nonacademic criteria, particularly, personal characteristics.

This Australian study reaffirms the challenge that social work educators face in fulfilling their gatekeeping responsibilities and specifically demonstrates the necessity of continuing gatekeeping procedures beyond admissions. Additionally, the findings substantiate the critical role that individual characteristics and abilities play in a social work student's ability to demonstrate competent professional performance. Finally, Ryan et al. (2006) corroborate the need to identify and define the requisite individual characterisitics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance.

The other research study which was conducted by Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Power, Woodford, & Regehr (2006), illustrated the difficult task of identifying the specific components of competent professional performance. In hopes of discovering and defining the skills that contribute to competent professional performance, Bogo et al. (2006) interviewed a purposive sample of 18 experienced field instructors. First, the instructors were asked to describe one exemplary and one problematic student. Secondly, they were asked to describe student performance in seven core practice dimensions: assessment skills, interventions skills, relationship-building skills, differential use of self, ethics and values, report writing and presentations skills. The data were analyzed using grounded theory methods and the research team developed a theoretical understanding grounded in the themes that emerged (Bogo et al., 2006).

Bogo et al. (2006) had hoped to identify a set of skills and competencies that could be used to differentiate between exemplary and problematic students. Instead, the predominant finding that emerged was a constellation of personal characteristics

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possessed by the students that seemed to affect all of the other identified areas, including the student's approach to learning, behavior in the organization, and ability to conceptualize practice and practice abilities. The qualities most frequently cited were: bright, intuitive, motivated to learn, engaging, enthusiastic, self-directed, and tactful. This finding elucidates the complex task of defining professional performance and elevates the significant role individual characteristics and abilities play in this process. Finally, Bogo et al. (2006) assert that the descriptions provided by field instructors imply the need for a model of evaluation that captures an understanding of the multiple domains of professional performance.

Of interest to this researcher is Bogo et al.'s (2006) interpretation of the significant findings. Although the field instructors provided examples of behaviors related to the student's personal characteristics, Bogo et al. (2006) state, "these behaviors did appear to function as competencies that others might be expected to achieve, rather they served as indicators of the students' personal characteristics." It is unclear to this researcher why Bogo et al. (2006) did not view the student's behaviors as competencies; or mention considering the students' individual characterisitics as competencies. Given the significant role the personal characterisitics and behaviors of the students played in the field instructor's description of competent professional performance, one would think this issue would have been more fully elucidated.

Summary

Social work's history as an emerging profession was explored, along with early social work education's emphasis on the mastery of specific individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. Current social work

educational practices were also examined along with the NASW Code of Ethics. The Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards which dictate the curriculum content of social work programs and gatekeeping responsibilities were explored as they pertain to the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. Although the literature on social work education supports this study's inquiry into further identifying and defining of the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to professional competence, this researcher chose to additionally explore this topic from the perspective of the discipline of business management and organizational leadership.

Professional Performance in Business Management and Organizational Leadership

A review of the literature on professional performance suggests that social work is not the only profession that has grappled with the complex task of identifying and defining the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance (Boyatzis, 2000; Bryan, 2006; Emmerling & Goleman, 2003; Goleman, 2006; Shealy, 2004; Spruill, Rozensky, Stigall, Vasquez, Bingham & Olvey, 2004; Wright, Levine, Beasley, Haidet, Gress, & Caccamese, 2006). Not unlike the profession of social work, business management, particularly the area of organizational leadership, has also wrestled with how to define competent professional performance. For the past two decades leaders in the profession of business management and organizational leadership have developed and tested multiple theories or models of management in pursuit of the most effective and efficient ways to run their organizations. Boyatzis (1982) introduced a distinctive model of management that specifically focused on job

performance. This model, along with the Emotional and Social Intelligence Framework

developed by Boyatzis and Goleman (2002) will be explored in the following sections.

The Role of Individual Characteristics in Effective Job Performance

Boyatzis (1982) developed a new paradigm for understanding managerial

behavior entitled: A Model of Effective Job Performance. As shown in Figure 1, the

model includes three distinct components, all of which must be congruent for the goal of

effective job performance to occur.
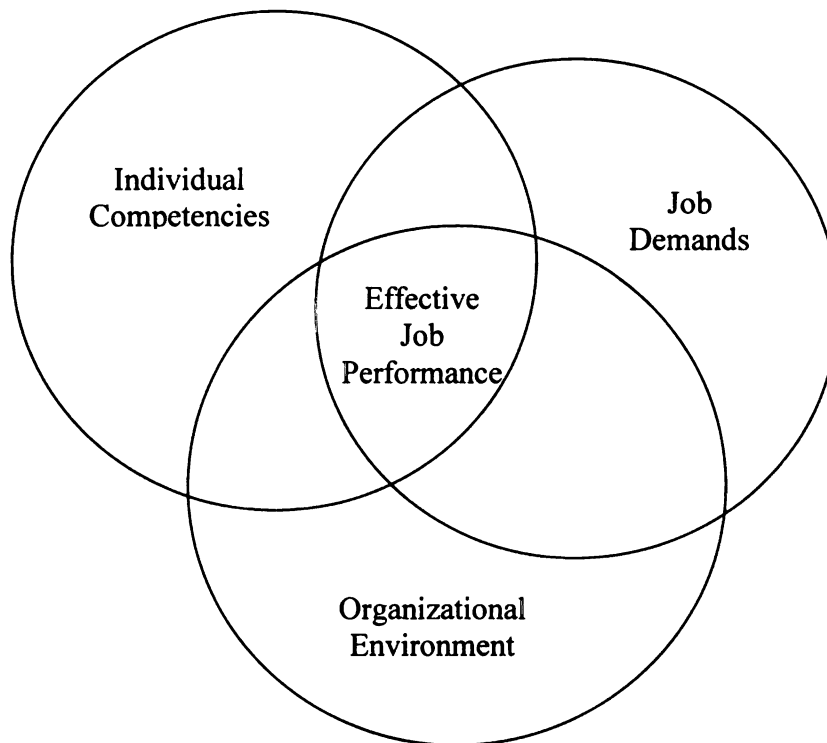
Figure 1. A Model of Effective Job Performance.

The component *job demands* refers to the functional requirements and responsibilities the

individual is expected to perform (Boyatzis, 1982). The component *organizational*

environment refers to the organizational climate or the culture and its impact on the

organization's structure, policies, and procedures (Boyatzis, 1982). The component

individual competencies refer to certain characteristics or abilities of a person that enable him or her to demonstrate specific actions (Boyatzis, 1982). Finally, *effective job performance* is defined as "the attainment of specific results (i.e., outcomes) required by the job through specific actions while maintaining or being consistent with policies, procedures, and conditions of the organizational environment" (Boyatzis, 1982).

This model is analogous to the social work model of person–in–environment. It assesses the individual's competencies *within* the context of the work environment which it divides into two separate components: the demands of the job and organizational environment. Viewing this model within the context of social work education, the individual competencies component would be akin to the social work student and the competencies he or she possesses and/or masters while in the program. As far as the two components related to the environment, the demands of the job component is comparable to the specific area of practice in the social work profession and the ten core competencies put forth by the EPAS; and the organizational environment component parallels the NASW Code of Ethics, which provides the mission, and ethical principles and standards that guides the social work profession.

Multiple studies have been conducted on various components of the demands of the job and the organizational environment in the fields of management and leadership (Boyatzis, 1982). What made Boyatzis's (1982) research unique was his focus on the individual's competencies. In his experience, a manager might possess the correct knowledge pertaining to the specific job demands and understand the organizational structure and policies, but, if he or she did not possess the specific characteristics and abilities needed to competently apply this knowledge, he or she would not be successful.

Consequently, Boyatzis (1982) chose to focus his research in this area and asked the question: "What characteristics of managers are related to effective job performance in a variety of management jobs within a variety of organizations?"

The raw data used for this study were derived from previously completed competency assessments that Boyatzis (1982) and a colleague had conducted over the years. The information came from 12 organizations and more than 2,000 people in 41 unique management jobs within those organizations. In addressing the component of individual competencies, Boyatzis (1982) defined *job competency* as "an underlying characteristic of a person which is causally related to effective and/or superior job performance." In order to be defined as a competency, there must be an empirical relationship between the characteristic as an independent variable and job performance as the dependent variable, in addition to the theoretical prediction of causality (Boyatzis, 1982).

The findings of this study uncovered 12 competencies that were statistically significant and could be considered common among those who hold managerial jobs. The job competencies are as follows: concern with impact, diagnostic use of concepts, efficiency orientation, proactivity, conceptualization, self-confidence, use of oral presentation, managing group process, use of socialized power, perceptual objectivity, self-control and stamina and adaptability (Boyatzis, 1982). These findings, along with further research, led to the development of the Emotional and Social Intelligence Framework which is theoretically grounded specifically within the context of work performance and will be explored in the following section (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2002).

A Framework for Social and Emotional Competencies

Goleman's (1995, 1998, 2000, & 2002) research into emotional intelligence was sparked by his interest in discovering what differentiates a good leader from an excellent leader. He discovered that IQ test scores are the best predictor of how people will perform at their careers; however, emotional intelligence may be a better predictor of who will exhibit *outstanding* performance and leadership skills.

There are many theories associated with emotional intelligence. Three that have generated the most interest and research are the theories of Mayer and Salovey, Barr-On, and Goleman (Goleman & Emmerling, 2003). Goleman and Emmerling (2003) report that Mayer and Salovey define emotional intelligence as the *ability* to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Barr-On's model of emotional intelligence, as reported by Goleman & Emmerling (2003), includes: 1) the ability to be aware of, understand, and express oneself; 2) the ability to be aware of, understand, and relate to others; 3) the ability to deal with strong emotions and control one's impulses; and 4) the ability to adapt to change and to solve problems of a personal or social nature. Both models conceptualize emotion and the way it is expressed and managed as an *ability* rather than an innate personality trait.

In light of this research, Goleman built on the work done by Boyatzis, collaborating with him to conduct additional research on work performance in several hundred companies and organizations worldwide. Subsequently, they constructed a

competency-based model of social and emotional intelligence, specifically within the context of work performance (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The foundation of the model has four domains: self-awareness, self- management, social awareness, and relationship management. Within each domain there is a specific set of capabilities that when mastered will lead to competence in the workplace.

Table 1

Goleman's Emotional and Social Intelligence Framework

	Personal Competence	*Social Competence*
Awareness	Self-awareness	Social awareness
Actions	Self-management	Relationship management

As seen in Table 1, although the domains are closely interconnected, there is somewhat of a hierarchical order. According to Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), the competencies in the domain of self-awareness must be mastered first, as they facilitate the development of the competencies in the domains of self-management and social awareness. Additionally, the competencies in relationship management are difficult to achieve without first mastering the other three domains. The domains of self-awareness and self-management are personal competencies and the domains of social awareness and relationship management are social competencies; additionally, there are several competencies associated with each domain (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The Emotional and Social Intelligence Framework in its entirety is as follows:

PERSONAL COMPETENCE
These competencies determine how we manage ourselves

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Emotional awareness: Recognizing one's emotions and their effects

Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits

Self-confidence: A strong sense of one's self-worth and capabilities

Self-Management
Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources

Emotional Self-control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check

Transparency: Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness

Adaptability: Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles

Achievement Orientation: The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence

Initiative: Readiness to act and seize opportunities

Optimism: Seeing the positive side in events

SOCIAL COMPETENCE
These competencies determine how we handle relationships.

Social Awareness
Awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns

Empathy: Sensing others' emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns

Organizational awareness: Reading the emotional currents, decision networks and politics at the organizational level

Service orientation: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting clients' needs

Relationship Management
Adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others

Developing others: Bolstering others' abilities through feedback and guidance

Inspirational Leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision

Influence: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion

Change catalyst: Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction

Conflict management: Resolving disagreements

Teamwork & Collaboration: Cooperation and teambuilding

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, along with the Hay Group, have conducted and reviewed the extensive research on emotional and social intelligence. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) purport that emotions play a powerful role in the workplace as evidenced by "the research results which verify the best leaders are those who have found effective ways to understand and improve the way they handle their own and other people's emotions." Their most recent work speaks not only to the impact emotional intelligence has on work performance, but also explains how to build emotionally intelligent teams and organizations (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002).

Boyatzis' (1982) model of effective job performance and Boyatzis and Goleman's (2002) framework on emotional and social intelligence are theoretical constructs that are currently relevant to the social work profession. Boyatzis's (1982) model addresses the individual's competencies within the context of the job demands and organizational environment which is a framework familiar to social work curriculum. Both models address the difficult issue of identifying and defining the individual characteristics and abilities that promote competent professional performance and both provide research which substantiates the competencies most likely to facilitate that outcome.

Summary

As highlighted by the above literature review, the phenomenon of professional performance, and more specifically, the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners, has been

given minimal research attention. However, the literature did bring to light the significant attention given to the role of the individual characteristics and abilities of students by early social work educators. Additionally, current studies in social work education indicate that personal characteristics and abilities of social work students are the primary reason for poor performance in field education, and that possession of a specific constellation of personal characterisitics seems to affect the mastery of all of the other learning domains in field education. Both studies attest to the need for further research aimed at identifying and defining the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance.

Studies from the profession of business management, particularly the area of organizational leadership, report that the individual's mastery of specific competencies is a vital component of competent professional performance and demonstrate that research on this topic is feasible. Unlike the aforementioned studies in social work, this researcher's study is specifically focused on identifying and defining the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. Building the knowledge base on this topic could prove valuable to social work education whose goal it is to graduate professionally competent social workers. The following chapter will describe the methodology used in to conduct study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory is a methodology in which theory is generated inductively and

developed out of the data collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Two key components of a grounded theory study are constant comparison analysis and

theoretical sampling. Constant comparison analysis is an iterative process where the

researcher continuously compares the emerging concepts with the new data being

gathered, refining the theory throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Padgett,

2003). Theoretical sampling relies on the constant comparative method, and represents

the process where the researcher takes the preliminary categories back to the field to gain

further information and insight (Charmaz, 2000). Interviews are repeated with the same

individuals in order to refine the properties of our categories, discover gaps between

categories, and gain understanding of how and in what context categories may be linked

(Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Padgett, 2003).

The grounded theory method is consistent with the constructivist orientation that

guides this study, as both are based on the assumption that knowledge and meaning are

constructed through an individual's subjective understanding of reality and their

interactions within that reality. Additionally, the constructivist orientation and grounded

theory method support the importance of respecting the multiple and unique realities of

each interviewee and promote partnering with interviewees to create shared meaning.

Since my intent was to discover how three distinct groups of social work

professionals identify and define the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute

to competent professional performance, and the literature revealed a limited social work

knowledge base in this area, the grounded theory method was determined to be an appropriate qualitative method for developing a theoretical framework rooted in the perspective of social work professionals.

<u>Sample</u>

The participants for this study were gathered using a purposive sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that because the investigator wants to understand and gain insight into the phenomenon being studied, he or she must select a sample from those whom the most can be learned (Cresswell, 2003). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest comparing different types of groups that have been selected for their theoretical relevance to increase the possibility of substantive theory development. For that reason, the purposive sample for this study includes three distinct groups of social work professionals: social work field instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators. For this dissertation, the term, field instructor, is defined as an individual who directly observes the activities of a social work student intern and provides guidance, instruction, mentoring, evaluation, and supervision. The term, social work practitioner, is defined as an individual who is a licensed master's degree social worker (LMSW) and currently is engaged in social work practice. The term, social work educator, is defined as an individual who is a full-time faculty member at a CSWE-accredited social work program and teaches social work practice courses.

The selection criterion allowed for the inclusion of social work professionals who had been in the role of field instructor, practitioner, or social work educator for a minimum of five years. In order to indentify potential participants for the study who met the above criterion, this researcher consulted with key informants who had knowledge of

seasoned social work professionals who excelled in their careers. Social work educators and field instructors were solicited from two large Midwest universities. Social work practitioners were solicited from various agency and hospital settings in the Midwest. An introductory e-mail was sent to potential participants explaining the purpose of the study (See Appendix A).

Social work professionals were invited to participate in the study and asked to respond to my e-mail if they were interested in participating and would allow me to contact them to set up an interview. They were also asked to include the best day and time for the interview to occur and a location that was convenient for them. All but one of the social work professionals solicited for the study chose to participate. One of the social work educators did not respond to the e-mail so an additional social work educator was sought and an interview was secured. The total sample for this study consisted of three distinct groups: social work educators, social work field instructors and social work practitioners. Each group was made up of four participants, with the total n=12.

A group made up field instructors was included in the study because of their role in actively observing a student's professional performance in the field practicum setting. Field instructors directly evaluate whether a student's individual characteristics and abilities contribute to or diminish their ability to demonstrate competent professional performance. All of the field instructors who participated in the study were currently employed as social work practitioners and serving in the role of field instructor in the practice areas of community mental health, child welfare, and medical social work. The sample consisted of four females who have served in the role of field instructor for nine

years, eight years, twenty years and twelve years respectively, with a total of 49 years of combined experience.

A group made up of social work practitioners was included in the study because of their frequent contact with other social work practitioners and the likelihood that they regularly observe the individual characteristics and abilities inherent in competent professional performance. All of the social work practitioners who participated in the study were currently employed as licensed social work practitioners in the areas of child welfare, community mental health with children and families, adolescent outpatient services, and adult clinical outpatient services. The sample consisted of two females and two males who been practicing licensed social workers for 24 years, 26 years, 12 years and 5 years respectively, with a total of 67 years of combined experience.

A group made up of social work educators was included in the study because of their ability to observe how the individual characteristics and abilities of students contribute to competent professional performance in the classroom setting and advising or mentoring relationships. All of the social work educators who participated in the study were tenured or tenure track faculty who teach MSW level coursework in a variety of social work practice areas. The sample consisted of three females and one male who have taught for eight years, eleven years, ten years and twenty years, respectively, with a total of 49 years combined experience.

Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, particularly useful for eliciting data on topics that are complex or relatively unexplored (Fortune &

Reid, 1999). In order to capture the answers in their entirety, all interviews were audio taped and transcribed for data analysis. When utilizing grounded theory methods from a constructivist perspective, it is critical that the researcher build a partnership with the interviewee and create a sense of reciprocity (Mills, Boner, & Francis, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Regarding the interviewee as a conversational partner allows the interviewer to shape the discussion, as both work together to achieve a shared understanding of the topic at hand (Mills, Boner, & Francis, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Additionally, the researcher must be cognizant of any power imbalance that may exist between the interviewee and her/himself, as this could inhibit reciprocity (Mills, Boner, & Francis, 2006). A mutual sharing of power fuels the interactive process and the co- construction of meaning (Mills, et al., 2006). A practical strategy to allow for equal sharing of power was scheduling the interviews at a time and place of the interviewee's choosing. Three of the interviewees chose to meet for lunch or coffee at a local restaurant of their choosing, while the remaining nine preferred that the interview take place at their place of employment.

The semi-structured interview began with the researcher engaging the interviewee in small talk in an attempt to create a relaxed atmosphere. After a brief time, the purpose of the study was reviewed, with an emphasis on the researcher's interest in the interviewee's views and insights into the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance. Following the Human Research Protection (IRB) program protocol, the interviewee was asked to sign a letter of informed consent (See Appendix B). Interviewees were also asked if they would like to sign a letter

of interest (Appendix E) indicating their willingness to be contacted again by this researcher for a second follow-up interview. Finally, this researcher explained the process of "memo writing," which involves the researcher taking notes during the interview, and requested permission from the interviewee to do so.

After the initial formalities where completed, this researcher began by asking the interviewee to please take a minute or so and picture in her mind a social work student she deemed an outstanding example of professional competence, someone who effectively applies social work knowledge, skills, and values in a professional manner. Then this researcher asked the three primary interview questions, which are as follows:

1.   Considering how this student effectively applies social work knowledge, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

2.   Considering how this student effectively applies social work values, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

3.   Considering how this student effectively applies social work skills, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

These three broad, open-ended questions were designed with the intent of simplifying the somewhat dense and complex topic at hand. Interview protocol and questions were presented in two formats. One format was geared toward social work faculty and field instructors in that it asked them to consider the characteristics and abilities of a "social work student" who effectively applies social work knowledge, values, and skills resulting in competent professional performance (See Appendix C). The other format was geared toward social work practitioners in that it asked them to consider the characteristics and abilities of a "social work practitioner" who effectively

applies social work knowledge, values, and skills resulting in competent professional performance (See Appendix D).

A responsive interviewing model was utilized during the remainder of the interview. Responsive interviewing is an approach that is dynamic and iterative, as the researcher adapts her questions and interviewing style to the varying relationships between herself and the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The goal of the interview is not solely to learn about a topic, but also to learn what is important to those being interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Elaboration, clarifying, steering, and sequencing probes were used frequently to elicit more in depth descriptions of specific behaviors and to gain as precisely as possible, a definition of the concepts being described. Subquestions were used as necessary to provide structure and direction.

Consistent with the grounded theory approach, the interview format was flexible and open and questions were guided by the theory as it emerged from the data (Fortune & Reid, 1999; Meadus, 2007). One striking example of this was the interviewees' response to the three interview question format. I chose to ask the primary research question in three segments, separating the knowledge, the skills and the values, with the intent of simplifying a somewhat dense and complex topic. However, the first interviewee did not respond very quickly to the initial question which was specifically about *social work knowledge,* so I suggested she consider the second question, which focused on the characterisitics and abilities of a student who effectively applies *social work skills.* This question got the interviewee thinking and she briefly described a few specific characterisitics of a student she had in mind, but then she stopped.

She appeared to be pondering something, so I asked her if I could clarify anything for her. She indicated that she was thinking of a cluster of behaviors and said, "And it may *cross over* into other *knowledge* and *values as well*, but when I think…" It was clear that having to bracket her thoughts into the areas of knowledge, skills and values was more confusing than helpful, in fact was hindering her ability to articulate her thoughts. I suggested she forget about the three separate areas and just talk freely about her observations of students who demonstrated competent professional performance to a high degree. She appeared relieved and began to share descriptive and detailed examples.

This first interview provided a valuable lesson in the importance of allowing the theory to emerge from the data, rather than imposing my theoretical lens on the interviewee through the way I had structured the interview questions. In the remainder of the interviews, after the initial formalities where completed, I began by letting the interviewees know that I would like them to describe the individual characteristics and abilities of a student or practitioner who effectively applies social work knowledge, skills, and values in a professionally competent manner. I then said that they could separate their answers into the areas of knowledge, skills, and values or that they could just begin with whatever came to mind. Interestingly, not one of the interviewees answered the questions using the structure of the separate areas.

At the end of each interview, I conducted a "check-in" with the interviewee. I reviewed the basic content of the interview and asked the interviewee if the information matched what he or she thought had been said. I then added or changed any new or different information and asked if there were any additional thoughts the interviewee

would like to add. In closing, the interviewee was thanked for participating in the interview process and reminded of the possibility of a follow-up interview.

The final step in the data collection process was to conduct a second follow-up interview with one participant from each subgroup. The selection criterion used to determine the follow-up interview participants was as follows. First, I contacted all participants who had signed the letter of interest. Second, from the pool of participants who responded, the participant from each group whose schedule allowed them to meet in the soonest time frame possible was selected and a meeting was arranged.

During the follow-up interview, two tables were shared with the interviewee, a table that outlined the four major categories that had emerged from the data, and a table that displayed the themes and sub-themes in each category. The interviewee was asked to share their thoughts regarding these findings and also asked if they saw any relationship between the four major categories. In closing, the interviewee was asked to share any further elaborations on the individual characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance and was thanked for participating in the interview process. Additional questions were asked in the follow-up interview, but will not be reported in this document.

Data Analysis

As noted earlier, data collection and data analysis took place concurrently. The data were analyzed using the constant comparison method. This approach involves a structured process of analysis consisting of open, axial, and selective coding (LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding is the first stage and involves "opening" the data and looking for similarities and differences (LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Upon completion of the open coding process, axial coding is employed. Axial

coding consists of reapplying the constant comparison method to each category resulting

in the discovery of themes, and possible sub-themes. Possible relationships between the

categories are also explored during this phase of the coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding is the last phase of data

analysis. Selective coding serves to identify a central concept or core category that

provides the focal point for the development of a conceptual diagram elucidating the

various relationships between the categories (LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

For this research study, all interviews were audio-taped on a digital voice

recorder. Each recording was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document by a research

assistant, who then e-mailed the transcript to me. Each subgroup (social work field

instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators) was analyzed

separately. A detailed description of the data analysis process follows.

When all four of the interviews for a particular subgroup were completed, the

textual data were opened and read collectively. The constant comparison method was

applied and similar statements were grouped together. In an attempt to organize the

magnitude of data being analyzed in the open coding phase, a coding structure was

developed using the research question. Specifically, the terms characterisitics and

abilities were placed on one axis, and the terms intrapersonal and interpersonal were

placed on the opposite axis (See Table 2). For the purpose of this study, the term,

characteristic, is defined as a distinguishing trait or quality and the term, ability, is

defined as the quality or state of being able, i e., competence in doing. The term,

intrapersonal, is defined as knowledge about and awareness of the internal aspects of the

self, such as knowledge of feelings, thinking processes, self-reflection, and intuition. Finally, the term, interpersonal, is defined as the ability to engage in verbal and nonverbal communication, to notice distinctions among ourselves and others, such as, contrasts in mood, motivations, and intentions, and the ability to understand another's feelings, anticipations and beliefs (Lazear, 2000).

Table 2

Coding Structure

	INTRAPERSONAL	INTERPERSONAL
CHARACTERISTICS LEVELS OF AWARENESS		
ABILITIES		

I began the open coding phase by placing similar statements together within the four quadrant context of the coding structure. Once the data were assigned a place in the coding structure, the next step was to give each grouping a label. I began with apriori assumptions; however, as I read and reread the four specific groupings of data, the labels that came to mind were of self-awareness, self management, social awareness, and relationship management. These labels just happen to be the four major categories that have been identified by Goleman et al., (2002) in the Framework of Emotional and Social Competence. While it was not this researcher's intention to utilize the Goleman et al., (2002) framework in the coding process, the open coding process yielded the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

While a variety of qualitative software programs are available to assist researchers in the coding and grouping of data, I opted to use a word processing program which allowed me remain personally connected with the data and less reliant on developing themes based on specific word usage. After establishing the major categories of self-awareness, self management, social awareness, and relationship management, the axial coding phase of analysis was performed. During this phase, the constant comparison method was reapplied to each category individually via a color-coding system which was implemented in the following manner. As I read and reread the textual data from an individual category, I assigned specific colors to grouping of words that had similar meanings. After all the textual data were color-coded, the information was printed out as a Word document. The individual groupings of color-coded textual data were then cut into pieces and placed into piles according to the color they had been assigned.

Finally, each individual grouping (concept) was determined to be a theme, if two or more (50 percent) of the interviewees had identified it. Each theme was considered a *dominant theme*, if it had been identified by all four members of the subgroup. In the subgroup if field instructors, axial coding yielded 14 themes, in the subgroup, social work practitioners, axial coding yielded 13 themes, and in the subgroup, social work educators, axial coding yielded 13 themes.

Next, the individual groupings of textual data which made up the themes were read and reread for the purpose of assigning a label to each of the themes. Again, I began this process with apriori assumptions. However, as I began to determine the specific labels, I came to the realization that many of them were similar to, if not exactly the

same, as the terms used by Goleman et al., (2002). This was particularly true in the categories of self-awareness, self management, and social awareness.

Finally, because many of themes' labels were quite global, the last task of the axial coding process was to indentify sub-themes. Again, after beginning with apriori assumptions, many of the sub-themes and their labels were found to be similar to the specific competencies identified by Goleman et al., (2002). This phase of the axial coding yielded 36 sub-themes from the field instructor subgroup, 28 sub-themes from the social work practitioner subgroup, and 31 sub-themes from the social work educator subgroup.

Upon completion of this segment of the data collection and the open and axial coding analysis processes, a follow-up second interview was conducted with one participant from the particular subgroup. This interview was transcribed, the data were analyzed, and any new information gleaned from the interview was incorporated into the existing tables. The interviewee's thoughts on possible relationships between the categories were explored during the final stage of analysis, selective coding, which yielded a conceptual diagram depicting the central concept of professional performance and the emergent relationships between the four major categories.

Reflexive Accounting and Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must pay close attention to the subject of rigor in order to reduce threats to the credibility and trustworthiness of their study (Padgett, 1998). The constructivist perspective offers several approaches to enhancing rigor in research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998; & Altheide &Johnson, 1994). One approach is employing strategies to reduce the threat to trustworthiness, and another approach is the

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technique of reflexive accounting, which reduces the threat of researcher bias (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; & Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998). In order to enhance rigor in this study, I engaged in three distinct methods of reflexive accounting, and four specific strategies were employed to reduce the threat to trustworthiness.

Reflexive Accounting

Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as the researcher, the "human as instrument" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 2000). It requires a keen awareness of self and is a consciously reflective process (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007). Reflexivity suggests a turning back on the original action, and when utilized in a research setting, it is common for the researcher to "turn back" throughout the data collection and analysis processes consciously acknowledging the influence of his or her role (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007; Padgett, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Given that this study utilized the responsive interviewing model as the primary data collection method which incorporates the researcher as an active participant, it was imperative that I engage in reflexivity. One cannot pretend that the researcher does not come to the interview with his or her own biases and with the propensity to sift the interviewee's response through his or her own experiences and cultural lenses. The researcher must be self-aware; reflecting and examining his or her own biases and expectations that might influence the interviewee and the interview process itself (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Memo writing is a method used to document this reflexive process and provides the researcher with an opportunity to remember, question, analyze and further understand the data that were generated with the interviewees (Mills, et al., 2006).

Although data were collected in this study through face-to-face semi-structured interviews that were audio taped, I also took notes throughout the interview. The note taking focused not only on what the interviewee was saying, but also on my personal reactions and responses to the interviewee's comments. Throughout the various stages of the data analysis process, I read and considered the reflexive memos I had written with the intent of eliminating or at the very least, becoming aware of my personal biases and their possible influence on the research process.

Another area where reflexivity is of the utmost importance is in relationship to the literature review. A highly debated issue in grounded theory research is *when* the literature review should be consulted (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007). Some researchers believe that an initial review of the literature is necessary because it enables the readers to identify the researcher's perspective early, and it also provides the researcher justification and direction for developing the grounded theory study (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007). Although Glaser disagrees with conducting an initial literature review, Straus, in his later writing with Corbin, advocates for reviewing the literature early on in the study because it stimulates questions, provides theoretical sensitivity, and provides direction for theoretical sampling (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this study, an initial literature review was conducted. The literature review provided pertinent information which guided the sample selection and stimulated the primary research questions. I took care to remain aware of the influence that the knowledge gained by the literature review could have on the research process (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Memo writing was the tool used to

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document the reflexive processes in which I engaged, with the intent of minimizing the influence of the literature review on my perceptions of the data.

In addition to memo writing, two additional reflexive strategies were utilized to reduce the threat of researcher bias. As noted earlier, a "check-in" was conducted at the end of each interview where the basic content of the interview was reviewed and the interviewee was asked if the researcher's information matched what he or she thought had been said. The interviewee was also asked to share additional thoughts. The goal of the check-in process was to reduce the possibility that the researcher had misunderstood the interviewee's responses or excluded information that was important to the interviewee.

Finally, as also mentioned earlier, a follow-up interview was conducted with one participant from each of the subgroups. The categories, themes and sub-themes were shared and the interviewee's response to the findings was solicited, as well as any thoughts about relationships between the categories. This follow-up interview served to reduce researcher bias that may have taken place during the initial data analysis.

Trustworthiness

"Prolonged engagement," where a researcher spends time in the field in order to gain a deep understanding of the topic and develops a trusting relationship with the participants, is a strategy that serves to decrease the likelihood of reactivity and respondent bias (Padgett, 1998). In this study, the participants and researcher share the common profession of social work and have a shared investment in exploring the phenomenon of professional performance. In many of the cases, the participants stated

they had already given thought to what the characterisitics and abilities are that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners.

Member checking is another strategy used to reduce the threat to trustworthiness. Member checking as described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) requires the researcher to return to the field periodically to ensure that she is on the right track. Member checking took place in this study through the use of the end of the interview check-in and the follow-up interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also recommend leaving an "audit trail" so that others can confirm the researcher's findings. Leaving an audit trail requires the researcher to adopt a spirit of openness about their research and includes documenting each step in the data collection and analysis process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, an audit trail was left by this researcher. The transcribed interviews, reflexive memos and memos noting decisions made during data collection, coding, and analysis have been saved and in compliance with the IRB program, will be kept for one year in a secure setting.

The final strategy utilized to reduce the threat to trustworthiness is inter-rater reliability. A second research assistant was enlisted (in addition to the research assistant who transcribed the interviews) to participate in the open and axial coding process previously described. The research assistant reviewed and coded the data independently of the researcher. After the coding was completed, we met together and compared our results. The findings were finalized through mutual agreement.

Summary

Chapter Three contained a discussion of the study's methodology and sampling, as well as the data collection and analysis procedures. Additionally, the attempts to

reduce the threat to researcher bias and trustworthiness were examined. Analysis results

and study findings are presented in Chapter Four. These results include a detailed

description of each individual subgroup as well as the emerging theoretical outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The interviews with various social work professionals contained rich detailed descriptions of their perceptions of what competent professional performance looks like in a social work student or practitioner. The open coding process yielded the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. For the purpose of this dissertation, the following definitions were used for each of the major categories.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness is defined as having a deep understanding of one's internal states, including one's emotions, one's values and motivations, as well as one's strengths and limitations. It also includes the propensity for self-reflection (Goleman et al., 2002).

Self-management

Self-management is defined as having the ability to manage ones' internal states, including one's emotions and impulses. It also includes the flexibility needed to adapt to new situations and comfortableness with the inevitable ambiguities of the professional work arena (Goleman et al., 2002).

Social awareness

Social awareness is defined as having an awareness of what others are feeling when you are interacting with them by being attuned to their facial expression, voice tone, and body language. This attunement results in an empathic response and display of concern for the others circumstances (Goleman et al., 2002).

<u>Relationship management</u>

Relationship management is defined as the ability to effectively participate on relationships with others. This includes leadership abilities that inspires others to develop to their full potential and promotes collaboration and teamwork (Goleman et al., 2002).

The sub-groups of field instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators were analyzed separately in order to retain the distinct quality of each of the groups' roles. The three slightly varying perspectives were then analyzed collectively to create an integrated framework. The final step in the data analysis process consisted of identifying a central concept from which a theoretical framework describing the relationships between the categories was developed.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will share the findings from the field instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators separately. The integrated findings of all social work professionals will also be portrayed, as well as the conceptual framework depicting the relationships between the categories. A discussion of the similarities and dissimilarities of the sub-groups and the overarching themes that emerged from the findings can be found in Chapter Five. Additionally, the limitations and implications of this study will be discussed.

<u>Field Instructors</u>

Field instructors were asked the question, "what characteristics and abilities would you use to describe a student who applies social work knowledge, values, and skills in a professionally competent manner?" Their responses were analyzed and are summarized in Table 3 which depicts the coding structure (intrapersonal or interpersonal and level of awareness/characteristic or ability), and the major categories (self-awareness,

self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). Under each category,

the themes are listed. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the textual data that

were not a component of Goleman et al., (2002) Framework of Emotional and Social

Competence are *italicized.* Each theme is described, followed by its sub-themes, which

are portrayed by a narrative account of one or more of the field instructors.

Table 3

Field Instructor Responses

Field Instructors	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Characteristics	SELF-AWARENESS	SOCIAL AWARENESS
Levels of Awareness	Emotional awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence	*Basic professionalism* Accurate empathy
	SELF MANAGEMENT	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Abilities	Emotional self-control Authenticity Adaptability/flexibility *Investment in professional growth* Initiative Optimism	*Engagement* *Communication* Collaboration and teamwork

Category: Self-Awareness

In the category self-awareness, three themes were discovered: emotional

awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. All three themes are found in

the Emotional and Social Competence Framework. Many of the themes produced several

distinct sub-themes. The following is a description of each theme, as well as narratives

from that theme or sub-theme.

Theme: Emotional Awareness

The theme emotional awareness portrays a person who is attuned to their inner self and recognizes how their feelings and values impact their job performance (Goleman et al., 2002). Emotional awareness is demonstrated through behaviors such as the ability to self-observe, and the awareness of and insight into how personal family of origin issues, personal values and biases, and ones status in relationship to diversity issues impact their job performance. The four sub-themes, ability to self-observe, displays insight into family of origin issues, awareness of personal biases and values, and awareness of personal status in relation to diversity issues, are described below.

Ability to self-observe

The ability to self-observe is not included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework. This makes since given that the ability to self-observe, as described by field instructors, is a very specific type of awareness that is used primarily by practitioners while engaging in a therapeutic relationship.

...and so I have to be able to get out of myself to look back at myself. It is from the corner of the room that I can see the space between us. Because from the chair, I can only see you, but from the corner of the chair, I can see me, and I can see us. And that information about me, and about us, gets fed back down to me and I have to use it to work with you. And that's really the clinical process.

Displays insight into family of origin issues

All four of the field instructors, spoke to the sub-theme, displays insight into family of origin issues, and emphasized the negative ramifications of students who did not have insight into their family of origin issues.

I never cease to be amazed at what people [students] are dealing with when they come into a professional setting, what their personal issues are that they haven't worked through.

...or even if you have had things that have happened to you throughout your life you have taken the time to process that. You know, an example is I had a student who had issue related to sexual abuse in the past, did not appear to have dealt with that well, and really affected the work that she did with families who had sexual abuse issues, she was not able to separate out personal from professional self in those cases and was very judgmental.

...able to understand because they [students] have dealt enough with their own baggage to be able to say, this has some similar quality but is not the same as. I might be able to piece myself over their situation and understand because I can relate it to some similar experience or awareness of my own, but always with awareness that they aren't the same. They are able to differentiate between what they can embrace or understand in that client because of their own experience and yet remain separate from it, not get swallowed up by it.

Awareness of personal biases and values

All four of the field instructors, reported the sub-theme, awareness of personal biases and values, and stressed the value in having students explore this area and gain some insight into it prior to being placed in field education.

...you know where it's at, you [students] are aware of your values around things; it is the people who are not self-aware who end up really tripping up in this field. Knowing who are you as a person, how do you feel about substance abuse, how

do you feel about men who beat wives, how do you feel about parents that abuse children?

... and that's what I look for when they are talking to me [field supervisor]. I will talk to them about their experiences up front. I listen for their [students] tone as to get an idea of how they feel about substance abusers, I listen to the tone of how you feel about people who come in seeking petitions for their loved ones, I listen to the tone as to what you think about someone who is once again coming in here looking for housing and this person is, you know, comes once or twice a week, knows you by name, how do you feel about that person who knows you by name and comes in here looking for the same thing over and over again. I wanna know.

Awareness of personal status in relation to diversity issues

...so you know, for example if you get a social worker from East Grand Rapids who has never really explored how poverty affects the people that they work with and then judgments get made about parents who may leave their 10 year old home because they can't afford a babysitter to go out to their $8/hour job.

So it doesn't even have to be big personal things that have happened to them, it really has to do with being in touch with who are you, what do you bring to the table, and how are you going to handle it.

Theme: Accurate Self-Assessment

The theme accurate self-assessment portrays a person who has a high level of self-awareness, including knowledge of their strengths and limitations, as well as the ability to gracefully accept feedback from others their work performance (Goleman et al.,

2002). The two sub-themes, awareness of strengths and limitations and open and receptive to feedback about performance, are described below.

Awareness of personal strengths and limitations

I think one of the other characteristics, is um, I can't think of the right word for this, but knowing what your limits are too because I have had the opposite where we've had students who think they know it all and they make really big mistakes so for students to have a good self-awareness about what their strengths are and what their weaknesses are.

…rather than splitting themselves [students] into good or bad, only being able to talk about what's good about them and not hiding the negative side, you know it is all on the table, not in a vomiting kind of way, but in a self-awareness kind of way. It's the ying and the yang.

I guess that's the piece, when I talk about [warts] and all, it's the awareness that who you are [as a student] is neither good or bad, it is a whole package and depending in relationship to who you are with, it has the potential to being wonderful or not wonderful.

Open and receptive to feedback about performance

…receptive to feedback. That's a huge piece. To be able to take feedback and when someone says, 'I notice that you do this, I'm beginning to see how you find yourself in these types of situations,' they [students] are able to sit there and look at it with you, as opposed to saying, 'I don't think you understand me,' or other defensive types of things.

<u>Theme: Self-Confidence</u>

The theme, self confidence, portrays a person who self-assured and confident in their ability to accomplish the work set before them (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes found within this theme, the possession of a strong sense of self-worth and comfortable not knowing it all/able to make mistakes without losing faith in their competence are described below.

<u>Possession of a strong sense of self-worth</u>

...[students] need to be more secure with where they are at and who they are. I think students that are able to be secure in the role of the student do a lot better in field.

<u>Comfortable "not knowing it all", able to make mistakes</u>

This sub-theme is not included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework. All four of the field instructors, however, reported the sub-theme, comfortable "not knowing it all", are able to make mistakes without losing faith in their competence. Field instructors described students who appeared self-confident, but would refrain from answering questions or trying new things until they felt they could do it perfectly. They reported that the ability to be comfortable not knowing it all, is a key component of self-confidence and is critical for active participation in field education.

...[a student who is] able to make mistakes. Being able to learn, not having to know it all. Being able to grow, being able to develop.

...I think a person [student] who is, who is not afraid of not knowing an answer.

<u>Category: Self-Management</u>

In the category of self-management, six themes were found, emotional self-control, authenticity, flexibility, investment in profession growth, initiative, and optimism. All six themes are found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework; however, many of the specific sub-themes are not. Three of the themes produced several distinct sub-themes. The following is a description of each theme, as well as narratives from that theme or sub-theme.

<u>Theme: Emotional Self-Control</u>

The theme emotional self-control primarily portrays a person who is able to effectively manage their emotions in the workplace (Goleman et al., 2002). It includes the ability to regulate distressing emotions, as well as the ability to challenge oneself to experience emotions that may be uncomfortable, for example, feeling vulnerable. The field instructors identified four sub-themes. The sub-themes, ability to self-observe and monitor internal emotional responses, and the ability to manage personal stress, are found in Goleman et al., (2002), the sub-themes, ability to separate personal and professional issues, and the ability to take risks, are not. The four sub-themes are described below.

<u>Ability to habitually self-observe and monitor their internal emotional responses</u>

If I'm sitting with a client and I'm thinking, oh my Gosh, I can't believe anyone would be your friend. Rather than thinking, whoa, I shouldn't be thinking that, I'm supposed to have unconditional regard, I shouldn't have a negative thought I'd say, no, the negative thought is a gift. The goal is you don't stay in the negative thought. That is when it is destructive. Step out of the negative thought,

and look back at it and say, that's really interesting, he is kind of ticking me off; I wonder what that's about.

Ability to separate personal and professional issues,

...an ability [student's] not to personalize client's issues. An ability to keep client issues and personal issues separate.

...able to understand because they [students] have dealt enough with their own baggage to be able to say, this has some similar quality but is not the same as. I might be able to piece myself over their situation and understand because I can relate it to some similar experience or awareness of my own, but always with awareness that they [students] aren't the same. They are able to differentiate between what they can embrace or understand in that client because of their own experience and yet remain separate from it, not get swallowed up by it.

Ability to take risks

...if you [student] don't give yourself permission to take those risks, you won't learn much. You want to be correct, but you don't want to take the risk. You will never get anywhere in this business being safe. So, you gotta put yourself out there, because nobody is going to give you a hard time about it. They are just going to help you see what it is you have said and navigate you in a way that is more clinically appropriate.

...but it does mean you [students] have to take some calculated risks

Ability to manage personal stress

...I think one of the things we experienced this last year was an unsuccessful student. She was clearly was overwhelmed with a lot of personal stuff going on.

She frequently came to supervision hour late, she frequently canceled supervision, frequently called and said wasn't going to be here. She was always coming in saying, 'my mother had this, my sister this, my sister in law that, I had to take care of my niece.' She said all these things that play on your sympathy of family problems, but it was clearly impairing her ability to do her internship.

Theme: Authenticity

The theme authenticity is portrayed by a person who is comfortable in their own skin and has a professional demeanor that is genuine, open, and relaxed (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes, is comfortable with themselves and relates to others in a relaxed manner are included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework, and described below.

Is comfortable with themselves

I think it has to do with them [students] reaching a certain comfort level. It's having enough self-awareness that you can begin to be able to accept who you are and be comfortable of it, warts and all. To some degree, I guess its maturity.

I think it is just, you know, [students] being comfortable in your own skin, being comfortable in your own professional skin.

Relates to others in a relaxed manner

…it is almost out of fear and they [students] are so eager to do it right that they are not relaxed enough. And when you are not relaxed and genuine, guess what, consumers know that. And so they are going to give you that government response [the status quo] and that's not what we want.

...their [students] presentation is so uptight, even when they come in here and talk to me [field supervisor] about something that they are doing three or four times a week.

Theme: Adaptability/Flexibility

The theme adaptability/flexibility is portrayed by a person who is able to smoothly handle multiple demands, adapt their responses to fit fluid circumstances and possess a flexible thinking style (Goleman et al., 2002). The three sub-themes, displays flexible thinking patterns: multiple personal styles, uses multiple theories, can problem-solve when there's a need to change plans, ability to hear the whole story and then discern what all the pieces mean and what pieces have clinical significant, and the ability to generalize knowledge to new and different situations found by field instructors, are all referred to indirectly in Goleman et al., (2002) framework and are described below.

Displays flexible thinking patterns: multiple personal styles, uses multiple theories, can problem-solve when there's a need to change plans

...to problem solve and not to get so personal. It's like it is okay if it is my [the students] problem. It is okay if I'm not getting it across, because I'm capable of thinking in another direction and thinking, okay if that didn't work, maybe if I tried another motivational skill or look at it in a different way or think about this client in a different way I might be able to be successful, rather than an either/or thinking.

I'm loud and I take up space and I like to talk and I like to laugh [field supervisor giving an example]. So, I'm loud and I take up space and I'm laughing, those are my default choices, but you know when I went to see Mr. Smith, what he really needs is someone who will be quieter, take up less space, and listen. Now you

know what, that is me too. It's not my default choice, but that quiet, receptive listener is me too.

Ability to hear the whole story and then discern what all the pieces mean and what pieces have clinical significant

...that the student is able to pick out those features[from the assessment], those salient features, whether it is a mental health issue or a substance abuse, and whether it is something other than what we manage here[at the agency where the field placement is occurring] .

You [the student] have to know what questions to ask, you have to know where to look for data, and you gotta be able to get information. You have to then be able to attach meaning to that information. And so you gotta have some discernment that says, 'this seems like it might be important and this doesn't.' Once we have done that, we have all the pieces to the puzzle, we have to put the pieces together; we have to get the big picture.

Ability to generalize knowledge to new and different situations

You have to trust that a person [student] can take that information and then the next time a similar situation occurs they can apply that learning to that next experience. That doesn't always happen. When you have individuals [students] who aren't able to generalize their learning experience, then each and every time something comes up they're relying on their supervisor to guide them through that.

Theme: Investment in Professional Growth

The theme, investment in professional growth, parallels Goleman et al., (2002) theme titled achievement orientation. This theme is portrayed by a person who has high personal standards and is motivated to grow professionally and is described below.

...and those are a few of the students I'm thinking about when I look back and that's what made them successful was because they were eager to learn, develop new skills and not only eager to learn that from you but eager to take the personal responsibility to enhance those skills. You know, you can tell very quickly the students who are there to put the time in and the students who are there to gain something from their time.

...you know the exceptional students do what you ask them and then ask what more they can do. They are seekers of knowledge

...a commitment to professional development, you know if you are working in a community, what do you [the student] know about that community's resources?

Theme: Initiative

The theme, initiative, is portrayed by a person who seizes opportunities and actively seeks them out instead of waiting for something to come to them (Goleman et al., 2002) and is described below.

...and I think students that have been very good about being self-starters are displaying competent professional performance.

I would kind of put self-starter and independent together a little bit, um, because I think one gives you the other.

...that they [students] need to be able to take initiative and be a self-starter.

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Theme: Optimism

The theme optimism is portrayed by a person who sees others positively, and is persistent in pursing goals despite obstacles and setbacks along the way (Goleman et al., 2002) and is described below.

> ...to offer hope. And that can be really tough when you realize their [the client's] circumstance is going to remain in poverty and their circumstance is that perhaps they will be able to achieve employment, but that employment will never be gainful enough to help them rise out of poverty. Um, and in some cases, they are not gonna be employable either. In that case, what can you [the student] do to bring hope to that existence to allow them to experience the best they can?

> ...that we give them [client's] enough hope that they can do it one more day. Because we are not in their shoes damn it, there is no way. And the reality is that they [clients] have had enough life experience that they know when you [student] are not hopeful for them. Just like kids can figure it out with their own parents, by what you say, how you say it.

Category: Social Awareness

In the category of social-awareness, two themes were discovered: basic professionalism, and accurate empathy. The theme, basic professionalism, is not found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework; however, the theme, accurate empathy is. Each theme produced several distinct sub-themes from which narratives will be shared.

The theme, basic professionalism, is portrayed by a person who is aware of the basic expectations in a professional work environment. It is demonstrated by the four sub-themes, is aware of appropriate work attire, is aware of professional demeanor and body language, is prepared and organized, and is prompt and dependable. Three out of the four field instructors mentioned this theme, and speculated as to why more students than usual seem to be lacking in this area as of late. Although no definitive answers were arrived at, some of the speculation included the thought that the upcoming generation of college graduates has a strong sense of entitlement and does not want to be told what "professional" looks like, and that MSW programs are getting more students who do not have a professional undergraduate degree and therefore may not have been exposed to professional expectations in the past. The following are some of the field instructor's narratives.

Is aware of appropriate work attire

Well, I mean take it from as simple as dress. I'm struggling with a student right now, needing to explain the basics about when you come to work; it shouldn't look like you are ready for a night club. So you know some of those real basic skills

I've had to have conversations about how people dress, about your hair, about all the piercings. It's fine and wonderful when you [student] aren't here in this setting, but in this setting [field agency] you cannot wear a tank top.

Is aware of professional demeanor and body language

If you [student] are coming into a staff meeting you know if you come in, you're sitting alert at the table, you're not stretched out across a couple chairs like you are lounging in a living room. You know, as basic as that sounds, that's what we struggle with.

Is prepared and organized

...preparedness, you know, what did you [student] learn about this family, consumer, client before you showed up at their door?

...if you [students] are coming into a staff meeting, you know if you come in, if you are gonna drink coffee, come in with your coffee, you have your notepad you have your agenda ready, you have your pen with you....

Is prompt and dependable

...okay, because I'm counting on you [student] to be here, even though we aren't paying you, I'm counting on your presence up front. No, you are not part of the schedule, but I'm counting on you being here because you are an intern.

Theme: Accurate Empathy

The theme accurate empathy is portrayed by a person who is able to accurately sense what others' are feeling and understand their perspective (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes, ability to step outside oneself emotionally and take the others perspective and the ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues are included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework and are described below.

<u>Ability to step outside one's self emotionally and take the others perspective</u>

...very naive and they [students] struggle to put themselves in the shoes of their clients, to really be empathic. They hold themselves so separate, as in *not like clients,* that they estrange themselves.

<u>Ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues</u>

...you know, you don't just go through a survey saying 'have you had any substance abuse history, yes or no.' If people indicate yes or appear uncomfortable, the students should kind of sense that, pick up on that...and know enough then to ask more open-ended questions are the successful ones.

They [students] can recognize through the clients story, recognize through what they are observing, (the symptoms and the presentation of that client) and get a clear picture of what's going on.

<u>Category: Relationship Management</u>

In the category relationship management, three themes were found: engagement, communication, collaboration and teamwork. The themes, engagement and communication are not included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework, however, the theme, collaboration and teamwork is. The themes produced several distinct sub-themes from which narratives will be shared.

Theme: Engagement

The theme engagement was seen as an essential component of competent professional performance by field instructors. More than once, a comment about the importance of students being able to develop rapport and engage with clients, was followed by a comment about the application of theory being of no value if the student

does not know how to connect with clients. Four sub-themes emerged, the ability to relate to others in a nonjudgmental and trustworthy manner, the ability to listen attentively and be fully present, the ability to have a curious approach towards clients, and the ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them, and are described below.

Ability to relate to others with respect, in a nonjudgmental and trustworthy manner

Well, I think allowing people to feel safe in the process, um developing trust, respect, um non-judgmental, you know just developing that atmosphere where people feel like they can share that information and it isn't going to come back to them in any sort of negative way.

...so you know, I think you [the student] start by setting the stage and setting that appropriately in that safe environment where people feel welcome they can share what's going on without you being judgmental.

Ability to listen attentively and be fully present

They [the students] are less into the mind frame of wanting to get it right and more into really listening and being there and being present with the person and not just writing it down.

Ability to have a "curious" approach towards clients

They [the students] are curious about this person's life when they walk in the door.

...just to be curious [the student]. Why are you [the client] doing it that way? You know, it didn't work the two other times before, what makes you think it will work this time? What's different?

Ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them

All four field instructors reported the sub-theme, ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them. This ability was frequently brought up by field instructors in relationship to their observation that students often felt they had to be "the expert." Field instructors reported that when students used "the expert" lens to view clients and their behaviors; they were frequently pushing clients to go where they (students) thought they should go, instead of partnering and meeting the client where they were at.

> And meeting people where they are at, starting there, and being able to understand where people are at so you [the student] can meet them there.

> …understanding that you [the student] are there to help; you are there to meet them [the client] where they are at.

> We can't look at the final product, we can only at the product and when you start jumping ahead of yourself then you've lost what we do, because it is a process, we [as social workers]travel right along side of our consumers.

> …if people are back here you [the student] don't try to take them three steps down the road. You get where people are at and you meet them there and develop interventions around where they are at.

Theme: Communication

The theme communication is not included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework. Field instructors described communication as an important component of competent professional performance and elucidated five sub-themes, ability to be articulate, the ability to be assertive, the ability to give others constructive feedback in a nonthreatening

way, is receptive and open to others ideas and feedback, and professional documentation skills. Below are narrative accountings from each of the sub-themes.

Ability to be articulate

Articulate communication runs across the board, whether its communication with clients that they [the students] are working with, colleagues, supervisors. They [the students] need to be able to articulate the data and they need to do that ideally in a categorical fashion instead of chronological. That's a problem a lot of students have. They need to be able to articulate an opinion [in case presentations].

Ability to be assertive

Well, I always talk to students about being assertive because sometimes the word assertive doesn't, it sometimes can seem bad to people but it's really not because if you're assertive, you're talking about what you need to get across but you're doing it in a way that is not impeding on others. So we spend a lot of time talking about assertive communication.

… to be able to challenge the person they [student] are talking to, if you have been listening well, you should challenge them….not confront them, just challenge them, have them rethink that.

Ability to give others constructive feedback in a nonthreatening way

I need you [the student] out there talking to colleagues, I need you out there talking to consumers; yes, I need you not just listening, talking, giving them feedback.

The ability to give and receive constructive feedback [said in response when asked for a clarification of what was meant by good communication skills].

Is receptive and open to others ideas and feedback

Usually, when people [students] are resistant to receiving feedback it is because, I'm not sure how to say it better, but typically it's because they haven't done something they need to be doing. Um, and rather than taking that as a learning opportunity they become defensive.

...Receptive. Open. Aware [said in response when asked for clarification of what was meant by good communication skills].

Displays professional documentation skills

Reading and writing, there are amazing differences between students, just the basic ability to communicate in writing. I have a student I'm struggling with right now. You know when we are writing audits or doing professional documentation, you [the student] can't write it conversational. It has to be to the point, professional; this shouldn't be something you are writing to your friend or texting to your friend.

Professional documentation skills are huge. [said in response when asked if they had any other thoughts about communication skills].

Theme: Collaboration and Teamwork

The theme, collaboration and teamwork, is included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework of Social and Emotional Competencies and is portrayed by a person who is

collegial and works cooperatively with others towards shared goals. The following is a narrative from one of the field instructors.

> ...and developing those relationships with the people they work with. They [students] have to be able to collaborate; they have to be able to do that here. Whether it is with a supervisor, whether it is with a security person, whether it is with the doctor, because you might see the doctor from time to time, or with a fellow clinician, you [the student] have to have relationships with all those people.

Follow-up interview

After the above categories, themes, and sub-themes had been coded; I met with one interviewee from the subgroup, field instructors, for a follow-up interview. I shared the findings, explaining how I had coded the transcribed interviews of all four field instructors into the coding structure that I was displaying. I gave the interviewee time to read over and digest the information and then asked for her thoughts on the categories, themes and sub-themes. The field instructor found the coding structure interesting and stated, "Yeah, that makes sense, intrapersonal and interpersonal, awareness and abilities."

Following that discussion, I asked her if she saw any relationships between the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. While pointing to the diagram of the four major categories, she reported the following:

> But again, I think this whole cycle works here [between social awareness and relationship management] as well, because the ability to relate to others, the ability to relate with unconditional positive regard, listen attentively, again if you

haven't figured out where you are at up here, [social awareness] appropriate work attire, you won't be able to do those things [relationship management].

Unless you've done these, step outside your own emotional, yourself emotionally, take others' perspectives [social awareness], you are not gonna be able to do these actions [relationship management], and you also need to have been here [self-awareness and self-management] as an individual and worked through it.

Again, it is interesting if you watch how these [self-awareness, self-management, social awareness & relationship management] all interplay back and forth, because if you are comfortable with where you are at with your diversity, if you are comfortable with making mistakes, if you are comfortable and you process through your issues, you'll be able to move here [social awareness]. It just really blends back and forth.

The field instructor had been talking about a cyclic relationship between self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness, but had not included the category of relationship management. So I asked, (pointing to relationship management) "So do you see a relationship between these two here? Does it go both ways, do you think?"

She responded,

No, I don't think it goes both ways here, because if you have not worked through personal issues, there is no way you are gonna work with others [relationship management]. I think back to my last intern, was very very stuck here in the first block, [self-awareness] and you can almost draw a correlation to every issue that came up in her placement. You could go back to her own personal stuff that she did not work through, so again, I think if social work programs can help students

with their own intrapersonal awareness; it will help them move forward more quickly in field placements.

<u>Summary of Field Instructors Findings</u>

The 37 pages of textual data from the subgroup of field instructors were replete with detailed illustrations of individual characteristics and abilities believed to contribute to competent professional performance. The dominant category for this group was self-awareness as evidenced by the two themes of emotional awareness and self-confidence being highlighted by all four of the field instructors. Specifically, all four field instructors mentioned the sub-themes, insight into one's family of origin issues, an awareness of one's personal values and biases and the ability to make mistakes without losing faith in one's competence.

The three primary sub-themes articulated by field instructors were of an intrapersonal nature, however, the sub-theme, ability to meet clients where they are at, partner and share power with clients, was also emphasized by all four field instructors. This interpersonal area was noted as being critical to relationship development with clients, and is an area that students who had not mastered the earlier mentioned intrapersonal themes, appear to struggle with to a greater degree.

The field instructor's group reported a hierarchical relationship between the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. It was their perception that self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness needed to be mastered *before* one could master the ability to manage relationships. Self- awareness, self-management, and social awareness were perceived as being mastered in the order written. However, once mastered, it was thought that one

would most likely revisit each of the areas in a variety of different orders, dependent on life circumstances. Additionally, field instructors voiced a desire that students come to field education with a greater understanding and mastery of the intrapersonal components of self-awareness and self-management.

Social Work Practitioners

Social work practitioners were asked the question, "what characteristics and abilities would you use to describe a student who applies social work knowledge, values, and skills in a professionally competent manner?" Their responses were analyzed and are summarized in Table 4 which depicts the coding structure (intrapersonal or interpersonal and level of awareness/characteristic or ability), and the major categories (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). Under each category, the themes are listed. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the textual data that *were not* a component of Goleman et al., (2002) Framework of Emotional and Social Competence are *italicized*. Each theme is described, followed by its sub-themes, which are portrayed by a narrative account of one or more of the practitioners

Table 4

Social Work Practitioner Responses

Social Work Practitioner	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Characteristics	SELF-AWARENESS	SOCIAL AWARENESS
Levels of Awareness	Emotional awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence	Accurate empathy Organizational awareness

Table 4 Social Work Practitioner Responses Continued

	SELF MANAGEMENT	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Abilities	Emotional self-control Authenticity Adaptability/flexibility Investment in professional growth Optimism	Engagement Communication Collaboration and teamwork with colleagues

Category: Self-Awareness

In the category self-awareness, three themes were discovered: emotional

awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. All three themes are found in

the Emotional and Social Competence Framework. Many of the themes produced several

distinct sub-themes. The following is a description of each theme, as well as narratives

from that theme or sub-theme.

Theme: Emotional Awareness

The theme emotional awareness portrays a person who is attuned to their inner

self and recognizes how their feelings and values impact their job performance (Goleman

et al., 2002). Emotional awareness is demonstrated through behaviors such as an

awareness of what one is feeling, and the awareness of and insight into how personal

family of origin issues, personal values and biases, and ones status in relationship to

diversity issues impact their job performance. The four sub-themes, the awareness of

what one is feeling, displays insight into family of origin issues, awareness of personal

biases and values, and awareness of personal status in relation to diversity issues, are

described below.

Awareness of their feelings

It is that sense of the therapist's judgment and understanding of what's going on that is really key to bringing back information. You know, like, I'm stuck, I'm getting angry with this family, I'm frustrated, I can feel my blood pressure going up.

It's like being aware when you [the practitioner] are reacting to something and it is your own stuff, or that there are certain kinds of people who push your buttons.

...being able to feel your own [the practitioner] emotions and being aware of your reactions.

...aware of their [the practitioner's] affect level.

Displays insight into personal family of origin issues

I have had that with some therapists recently, where they are in their own grieving process because of some losses in their family, they get connected to a family that is working on a lot of grief stuff, and being aware of, 'okay, I [the practitioner] need to be checking my own work, my own process, where I'm at, you know. And if I'm stuck at a certain spot, ask myself if the family I'm working with is gonna get stuck at that same spot. I have to be aware of that, aware of where can I take them if I'm struggling with my own stuff at that time.

...because I think that at different times, we've seen in practice folks where you go, you haven't managed your own issues sufficiently enough and your issues are getting all messy and intertwined in your families. Because families we work with are certainly going to push buttons and you need to be aware of what yours are.

Awareness of personal bias's and values

I think with some of the values, I think the focus we always take with therapists is figuring out what's a social work value and what are your personal values and to be very clear about knowing those could be in very separate lists. There are some things you might put on your personal values list that you know do not belong on what you are going to say is my professional social work values list.

...that you [the practitioner] are not starting out with preconceived issues or assumptions about people.

... jumping to stereotypes is important to stay away from, that you're [the practitioner] asking them [the client] what their journey is.

<u>Awareness of personal status in relation to diversity</u>

...and then in this whole engagement process, also recognizing what you[the practitioner] represent to them [the client] because then you try to understand it in their context. If you are a white male, or a white female, or if you are an African American therapist working with a Caucasian family, you are trying to figure out what you represent to them as well, so maybe you can identify if the differences between you are gonna be barriers.

<u>Theme: Accurate Self-Assessment</u>

The theme accurate self-assessment portrays a person who has a high level of self-awareness, including knowledge of their strengths and limitations, as well as the ability to gracefully accept feedback from others their work performance (Goleman et al., 2002). The sub-theme, the ability to be introspective, is the only sub-theme identified by the social work practitioners and is described below.

<u>Ability to be introspective</u>

Introspection, that they [practitioners] have a high degree of an accurate introspection so then you know, um, when something registers on your own internal meter, that it's like, 'oh this is a reality check I'm gonna have to go get from my supervisor.

Theme: Self-Confidence

The theme, self confidence, portrays a person who self-assured and confident in their ability to accomplish the work set before them (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes found within this theme, the possession of a strong sense of self-worth and comfortable not knowing it all/able to make mistakes are described below.

Possession of a healthy sense of self, ego strength

All four social work practitioners described the sub-theme, possession of a healthy sense of self, ego strength, and emphasized its importance as a key ingredient of competent professional performance. They reflected that doing this work can be difficult, and that one needs to be equipped with a strong sense of self in order to provide competent services to clients.

You [the practitioner] certainly have to have enough healthy sense of yourself and enough confidence. Enough ego strength so that you can hear what may be a painful message or whatever from someone about, 'yeah, you missed the boat, or you didn't handle that so well, or you got sucked into a problem versus helping someone problem-solve their way out of a problem or whatever.' You gotta be able to hear that without being crushed, you can't be that fragile.

You need a lot of ego strength.

…is able to be interdependent, has a healthy sense of self and can set boundaries.

I think you gotta like yourself and believe you can help, or at least believe in the integrity of your intentions.

Comfortable making mistakes, not "knowing it all"

Now, some of that also gives you permission to make mistakes because you recognize that you never arrive.

You gotta see this profession as you are always learning, and if you take that as a belief, that you are always learning, then you don't have this false sense of thinking 'well, I know all about that, or I shouldn't have to ask for help or whatever.' We are always learning different things from families. A question I like to ask is, 'what's that family teaching you?'

Category: Self-Management

In the category self-management five themes were discovered, emotional self-control, authenticity, adaptability/flexibility, and investment in professional growth, and optimism. All five themes are found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework; however, some of the specific sub-themes are not. Three of the themes produced several distinct sub-themes. The following is a description of each theme, as well as narratives from that theme or sub-theme.

Theme: Emotional Self-Control

The theme emotional self-control primarily portrays a person who is able to effectively manage their emotions in the workplace (Goleman et al., 2002). It includes the ability to regulate distressing emotions, as well as the ability to challenge oneself to experience emotions that may be uncomfortable, for example, feeling vulnerable. The social work practitioners identified five sub-themes. The sub-themes, ability to self-

observe and monitor internal emotional responses, the ability to be deliberate and intentional versus reactive and the ability to manage personal stress, are found in Goleman et al., (2002), the sub-themes, the ability to let the client own the problem, and the ability to separate personal and professional issues, are not. The five sub-themes are described below.

Ability to habitually self-observe and monitor their internal emotional responses

All four social work practitioners reported the sub-theme, ability to habitually self-observe and monitor their internal emotional responses. This sub-theme was often discussed in relationship to engagement with clients and was seen as a prerequisite of sorts to one's ability to engage with clients successfully.

...observing and watching the "space" between yourself and the client.

...like the ability to handle tension.

...the ability to "contain" their feelings.

...being able to feel your own emotions and being aware of your reactions.

Ability to let the client own the problem, does not take client's behavior personally

...the ability to allow the client to struggle with the problem, and not take it on as their [the practitioner] own.

...the ability not to see client's improvement or lack of improvement as a reflection of themselves [the practitioner].

Ability to separate person and professional issues

I think that's that introspection of knowing, you know, if you're in a crisis in your

own personal life, you want to make sure that isn't drifting in and influencing

your judgment with what you are seeing with clients.

...being able to keep your own stuff separate.

<u>Ability to be deliberate and intentional verses reactive</u>

Someone who is self-aware, conscious and thoughtful about what they are doing.

Almost every interaction you have with a client should be intentional.

...that we are always conscious of what we are doing [said in response to being

asked to clarify what was meant by being purposeful].

<u>Ability to manage personal stress and engage in self-care</u>

I think one of the biggest things is taking good enough care of myself

[practitioner], to know when I'm there and when I'm not there. These things are

hard to describe.

You have a responsibility to your clients to keep yourself healthy emotionally;

you must have the desire to address your own stuff.

<u>Theme: Authenticity</u>

The theme authenticity is portrayed by a person who is comfortable in their own

skin and has a professional demeanor that is genuine, open, and relaxed (Goleman et al.,

2002). The two sub-themes, is comfortable with themselves and relates to others in a

relaxed manner are included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework, and are described

below.

<u>Displays a genuine openness to others, hospitable</u>

...be warm and friendly and open and show good hospitality [to clients].

And if I got someone [a practitioner] who was kind of cold or rigid or robotic, then I'm not gonna feel like I'm gonna wanna bear my soul to you. I want someone who is going to be connecting with me. So I sort of have to be able to adjust myself, but be aware enough of the tools, using the skills that are congruent with whom I am.

<u>Ability to use humor and light heartedness</u>

A sense of humor I think is critical. I'll see people, they'll be real serious and if you know the client, the person, whatever, and you can say something that can lighten the mood....

I see a lot of people [practitioners] who act like,' I gotta get to the end of this story right now, and we gotta stay on task, not deviate, not take any side bars, I gotta get all the info, I gotta be serious.' That's not helpful.

<u>Theme: Adaptability/Flexibility</u>

The theme adaptability/flexibility is portrayed by a person who is able to smoothly handle multiple demands, adapt their responses to fit fluid circumstances and possess a flexible thinking style (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes, displays flexible thinking patterns: multiple personal styles, uses multiple theories, can problem-solve when there's a need to change plans, ability to think creatively in a non-linear manner found by practitioners, are all referred to indirectly in Goleman et al., (2002) framework and are described below.

<u>Displays flexible thinking patterns: multiple personal styles, uses multiple
theories, can problem-solve when there's a need to change plans</u>

...because I [practitioner] can really only be myself, but it doesn't mean I don't

have different tools within that realm to use to help connect with this person.

If I get the sense that this is a very intellectual person, I might wanna stick with

some cognitive stuff up front, and part of that is out of respect for their [the

client's] style, you have to adjust to the way you do therapy. I need to offer you

what I think is gonna work best for you based on what you are showing me, you

know. Or if it is someone who is real emotive, I might want to do more

containment sorts of things, and it is not in a real judgmental sort of way, it is just

realizing maybe they are over-emoting.

<u>Ability to think creatively in a non-linear way, use metaphors</u>

Metaphor and analogy are powerful tools. Metaphors and analogies allow you to

talk about some of the most difficult and painful things or to give advice without

being direct and authoritative.

<u>Theme: Investment in Professional Growth</u>

The theme, investment in professional growth, parallels Goleman et al., (2002)

theme titled achievement orientation. This theme is portrayed by a person who has high

personal standards and is motivated to grow professionally and is described below.

Well, one of the things that I would think about is that kind of quest to be an

eternal learner; so that, you [the practitioner] see this journey as a continual

learning journey.

You [the practitioner] gotta see this profession as one where you are always

learning.

<u>Theme: Optimism</u>

The theme optimism is portrayed by a person who sees others positively, and is persistent in pursing goals despite obstacles and setbacks along the way (Goleman et al., 2002) and is described below.

...to have a nonpathologizing attitude.

... to be strengths focused and see all behavior as a way of coping.

...and also have a strong belief in resiliency of the human spirit. A belief that life is worth living, and that no matter what has happened up to a point, the possibility exists that they [clients] may have something really important to do before their day is done.

<u>Category: Social-Awareness</u>

In the category social awareness two themes were found, accurate empathy, organizational awareness. Both themes are found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework. Each theme produced two distinct sub-themes from which narratives will be shared.

<u>Theme: Accurate Empathy</u>

The theme accurate empathy is portrayed by a person who is able to accurately sense what others' are feeling and understand their perspective (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes, ability to step outside oneself emotionally and take the others perspective and the ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues are included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework and are described below.

<u>Ability to step outside one's self emotionally and take the other's perspective</u>

...the ability to understand another person's world as they perceive it to be.

Yeah, it is kind of my [the practitioner] way of feeling their pain, their angst about whatever is going on in their life.

…able to understand their [clients] perspective.

Ability to read body language accurately and respond appropriately

Sometimes their [clients] body language shows they have so much they want to express, maybe what you gotta do is start with that. You say, 'you look like you've got a lot on your mind and a lot of questions. It's so hard to hear when you have questions of your own, why don't we start with that.'

I think you [the practitioner] have to be able to read the other person's body language more than anything else.

Theme: Organizational Awareness

The theme organizational awareness is portrayed by a person who is sensitive to the emotional undercurrents and key power relationships in a group. They also understand the context and values that the organization operates within (Goleman et al., (2002). The two sub-themes, awareness of the agency context, risk management issues, and conscious awareness of social work values and ethics are described below.

Awareness that you are practicing within the context of an agency/understanding the role of risk management

…the awareness that you practice in an agency so that you are doing the work in the context of the agency as well.

…that seems to be a foreign concept for them [practitioners], the broader circle of practice, professional risk, whatever it is that they need to be mindful of. It isn't a very strong understanding that I see students coming out of school with, understanding the whole risk-management life that you have to work within.

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<u>Conscious awareness of social work values and ethics</u>

It is that consciousness of those values and ethics [NASW Code of Ethics]. They

aren't just things we do because we are in this business; they need to be a part of

us [practitioners] well-integrated with who you are.

<u>Category: Relationship-Management</u>

In the category relationship management, three themes were found: engagement,

communication with clients, and communication and collaboration with colleagues. The

themes, engagement and communication are not included in Goleman et al., (2002)

framework, however, the aspect of collaboration with colleagues is. The themes produced

several distinct sub-themes from which narratives will be shared.

<u>Theme: Engagement</u>

The theme engagement was seen as an essential component of competent

professional performance. Social work practitioners emphasized honoring the client and

their journey. Four sub-themes emerged, the ability to relate to others in a nonjudgmental

and trustworthy manner, the ability to listen attentively and be fully present, the ability to

have a curious approach towards clients, and the ability to meet clients where they are at,

share power, partner with them, and are described below.

<u>Ability to relate to others with respect, in a nonjudgmental stance</u>

All four social work practitioners emphasized the sub-theme, ability to relate to

others with respect, a nonjudgmental stance, as an essential ability that practitioners must

possess in order to display competent professional performance.

Um, I think part of it is some of that basic respect for a family and their journey.

So that you truly want to know their journey, and hear what happened to them.

Respectfulness, a general respect for human beings in general. That you can accept anyone where they are at....

...really truly believing that you need to have respect for self-determination and human dignity in relationships.

Ability to listen attentively and be fully present

We are listening to them, watching them, communicating....

Attentive listening, what did they emphasize, where did they get teary....

I have never actually thought about it, but I want to be totally empty. I'm just gonna receive what they are telling me, and try to understand it, and be watchful of them and its [what they are saying] meaning to them, and not have my own mind [the practitioner] working on assessing them.

Ability to have a "curious" approach toward clients

...that you [the practitioner] are recognizing there is a uniqueness to a family's journey. They may be African American but that doesn't mean everyone's African American experience is exactly the same. Jumping to stereotypes is important to stay away from; instead, you're asking them what their journey is.

...the ability to appreciate that each person is unique.

Allowing people to handle things differently than you [the practitioner] would, I guess it's the acceptance of difference.

Ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them

All four social work practitioners reported the sub-theme, ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them, as critical to successful client relationships. They relayed the importance of walking with clients, instead of pulling

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them in a specific direction, and emphasized the value of familiarity with the stages of change model.

...but looking at the power that a family has to choose their way towards success, as well that it may not include you. You are trying to engage with them at the front end to give them some confidence that you could be that person who could be on a successful journey with them. Ask the question, 'do you feel like you can work with me at this point?'

This is a partnership and I [the practitioner] value what you think; I want to respect your right to make a decision about this relationship and what we do here.

You are going to stay on the same level as them. The only way you can help someone is to walk beside them, not drag them.

Because sometimes it's a pacing issue, you know, like sometimes you [the practitioner] are trying to find the stage of change they are in, the pace they are willing to take things. Asking what the family is teaching you, shows the whole kind of therapy connectedness, that it has an impact on both parties that are in the relationship.

Theme: Communication with Clients

The theme, communication with clients, was distinctly separate from the theme, communication with colleagues. The focus was primarily on the ability to be assertive and directive in a nonthreatening way and is described below.

...an ability and willingness to raise hard issues with clients.

The other thing too is I think challenging [clients] Anyway, you know, I think challenging people, so when they say something or characterize themselves in a

specific way, we [the practitioner] need to point it out in a non-judgmental, direct, objective way.

Theme: Communication and Collaboration with Colleagues

The theme, communication and collaboration with colleagues, focused specifically on the importance of giving colleagues feedback, as well as consulting with colleagues on a cases. The sub-themes, ability to give colleagues constructive feedback in a nonthreatening manner and seeks out colleagues for consultation and uses teammates as a resource, are described below.

Ability to give colleagues constructive feedback in a nonthreatening way

But I don't see a lot of people that come out with a strong value in 'if my colleague is telling me this and I think they are a little off base' I need to say to them, 'I think you need to talk to your supervisor about that.'

...we [practitioners] need to hold each other accountable, as far as competent and ethical practice goes.

Seeks out colleagues for consultation and uses teammates as resource

Right, so you know you are learning and that implies using teammates, others around you and you are looking for other resources. You are looking for folks who have had different experiences than maybe you have had, so you're learning from someone with some unique experiences that don't match yours.

...and doing the consulting, using your colleagues, using the team, 'I am stuck with this family, Am I on the right path? Am I pushing them too fast? What am I missing?' Those are the kind of things that you can learn from others.

You owe that [evaluating your own work] to the next person that comes in your office, that if you [the practitioner] had a case that didn't work out, you have to have the guts to look at it with your eyes open. Was it something I did or did not do? Is there anything I need to learn? And it is probably a good idea to do that with someone you trust.

Follow-up Interview

After the above categories, themes, and sub-themes had been coded; I met with one interviewee from the subgroup, social work practitioners, and shared the findings. I explained how I had coded the transcribed interviews of all four social work practitioners and displayed the coding structure I had developed. I gave her time to read over and digest the information and then asked for her thoughts on categories, themes and sub-themes. Some of her responses were, "I like the list; it makes good sense to me as well. I think it is a very helpful construct, I like it, I really do."

Following that, I asked her if she saw any relationships between the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. While pointing to a diagram of the four major categories, some of her responses were as follows:

Yeah, I would think, and if you look at it from a school perspective, you know, that it would make good sense that you are doing inventory and educating and supporting skill development in those areas, [self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness] in order to get them to the point where their contact with clients or systems or whatever it is, is successful.

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These [self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness] feel like some

key building blocks that will get you to that fourth quadrant [relationship-

management], and maybe not sequentially, but certainly....

I asked, "So do you think there's an order one in which one learns these three?" She

responded, "I think it can go, self-awareness to self-management, or self-awareness to

social awareness, I mean it could be little arrows going back and forth. Just anecdotally,

those three areas are the key ones you gotta do some pre-work on before you are ready to

step into the client environment."

<u>Summary of Social Work Practitioners Findings</u>

The 35 pages of textual data from the subgroup social work practitioners also

contained detailed descriptions of the individual characteristic and abilities believed to

contribute to competent professional performance. In the intrapersonal dimension, this

group emphasized the themes of self-confidence, specifically the sub-theme, possession

of a healthy sense of self, ego strength, and the theme of emotional self-control,

specifically, the sub-theme, ability to habitually self-observe and monitor internal

emotional responses. While noting the importance of the intrapersonal aspects of

competent professional performance, two of the interviewees recalled their social work

education and were struck by not having learned much about this area prior to their field

placement. Both of the social work practitioners suggested that they thought it would be

helpful to provide some learning activities in the classroom on this topic prior to students

entering field education.

Social work practitioners also emphasized the theme of engagement, specifically,

the two sub-themes, the ability to relate to others with respect, in a nonjudgmental stance

and the ability to meet clients where they are at, partner and share power with clients. They reported that these were essential components of engagement that needed to be mastered before social work theory, stating that if one cannot develop rapport and engage with the client, the theory is really of no use anyway.

The four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management were also viewed by the social work practitioner's group as having a hierarchical relationship between them. It was their perception that self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness were the key building blocks to relationship management. This group did not see any order to the mastery of self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness; rather they described it as a fluid process. They did, however, accentuate the importance of these areas needing to be mastered to some degree before practitioners attempt to master the category of relationship management, especially because of the fact that it usually involves client contact.

Social Work Educators

Social work educators were asked the question "what characteristics and abilities would you use to describe a student who applies social work knowledge, values, and skills in a professionally competent manner?" Their responses were analyzed and are summarized in Table 5 which depicts the coding structure (intrapersonal or interpersonal and level of awareness/characteristic or ability), and the major categories (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). Under each category, the themes are listed. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the textual data that *were not* a component of Goleman et al., (2002) Framework of Emotional and Social

Competence are *italicized.* Each theme is described, followed by its sub-themes, which are portrayed by a narrative account of one or more of the social work educators.

Table 5

Social Work Educator Responses

Social Work Educator	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Characteristics	SELF-AWARENESS	SOCIAL AWARENESS
Levels of Awareness	Emotional awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence	Accurate empathy Organizational awareness
	SELF MANAGEMENT	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Abilities	Emotional self-control Authenticity Flexible thinking Abstract thinking/ masters complex ideas Initiative Optimism	Engagement Communication with clients Collaboration and teamwork with colleagues

Category: Self-Awareness

In the category self-awareness, three themes were discovered: emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. All three themes are found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework. Many of the themes produced several distinct sub-themes. The following is a description of each theme, as well as narratives from that theme or sub-theme.

Theme: Emotional Awareness

The theme emotional awareness portrays a person who is attuned to their inner self and recognizes how their feelings and values impact their job performance (Goleman et al., 2002). Emotional awareness is demonstrated through behaviors such as the ability

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to self-observe, and the awareness of and insight into how personal family of origin issues, personal values and biases, and ones status in relationship to diversity issues impact their job performance. The five sub-themes, awareness of what they are feeling, ability to self-observe, displays insight into family of origin issues, awareness of personal biases and values, and awareness of personal status in relation to diversity issues, are described below.

Awareness of what they are feeling

...to be able to recognize their own level of anxiety.

It could be that I'm[the practitioner] sitting here with a client who is expressing this feeling that triggers in me an emotional response that leaves me less present, and more preoccupied, so I need to be able to reflect on that.

Ability to self-observe

...so self-awareness, lots of being able to observe self.

Displays insight into personal family of origin issues

I think the fundamental skill a student has to have in order to separate themselves is an awareness of their own kind of counter-transference issues. I guess awareness is first, because if we aren't aware, then we don't recognize there may be an issue; so self-awareness and the ability to check their own issues.

Awareness of personal biases and values

All four social work educators reported the sub-theme, awareness of personal biases and values. Educators indicated that it was essential to address the area of personal values and biases with students; however, they noted that classroom discussions could be

difference and then we lay it on heavy about what social workers do and ought to believe without realizing how threatening that is to their very identity, so they go into shame, and they close off and they shut out and cut us off, and then it is very hard to drag them along.

<u>Awareness of personal status in relation to diversity issues</u>

…personal work the students may have done, I think is to work on their ability to see that there are multiple ways to do things, multiple ways of seeing the world. Students who have accepted the importance of diversity and what diversity represents to themselves and to their clients [said in response to clarification regarding students having an awareness of how their clients may view them].

<u>Theme: Accurate Self-Assessment</u>

The theme accurate self-assessment portrays a person who has a high level of self-awareness, including knowledge of their strengths and limitations, as well as the ability to gracefully accept feedback from others their work performance (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes, awareness of strengths and limitations and open and receptive to feedback, are described below.

<u>Awareness of personal strengths and limitations</u>

I think they [students] have to know how other people perceive them, and what it is about them that, um that comes through as a potentially healthy person. They have to know even in their non-verbals how other people perceive them. And that self-awareness again, is a really hard thing to teach.

They [students] have this ability to self-reflect, so it's not just that they can assess clients, they can also assess themselves. So then, when they are not able to meet

difficult to maneuver due to strong feelings and opposing views. Some of the educator's responses follow.

Students have to work on his or her values in terms of what's right and wrong. What's accepted and not accepted behaviorally. Awareness of their own values, things they have internalized as a child growing up without being aware that they have internalized those things. Otherwise, when they look at things from someone else's perspective, a behavior, they may see that behavior as deviant. But, it'd be a student who has the value, um, to look at differences as not negative, but look at differences as just another way.

It's this ability to know how you were raised, and realize that there are other ways they can try out, and see how it feels, see how it fits.

I have students in a classroom all the time that I think, how in the world can you behave the way you are behaving in this classroom, how in the world can you make the comments that you are making that are so insensitive to how other people are perceiving them? How can you even make comments that reflect that kind of bias in your thinking process? And yet, it is really hard to bring that up, because all of a sudden it gets personalized.

Understanding that the human condition is not gonna always be about your values. So when you get assaulted by someone else's values, you can either be open to understanding them as part of a continuum of values, or you are gonna shut down and judge them as being wrong and you are right.

I think part of our trouble here in social work [education] is that we [social work educators] take these students who have had fairly sheltered exposure to

the client's needs, they don't pathologize the client as being so sick nobody can help them, instead they are really able to see that I have limitations in either my knowledge or my training, or you know the system.

They [students] are not reflecting on how they impact people, so they just rigidly, um, say similar things regardless of how ineffective or oppressive or insensitive it could be, and no matter how many times you teach them the model, no matter how many times you talk to them about what an ideal social work interaction or interview would look like they just don't get it.

<u>Open and receptive to feedback about performance</u>

All four social work educators reported the sub-theme, open and receptive to feedback about performance, and stated that this was a noticeably difficult area for students. Some educators mentioned the possibility of grade inflation having an impact on student expectations.

...aware of their limitations, aware enough of their limitations with the ability to accept feedback. To make whatever adjustments need to be made without feeling wounded; without feeling so wounded that they are stagnated in their own growth.

So the ability to not personalize, but to stand back and take someone's criticism, which is meant constructively and see it for what it is, is a really hard thing. A growing number of students don't really have that skill.

<u>Theme: Self-Confidence</u>

The theme, self confidence, portrays a person who self-assured and confident in their ability to accomplish the work set before them (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes found within this theme, the possession of a strong sense of self-worth and

comfortable not knowing it all/able to make mistakes without losing faith in their

competence are described below.

Possession of a strong sense of self-worth

You are able to have um, confidence in yourself. That's what it looks like to me, the ability to have confidence in oneself.

And I think that is the most important thing, their own comfort level in terms of their level of confidence in themselves.

Comfortable "not knowing it all", able to make mistakes without losing faith in their competence

There has to be sort of a general flexibility and openness to the world to try out new ideas, you know, it's the whole idea that if I [student] come in rigidly fixed and I already know I'm fine, I don't need to look at myself and you [social work educator] need to do it my way or the highway.

We talk about being able to make a mistake and being accepting of that, because you recognize that from that mistake, growth can occur. So we don't make a mistake and be accepting of it and do nothing with it. We make a mistake and grow from it. It's about a willingness to make an error and learn from the error.

Category: Self-Management

In the category self-management, six themes emerged: emotional self-control, authenticity, flexible thinking, abstract thing/masters complex ideas, initiative and optimism. Five themes are found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework; abstract thinking/masters complex ideas is the only theme that is not. Four of the themes produced several distinct sub-themes. The following is a description of each theme, as well as narratives from that theme or sub-theme.

<u>Theme: Emotional Self-Control</u>

<u>Ability to habitually self-observe and monitor their internal emotional responses</u>

… that middle ground in that session that helps us to observe, to observe self in the process and if we are observing self, then we know that this is perhaps something that um, the client exhumes, whatever that behavior or effort is that is coming out in you. Whatever those thoughts are, you are affected by what that client is saying in the same way that that client is affecting someone else.

So those thoughts that you are having about yourself [the student] during that time is key. What are those thoughts and how are you using those thoughts in that session? Are you able to separate your thoughts and really hear what the client is saying, because sometimes when the client is talking about something and you are thinking about something else.

Ability to let the client own the problem, does not take client's behavior personally

I think a person [student] who knows they aren't responsible for every decision that's made. That, uh, that there are so many environmental pieces that comes into play in the person's life that you have to be able to choose what your role is in things, even if your choices have been good or bad, but to be able to dissect what that means to you.

…and they have to establish clear boundaries; otherwise I think the student would feel so overwhelmed and not know what to do. They have to give the problem back to the client, the problem is not theirs [the student's], it's the client's.

Ability to take risks

To me, it is worth the risk, because the risk is calculated. It isn't like we [social work educators] are throwing you out there saying you could kill yourself and everyone else. We are saying you are in an environment where risk is calculated by your supervision.

Instead of being stuck at, "I can't, because I never have!" they have the energy to say, "I haven't, but I'm willing to try [taking a risk]."

Ability to adapt to change/tolerate ambiguity

All four social work educators reported the sub-theme, ability to adapt to change/tolerate ambiguity, and indicated that the inability to master this ability directly impacted their success in field education.

I also think that people who are, I don't know, the opposite of rigid, those that are less rigid and 'flexible' is even a little different for me, but we could put that in there I guess, we could say the less rigid person. Um, I work with students sometimes who can think outside the box, who can take two or three directions and work with it, instead of having to have the whole synopsis laid out before them about who is here, you are meeting here, this is what you will do, and here is how it will end. Students who are willing to be, to not know what the end will be. ... to be able to respond to flexibility without being angry, irritated, or feeling ripped off.

Students who need every single detail laid out, when they get into field, feel absolutely naked and exposed, because it isn't laid out. And so, I think academically, we have to continue to push our students to understand that that's

not how our job works. They aren't gonna know every detail. Things are gonna be different with every single person. That this is not a cookie cutter profession, where you learn one way of applying the strengths perspective and that's the only way you ever do it. That with every single person you meet, theory will be important, but it will be applicable numerous ways.

...but again, the more concrete thinkers, and the younger inexperienced students, they want specific concrete suggestions. They say, "Tell me what to do." It's really hard for me [social work educator] and they don't like it when I look at them and say, "I can't tell you what to do. Now in some instances, I can, but even if I tell you, it doesn't mean you are gonna be able to do it in the same way I can do it."

Theme: Authenticity

The theme, authenticity, is portrayed by a person who is comfortable in their own skin and has a professional demeanor that is genuine, open, and relaxed (Goleman et al., 2002). The three sub-themes, displays genuine openness to others, is comfortable with themselves, and relates to others in a relaxed manner are included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework. All four social work educators reported on least one, if not more, of the sub-themes and indicated that students can struggle with this area particularly when they are over focused on keeping professional boundaries.

Displays a genuine openness to others

Successful students have openness about them, instead of defensiveness or a closed nature when things come up. They are open, and again, if you feel good enough about yourself then you become more creative too and we still are an art.

…that they [students] are so busy protecting their personal self and trying to be professional, that they don't understand you can't get the professional without going through the personal. So if you have every intervention in the world, but you don't understand you are brother and sister to the person you are talking to, it completely fails as far as I'm concerned.

Is comfortable with themselves

I mean, it is a matter of being comfortable with who you are and knowing it isn't a threat to clients and clients aren't a threat to you.

I think they need to be able to feel comfortable with themselves.

Relates to others in a relaxed manner

I would see as a sense of optimism and humor.

I love humor and so, if I can have some interaction that makes me feel better, they are probably going to feel better too.

Theme: Flexible Thinking

The theme, flexible thinking, is portrayed by a person who is able to smoothly handle multiple demands, adapt their responses to fit fluid circumstances and possess a flexible thinking style (Goleman et al., 2002). The four sub-themes, displays flexible thinking patterns, utilizes multiple personal styles, utilizes multiple theories, and can think quickly are all referred to indirectly in Goleman et al., (2002) framework. All four social work educators emphasized the theme, flexible thinking and reported distinct abilities leading me to divide the sub-themes more precisely than had been done previously in the subgroups of field instructors and social work practitioners. Below are narratives describing the sub-themes.

Displays flexible thinking patterns

It comes down to really critical thinking. So the supervisor told you that, but you get in there and that's not what you are seeing. That you [the student] have the insight and the critical thought behind what you are doing, to say, uh, this is going a different way and I'm alone in the room here, but by my observations and my assessment, this is going somewhere else and I need to go with it.

Ability to utilize multiple personal styles

...that they [students] have actual interpersonal skills that are flexible, so that they know when to use a soft voice and supportive and know when to be assertive. They are responsive; they have a wide range of interpersonal responses available to them.

Ability to utilize multiple theories

So you need to find a theory that is gonna guide you, I can't tell you what that theory is. I can only give you four or five that are probably gonna be helpful to you, but um, again the complexity of what we are dealing with is such that you have to have a whole range of tools besides just your sense of self when you go into a relationships with a client.

...be assessing client needs on one hand, and then thinking, okay what are the range of theoretical approaches I can use to help this client get their needs met.

Can think quickly

...and so part of the brightness, I think contributes to the ability to think really quickly. And in today's world, with the high case loads that we have, you have to

be able to put together an assessment and recommend treatment interventions very quickly.

Theme: Abstract Thinking/Masters Complex Ideas

The ability to think abstractly

The higher intelligence leads to a greater ability to see abstractly and see things from an abstract perspective and I think that really benefits people who are in a clinical situation. And I think that those abstract thinking skills lead them to a better ability to understand the social work theory.

Ability to consider polar opposites and critically evaluate benefits and risks at the same time

They can hold polar opposite ideas in their mind at the same time, they can critically evaluate the benefits and risks both ways and at the same time, so it sort of begins as a cognitive process.

The ability to understand complex needs and complex options

All four social work educators accentuated the need for students to possess the sub-theme, the ability to understand complex needs and complex options. They reported that some students have a difficult time with this concept.

...to understand complex needs and complex options.

...is a student who has cognitive abilities that permit the understanding and mastery of complex ideas and theories. They [students] need to start with cognitive talents that can embrace complexity, master complexity.

Its one thing to understand sort of the concrete steps of what you do; it is a totally different thing to understand the theory behind those steps. And I think at higher levels of intervention, theory gives us perspective, it contributes to assessment,

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and that's the other piece, human behavior is exceedingly complex and I don't think there are any simple solutions.

Theme: Initiative

The theme, initiative, is portrayed by a person who seizes opportunities and actively seeks them out instead of waiting for something to come to them (Goleman et al., 2002) and is described below.

I would say that they don't have to be directed, but they have that self-starting eagerness and energy.

Students who really want to learn who are really motivated. They read and they research beyond what is expected in the classroom.

The first one I would say is a sense of eagerness and energy. I think there needs to be a sense of life that our clients and our professional field site supervisors see in the student that lets them know there is an energy there about learning, about approaching the population

Theme: Optimism

The theme optimism is portrayed by a person who sees others positively, and is persistent in pursing goals despite obstacles and setbacks along the way (Goleman et al., 2002) and is described below.

...an ability to engender hope.

... to come at life as a social worker thinking, I'm stepping into a pessimistic world and I bring with me optimism to balance that out. Everything in this person's life could be so negative, and I have a chance to bring in a flashlight into this darkness with my optimism by pointing out strengths, by saying, this isn't the

end, that there are things that can be done. And I may not know what they are experiencing now but for starters I'm gonna partner with you. You have nothing else, no hope, its all bleak out there, but you know what, now you aren't alone. For students to come at it with some optimism and some energy.

<u>Category: Social-Awareness</u>

In the category social awareness two themes were found, accurate empathy, organizational awareness. Both themes are found in the Emotional and Social Competence Framework. Each theme produced two distinct sub-themes from which narratives will be shared.

<u>Theme: Accurate Empathy</u>

The theme accurate empathy is portrayed by a person who is able to accurately sense what others' are feeling and understand their perspective (Goleman et al., 2002). The two sub-themes, ability to step outside oneself emotionally and take the others perspective and the ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues are included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework and are described below.

<u>Ability to step outside one's self emotionally and take the other's perspective</u>

You have to be able to put yourself in the other person's shoes.

… to have empathy, to understand how they feel, both the funny part and the sad part.

<u>The ability to read others verbal and nonverbal cues</u>

… and that they can read social cues.

Theme: Organizational Awareness

The theme organizational awareness is portrayed by a person who is sensitive to the emotional undercurrents and key power relationships in a group. They also understand the context and values that the organization operates within (Goleman et al., (2002). Narrative accountings from social work educators are below.

I think you jolly well better love what you do. The need to change yourself, to become somewhat of a different person than you are, I find the energy to do that comes when you love this stuff. And we have a fair number of people that come into this field because they didn't get into something else.

When you talk to them, [those who have a passion for social work] they're here it in part because they want to do better, because they love it. It is a passion with them. This is not just a way to make a living or to pay some bills.

…but it comes down to the desire-because desire is huge, people know if you want to talk to them or not. There has to be a desire to connect.

Category: Relationship-Management

In the category relationship management, three themes were found: engagement, communication with clients, and communication and collaboration with colleagues. The themes, engagement and communication are not included in Goleman et al., (2002) framework, however, the aspect of collaboration with colleagues is. The themes produced several distinct sub-themes from which narratives will be shared.

Theme: Engagement

The theme engagement was seen as an essential component of competent professional performance. Three sub-themes emerged, the ability to relate to others in a

nonjudgmental and trustworthy manner, the ability to listen attentively and be fully present, and the ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them, and are described below.

Ability to relate to others with respect, in a nonjudgmental and trustworthy manner

I also think about the dignity and worth of the person, that we are looking at people, for their own humanity, that everyone is valued regardless of what that person's status is in life.

… that I care, that I see you, I know your name, you aren't invisible, because I know you must feel invisible sometime.

… having a nonthreatening stance.

Ability to listen attentively and be fully present

So the student who is willing to listen, so engaging is the ability to listen. Listen to the client's story. Reframe the client's story so that the client knows you are actually listening.

The ability to really hear what the client is saying.

…and their [students] ability to hear things and to process it.

Ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them

I think students really have to know that they go into this relationship with the client as co-equals. You know, from students sometimes, when I read papers, they talk about empowerment but I think they misinterpret what empowerment is. It's a two-way conversation where both people grow through it. The student and the therapist grow through that experience, as well as the client.

Theme: Communication

The theme, communication, was distinctly separate from the theme, communication with colleagues. The focus was primarily on the ability to be articulate and is described below.

The students who are able to engage in conversation with ease.

The ability to verbalize what you're thinking in a coherent manner. I'm thinking of a student right now who mumbles a great deal.

...and they [students] are also good teachers in the sense that they can phrase things and help people see things not only in a reframed perspective but then, help people see how it can be different or better or improved

Theme: Communication and Collaboration with Colleagues

The theme, communication and collaboration with colleagues, focused specifically on the importance of students seeking actively seeking out supervisors, colleagues, and faculty for feedback and professional growth and development and is described below.

Just in terms of the respect you need to have for people who have gone before you and a lot of students don't seem to have anymore and yet it really contributes to success. When you go to someone who is experienced and you show them a listening ear and you care about what they have done and you indicate that you really want to learn from them....

There is a decreasing number of students, because I think of the culture they have been raised in, they don't have that respect. It is almost a disdain sometimes for what has gone before.

You are partnering with your field supervisor, they have the power, they have the insight, and they have the call. But still you are equally responsible in supervision; to be supervised is not sitting dead in the chair getting feedback. It is an active role to be the supervisee. That you must be prepared to get supervision, you must be assertive in supervision, you must keep a list of questions for supervision, that it is an active role to receive supervision.

Follow-up Interview

After the above categories, themes, and sub-themes had been coded; I met with one interviewee from the subgroup, social work educators, for the follow-up interview. I shared the findings, explaining how I had coded the transcribed interviews of all four social work educators, while I displaying the coding structure I had developed. I gave the social work educator time to read over and digest the information and then asked for her thoughts on categories, themes and sub-themes. She was positive about the findings and liked how the responses were organized.

Next, I asked her if she saw any relationships between the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. She responded,

...as far as teaching, I think we focus on this [relationship management] the most. We do teach these [self-awareness and social awareness] some, but we need to get better at it. We teach self-management the least; we really need to do more of this. I think these are the foundation [self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness] and this [relationship management] is the vehicle for competent professional performance.

When asked if she thought there was an order to the three foundation blocks, she responded,

> I think you can move back and forth between the three, but you have to start here [self-management] because if you don't have the cognitive piece, [the themes of flexible thinking and abstract thinking/masters complex ideas] you won't be able to get here [relationship management] no matter what.

Summary of Social Work Educators Findings

The 22 pages of textual data from the subgroup social work educators were noticeably fewer and less rich than that of the field instructors or the social work practitioners. This finding makes sense given the nature of the educator's role and the limited, if any, access to actually observing social work students "in action."

That withstanding, the social work educator's narrative accountings emphasized the intrapersonal categories of self-awareness and self-management. In the category of self-awareness, theme of emotional awareness was accentuated, specifically, the sub-themes, ability to display insight into family of origin issues and awareness of personal values and biases. In the category of self-management, social work educators emphasized two themes. The theme of authenticity, specifically, the sub-theme, and the ability to be comfortable with ones self was mentioned by all four social work educators. Within the theme, flexible thinking, two sub-themes were accentuated, the ability to utilize multiple theories and the ability to understand complex needs and complex options.

It is interesting to note that no themes or sub-themes were articulated by social work educators in the interpersonal categories of social awareness or relationship management. Perhaps this is due to the classroom setting where social work educators

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primarily engage with students. The central focus is the individual student's academic mastery, and there is limited, if any, opportunity to observe and assess students' level of social awareness or relationship management skills.

Similar to the other two subgroups, the social work educators reported a hierarchical relationship between the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. It was their perception that self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness served as the foundation for the category of relationship management. Relationship management was seen as "the vehicle" for competent professional performance. Social work educators did not believe self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness needed to be mastered in any particular order; rather, they also perceived it as a fluid process. They did, however; view the mastery of the cognitive theme, flexible thinking, specifically, the two sub-themes, the ability to utilize multiple theories and the ability to understand complex needs and complex options, as crucial to the development of competent professional performance.

<u>All Social Work Professionals</u>

The themes and sub-themes from the three sub-groups, field instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators were integrated into one format and are displayed in Table 6. There are a combined total of 16 themes, 10 of which are intrapersonal and six of which are interpersonal. The intrapersonal themes contain a total of 32 distinct sub-themes and the interpersonal themes contain a total of 19 distinct sub-themes (See Appendix G & Appendix H).

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Table 6

All Social Work Professionals

Social Work Professionals	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Characteristics	SELF-AWARENESS	SOCIAL AWARENESS
Levels of Awareness	Emotional awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence	Accurate empathy Organizational awareness Basic Professionalism
	SELF MANAGEMENT	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Abilities	Emotional self-control Authenticity Flexible thinking Abstract thinking/ masters complex ideas Initiative Optimism Investment in Professional growth	Engagement Communication with clients Collaboration and teamwork with colleagues

Theoretical Outcomes

In response to the research question's goal of identifying and defining the

characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance, the

selective coding phase of data analysis focused on the relationship between the major

categories and the phenomenon of professional performance. Figure 2 displays the four

major categories; the arrows indicate the relationships between the categories and the

central concept of this study, competent professional performance.
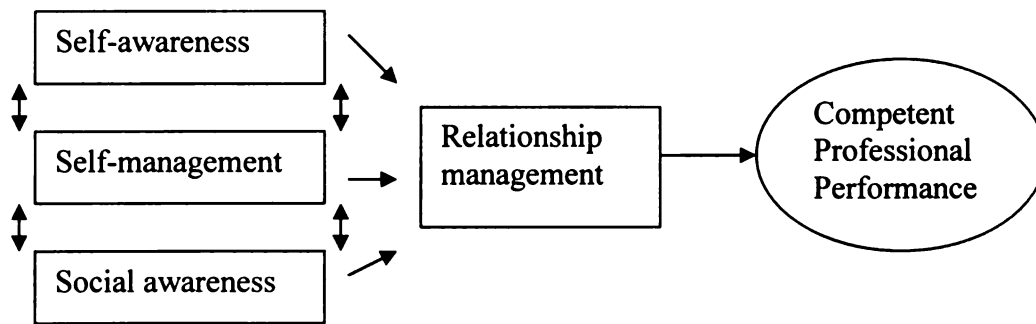
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Abilities and Characteristics that Contribute to
Competent Professional Performance.

The arrows in Figure 2 denote a beginning level of theory development,

indicating that the mastery of the characteristics and abilities found within the categories

of self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness precede the mastery of the

characteristics and abilities found within the category of relationship management

The arrow which begins at relationship management and points to competent professional

performance indicates that the mastery of all four categories contributes to competent

professional performance. Consistent with grounded theory, this conceptual framework is

not intended to be an exhaustive description of the abilities and characterisitics that

contribute to competent professional performance, but rather an organized way to

illustrate the categories and themes that emerged from the data and the relationships that

surfaced between them (La Rossa, 2006). Chapter Five presents an overview of the

findings and the overarching themes that emerged, along with a discussion of the

limitations and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The narrative accountings of the field instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators were very valuable in helping this researcher identify and define the characterisitics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. The following chapter includes a discussion of the findings through the lens of the four major categories. Each category's themes and sub-themes are displayed in a table format, while a narrative description highlights the commonalities and differences among the each of the distinct subgroups. Overarching themes are discussed as well as the limitations and implications of this research.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the first category in the intrapersonal domain and within it are the three themes of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence. As seen in Table 7 within each theme are several specific sub-themes. In the theme of emotional awareness, field instructors, practitioners, and social work educators all indentified the sub-themes of insight into family of origin issues, awareness of personal biases and values, and awareness of personal status in relationship to diversity. In the theme of self-confidence, all three subgroups indentified the sub-themes of strong sense of self-worth, ego strength, and the ability to make mistakes, comfortable not "knowing it all."

Within the theme of accurate self-assessment, two of its sub-themes, awareness of personal strength and limitations and openness and receptivity to feedback about performance were identified by both field instructors and social work educators.

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Table 7

Self-Awareness

SELF-AWARENESS	Field Instructors	Social Work Practitioners	Social Work Educators
EMOTIONAL AWARENESS			
Awareness of what they are feeling		X	X
Ability to self-observe	X		X
Insight into family of origin issues	X	X	X
Awareness of personal biases and values	X	X	X
Awareness of personal status in relationship to diversity	X	X	X
ACCURATE SELF-ASSESSMENT			
Awareness of personal strength and limitations	X		X
Openness and receptivity to feedback about performance	X		X
Ability to engage in self-reflection		X	
SELF-CONFIDENCE			
Strong sense of self-worth, ego strength	X	X	X
Ability to make mistakes, comfortable not "knowing it all"	X	X	X

Self-Management

Self-management is the second category in the intrapersonal domain and within it are

seven the themes of emotional self-control, authenticity, adaptability/flexibility, abstract

thinking/mastery of complex ideas, investment in professional growth, initiative, and

optimism. As seen in Table 8 within each theme are several specific sub-themes.

In the theme of emotional self-control, the only sub-theme identified by all three

subgroups was the ability to self-observe and monitor internal emotional responses. The

sub-themes, the ability to separate personal and professional issues and the ability to

manage personal stress were mentioned by both field instructors and social work

practitioners, whereas the sub-theme, the ability to let client's "own the problem," was mentioned by social work practitioners and social work educators.

In the theme of authenticity, all three subgroups identified sub-themes; however none of the subgroups identified the same sub-themes. In the theme, adaptability/flexible thinking, all three subgroups identified the sub-theme has flexible thinking patterns: ability to use multiple personal styles and multiple theories; ability to problem-solve when there is a need to change plans. The theme of abstract thinking/mastery of complex ideas, along with its two subthemes, was identified only by the subgroup, social work educators. The theme, investment in professional growth was identified by the field instructors and the social work practitioners, and the theme, initiative was identified by the field instructors and social work educators. Finally, the theme optimism was identified by all three subgroups.

Table 8

Self-Management

SELF-MANAGEMENT	Field Instructors	Social Work Practitioners	Social Work Educators
EMOTIONAL SELF-CONTROL			
Ability to self-observe and monitor internal emotional responses	x	x	x
Ability to separate personal and professional issues	x	x	
Ability to let client's "own the problem"		x	x
Ability to take risks	x		
Ability to manage personal stress	x	x	
Ability to be intentional and deliberate vs. reactive		x	
Ability to adapt to change and tolerate ambiguity			x

Table 8 Self-Management Continued

AUTHENTICITY			
Ability to be comfortable with self	x		x
Ability to relate to others in a relaxed manner	x		x
Displays genuine openness to others, hospitable		x	x
Ability to use humor and light heartedness		x	
ADAPATABILITY/ FLEXIBILITY			
Flexible thin king patterns: ability to use multiple personal styles and multiple theories; ability to problem-solve when there is a need to change plans	x	x	x
Ability to hear the story and discern what all the pieces mean as a whole, and discern what pieces have clinical significance	x		
Ability to generalize knowledge to new and different situations	x		
Ability to think creatively and use metaphors		x	
Ability to think quickly			x
ABILITY TO THINK ABSTRACTLY/MASTER COMPLEX IDEAS Ability to think abstractly			x
Ability to consider polar opposites and evaluate benefits and risks simultaneously			x
Ability to understand complex needs and complex options			x
INVESTMENT IN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH	x	x	
INITIATIVE	x		x
OPTIMISM	x	x	x

<u>Social Awareness</u>

Social Awareness is the first category in the interpersonal domain and within it are the three themes of basic professionalism, accurate empathy and organizational awareness. As seen in Table 9 within each theme are several specific sub-themes. The theme basic professionalism, which includes the sub-themes of awareness of appropriate work attire, awareness of body language and demeanor, preparation and organization, and promptness and dependability, was identified solely by subgroup field instructors. In the theme of accurate empathy, the two sub-themes, ability to step outside one's self emotionally and take the others perspective and ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues, were identified by all three subgroups. In the theme organizational awareness, social work practitioners and social work educators both identified the sub-theme, conscious awareness of social work values and ethics.

Table 9

Social Awareness

SOCIAL AWARENESS	Field Instructors	Social Work Practitioners	Social Work Educators
BASIC PROFESSIONALISM			
Awareness of appropriate work attire	x		
Awareness of body language and demeanor	x		
Preparation and organization	x		
Promptness and dependability	x		
ACCURATE EMPATHY			
Ability to step outside one's self emotionally and take the others perspective	x	x	x
Ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues	x	x	x

Table 9 Social Awareness Continued

ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS			
Awareness of practice issues within an agency context		x	
Conscious awareness of social work values and ethics		x	x

Relationship Management

Relationship Management is the second category in the interpersonal domain and within it are the four themes of engagement, communication, communication with clients, and communication with colleagues. As seen in Table 10 within each theme are several specific sub-themes. In the theme of engagement, all three subgroups identified the sub-themes ability to relate to others with respect in a nonjudgmental and trustworthy manner, ability to listen attentively and be fully present and ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them. The sub-theme, ability to have a curious approach toward clients, was identified by field instructors as well as social work practitioners. In the theme, communication, field instructors and social work educators both identified all five of the following sub-themes, ability to be articulate, ability to be assertive, ability to give others feedback in a constructive manner, ability to be receptive and open to others' ideas and feedback, and displays professional documentation skills. It is interesting to note that the subgroup, social work practitioners, did not identify this theme in a general context, but did so as the two distinct themes of communication with clients and communication with colleagues.

Relationship Management

Table 10

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	Field Instructors	Social Work Practitioners	Social Work Educators
ENGAGEMENT			
Ability to relate to others with respect in a nonjudgmental and trustworthy manner	x	x	x
Ability to listen attentively and be fully present	x	x	x
Ability to have a curious approach toward clients	x	x	
Ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them	x	x	x
COMMUNICATION			
Ability to be articulate	x		x
Ability to be assertive	x		x
Ability to give others feedback in a constructive manner	x		x
Ability to be receptive and open to others' ideas and feedback	x		x
Displays professional documentation skills	x		x
COMMUNICATION WITH CLIENTS		x	
COMMUNICATION WITH COLLEAUGES	x	x	x

Overarching Themes

Surprises

During the data collection process, two unexpected occurrences took place that are worthy of mention. First, I began this research study with the assumption that my interest in the individual characteristic and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance was not widespread and the concern that thoughts on the topic may be difficult to articulate. I expected that I would have to encourage interviewees' to

think about and discuss this topic with me. I was pleasantly surprised to find that my assumptions and concerns were false, and was energized by the high level of interest and eagerness that the interviewees from all three subgroups displayed about discussing the topic of professional performance. Several participants voiced having previously thought about this topic and were passionate about the stories they wanted to share. Although the stories were illustrative, at times, it was necessary to refocus the interview to the description of the characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners.

The second surprise was the abundance of specific characteristics and abilities believed to contribute to competent professional performance described by the interviewees. Table 6, previously displayed, depicts the four major categories and their respective themes. In total, 10 intrapersonal themes were found, including a total of 32 distinct sub-themes (See Appendix G). Six interpersonal themes were discovered, including a total of 19 distinct sub-themes (See Appendix H).

As noted previously, due to the magnitude of data collected, a coding structure was developed using the research question, specifically, the terms, characterisitics and abilities, and also the delineation between intrapersonal and interpersonal concepts (See Table 2). This coding structure was modeled after the four quadrant framework developed by Goleman (1996); however, I replaced the terms awareness and action, with the terms characteristics/levels of awareness and abilities, and also replaced the terms personal competence and social competence, with the terms intrapersonal and interpersonal. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the textual data were also very similar to those espoused in Goleman's (1996) model of Emotional and Social

Competence which is grounded in Boyatzis's (1982) research that is based on more than 2,000 people from more than 12 organizations. Although not all the components of Goleman's (1996) model of Emotional and Social Competence were present in the findings, there appear to be multiple correlations between it and the characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. It would be beneficial to further explore Goleman's model in light of the fact that he and Boyatzis have developed the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory which could be a tool Social Work Programs may wish to consider using.

Although a constellation of personal characteristics emerged in the Bogo et al. (2006) study, she did not consider them to be competencies. Given that Goleman (1996) and Boyatzis's (1982) research clearly defines emotional and social competencies, and the fact that many of the characteristics and abilities that emerged in this study are analogous to those competencies, it would seem appropriate to define them as competencies. The research literature in the area of gatekeeping (Gibbs, 1994, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Ryan, Habibis & Craft, 1998) urges social work to define the personal characteristics that contribute to competent professional performance, as there is currently very little know criteria developed in this area. EPAS mandates that Social Work Programs have criteria for evaluating professional performance and the new 2008 EPAS includes ten core competencies (See Appendix F) which are to be incorporated into the curriculum, along with methods to assess social work students' mastery of them. The multitude of characteristics and abilities uncovered in this study appear to be a beginning step in filling this void.

Intrapersonal Building Blocks

Another overarching theme emerged when considering all 12 social work professionals as a group. There was significant value placed on the intrapersonal characteristics/levels of awareness and abilities reported in the categories of self-awareness and self-management. The field instructor sub-group's voiced a desire for social work students to possess a beginning level of understanding and mastery of intrapersonal competence prior to beginning field placement. This finding validates the research of Ryan et al., (2006) which indicates that standard admission criteria do not correlate with a student's success in field education, we cannot assume that all persons admitted to social work programs have the minimal level of intrapersonal awareness needed to embark on the journey of becoming a professional social work practitioner. Perhaps the findings from this study can serve as a foundation for delineating criteria for professional performance, as well as developing curriculum that supports the acquisition of its intrapersonal foundation.

Social work practitioners also emphasized the need for an increased understanding and mastery of intrapersonal competence on the part of social work students. Their emphasis on the mastery of intrapersonal skills is important to note, as they are referring to the recent social work graduates with whom they have contact, or in some cases, who they supervise. This observation may suggest that some social work students are passing their field placement, while still possessing noticeable deficits in their intrapersonal competencies. This finding has potential implications for field performance evaluations and field seminar curriculum that will be discussed later in this chapter.

It is important to note that the characteristics and abilities reported in the two intrapersonal categories of self-awareness and self-management were viewed as essential building blocks to the development of relationship management skills and subsequently competent professional performance. This finding validates Goleman's interpretation of the Emotional and Social Intelligence Framework. According to Goleman et al., (2002), the competencies in the domain of self-awareness must be mastered first, as they facilitate the development of the competencies in the domains of self-management and social awareness. Additionally, they purport that the competencies in relationship management are difficult to achieve without first mastering the other three domains (Goleman et al., 2002).

An additional element of this finding was that both, field instructors and social work practitioners articulated the necessity of students and/or practitioners attaining minimal competency in the levels of awareness and abilities reported in the categories of self-awareness and self-management, *prior* to any client contact. This is somewhat incongruent with the standard sequencing of social work curriculum, where it is assumed that field education, specifically, the student's relationship with the field instructor, is the primary venue where these intrapersonal skills are developed (Caspi & Reid 2002; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

The subgroup of social work educators interviewed, also articulated that they believed the student's mastery of intrapersonal skills takes place in field education and verbalized the difficulty of trying to teach such competencies in the classroom. Some of their remarks follow:

...and again, that's why I said earlier, I'm intrigued by what you are doing and I hope you give me a chance to hear more about what you find. I have not found those things [intrapersonal abilities] to be able to taught. I can make people aware of the need for them, I can give them words to describe something they don't understand, but to be able to teach somebody to get outside of themselves, I don't know how to do that. I think field probably is a place you can get into it. It's so hard to get into it in a classroom.

...that's why we have internships, because that's where students can grow and learn and come to understand themselves [Said in response to a discussion on self-awareness].

Theory Practice Disconnect

The final overarching theme that emerged out of the textual data from the interviews of 12 social work professionals was the correlation between the depth and richness of the interviewees' responses and their access to observing students or practitioners "in-action," as well as whether or not they, themselves, are currently engaged in social work practice. This correlation is illustrated by the fact that the field instructors, who had the most in depth and detailed responses, serve in the role of educator and are practitioners. They not only observe students "in action," they, themselves, are also engaging in social work practice. In addition, in their role as field instructor, they explain the implicit underpinnings of "how" to engage in social work practice. Social work practitioners, who had the second most in depth and detailed responses, are also actively engaging in and observing competent professional performance "in action."

Social work educators' examples of the individual characteristic and abilities they believed to contribute to competent professional performance were not as in depth or detailed. However, given most educators limited access to observing students "in action," and the fact that most social work educators no longer have time to engage in social work practice given the requirements of scholarship, this finding makes sense and further validates the importance of bridging the theory practice disconnect.

Also of relevance to this overarching theme is that social work educators emphasized the cognitive theme of flexible thinking, specifically honing in on the importance of the two sub-themes, the ability to utilize multiple theories and the ability to understand complex needs and complex options. Additionally, in response to the question about any perceived relationships between the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, social work educators reported that the category of self-management, specifically, the cognitive theme of flexible thinking was crucial to the development of competent professional performance. This finding mirrors Goldstein's (2001) frustration about the primarily theoretical content of most social work courses. His belief that this could possibly be a stumbling block to the successful application of classroom learning to the field practice setting is supported by the findings of this study.

The social work educators responses regarding the importance of the cognitive theme, flexible thinking, makes sense given that in current social work courses, much of the course content requires students to have flexible cognitive abilities and abstract thinking skills in order to master it. Perhaps it would be wise to revisit the philosophy of some of the early social work education programs whose curriculum included addressing

the mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities in the classroom as well as in field education. Finally, in a side discussion with one of interviewees from the subgroup, social work educators, about the importance of the mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities as a foundation for competent professional performance, this comment was made,

> I also want to just say, when we are talking about academic and professional performance, I'm afraid we are too often waiting for field to be the giver of the professional performance evaluation. And for many [students], it is too late by then. And our system seems to say, oh well, we got them through with all their A's academically and now they are in field pooping out; we can't now say you can't be a social worker. So, if we are only using professional evaluation in the field for performance, we are gonna continue to run into problems. We have to find more experiential ways in classrooms academically to test and teach and prepare students to build these skills and be more prepared for field.

Implications

Limitations

When considering the limitations of this study, one must take into account the small sample size (n=12) and be mindful of the fact that the findings are not generalizable to all social work professionals. Transferability of findings, however, may be permissible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe transferability as a function of the similarity between contexts, meaning that if two separate contexts are sufficiently congruent, then the working hypothesis form one context may be applicable to the other. In view of that fact,

the findings and implications from this study, may be transferable to other social work programs.

An additional limitation is the homogeneity of the sample. Although the research question and methods called for a purposive sample, the subgroups of social work professionals selected for the study all reside in the same general geographic area and were not intentionally selected for their gender, race, age or other factors. Consequently, this is not a representative sample.

Selection bias is also an important topic to consider. Field instructors, social work practitioners, and social work educators who responded to the e-mail inviting them to participate in the study, may be over representative of social work professionals who believe that specific individual characterisitics and abilities contribute to competent professional competence. In fact, two of the interviewees indicated that they had previously thought about the topic at hand.

The internal validity of the study may have been threatened by the interviewees' desire to assist this researcher with the study due to a professional relationship between the two parties. Steps were taken to avoid this, however, as with any qualitative study, there is the risk that interviewees may present information in a way that they believe is pleasing to the interviewer.

Finally, it would be remiss not to address the potential threat of researcher bias, given the interpretative nature of this study and the fact that this researcher has herself, functioned in the role of field instructor, social work practitioner and social work educator. Reflexive memo writing, an end of the interview check-in with each interviewee, a follow-up interview with one interviewee from each subgroup, and the use

of a research assistant for inter-reliability when coding the textual data were the multiple steps taken reduce this threat.

Theoretical Implications

In response to this study's research question, social work educators, field instructors, and social work practitioners described an abundance of specific individual characteristics and abilities that they believe contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. The characteristics and abilities were first grouped into the four major categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Next, the selective coding phase of data analysis, which focused on the relationship between the categories and the phenomenon of professional performance, was employed, and beginning level of theory development was generated. Figure 2 provides a conceptual framework of the abilities and characteristics that contribute to competent professional performance and the emerging theory.

In this researcher's opinion, the most relevant and significant component of the emerging theory is the strong emphasis placed on the intrapersonal component of competent professional performance.. The findings reveal that social work professionals believe a beginning level of mastery of the characterisitics and abilities depicted in the themes and sub-themes of the intrapersonal categories of self-awareness and self-management is foundational to one's ability to demonstrate competent professional performance. Clearly, this is only a beginning level of theory development; however, it is validated by the research of Boyatzis (1982) and Goleman (1996), and is discussed in much of the literature on professional development (Eraut, 1994; Goldstein, 2001;

O'Reilly, Cunningham, & Lester, 1999; Schön, 1982, 1987; Shulman, 2005). This finding would appear to imply that the development of a "Framework of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Competencies for Social Work Practice" as described in this study may be a helpful tool for social work educators, field instructors, and even social work practitioners who may find it a useful tool for supervision purposes. This beginning level of theory development stimulates numerous pedagogical implications as well as implications for further research. These implications will be addressed in the following sections.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings from this study provide insights from social work professionals and a beginning level of theory development that may have implications for social work education. This study's findings are particularly relevant and timely due to the fact that newly created 2008 EPAS reflect a significant pedagogical shift to competency-based education. Ten core competencies have been identified that programs are required to use to design their professional curriculum. CSWE (2008) articulates that the goal of using this approach is to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

EPAS has included with each core competency a "description of characteristic knowledge, values, and skills, and the resulting practice behaviors that may be used to operationalize the curriculum and assessment methods" (EPAS, p.3; See Appendix F). Many aspects of the intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics and abilities uncovered in this study can be found in the ten core competencies espoused by CSWE. This finding is of genuine significance and further validates the development of the

Framework of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Competencies for Social Work Practice, as proposed by this researcher, and implies the need to incorporate intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies into the curriculum and to develop assessment methods.

Curriculum Development

Since intrapersonal competencies are described as a foundational component of competent professional performance, and a beginning level skill attainment is recommended prior to field education, early inclusion in the curriculum is indicated. Perhaps a foundation course on the profession's history would include material on the development of the professional self and the intrapersonal and interpersonal components of it. Students could be required to complete a self-assessment on their level of mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, noting their innate strengths and setting goals to acquire mastery of the competencies in which they need improvement. Social work courses throughout the foundation curriculum could contain assignments that inquire about the student's intrapersonal and interpersonal strengths, as well as progress made toward their chosen goal areas.

The culmination of the foundation coursework focus on intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies could be a Groups course where, in addition to learning about group theory, students participate in a small group in which the focus is on the intrapersonal and interpersonal goals that they had previously set for themselves. This course could potentially allow for a student's self-assessment, a peer assessment, and a faculty assessment of the awareness and mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Additionally, a satisfactory score on this assessment assignment could be

used as one of the determining factors for field readiness, particularly, if the student's score was considerably different than that of their peers and the faculty.

This addition to the curriculum would increase students' awareness of the intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies needed to engage in competent professional performance; and although not a formal assessment, could provide insight into students' level of mastery in these areas. Finally, the input of field instructors into curriculum development in this area would be essential.

While entry into field is one arena where gatekeeping has traditionally taken place, Ryan, et al. (2006) reported that the standard admission criteria of most social work programs do not correlate with successful completion of field, but that intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies have had the most impact on student success or failure. It was noted however, that most social work programs require applicants to write a personal essay of some sort. Given the impact of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies on competent professional performance, an implication may be that social work programs craft questions in their admission essays that focus on one's intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities.

Teaching Strategies

Social work educators clearly affirmed the awareness and mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies plays an essential role in a student's ability to effectively display competent professional performance. They also voiced that the classroom setting has typically not been the arena where this aspect of social work practice has been taught. Traditionally higher education has given priority to discipline-based theories and concepts, and little attention has been paid to how these theories are

actually used in practice (Eraut, 1999). In his map of professional knowledge, Eraut (1999) describes three different types of knowledge. The first type of knowledge is propositional knowledge, of which a large competent is theoretical and is what is typically taught in the classroom. The second type of knowledge is knowledge acquired through impressions, personal knowledge and the interpretation of experience. Finally, the third type of knowledge is process knowledge, which can be defined as, "knowing how to conduct the various processes that contribute to professional action" (Eraut, 1999, p. 107). According to Eraut (1999), the quality of one's professional performance is largely dependant on how one utilizes process knowledge.

Process knowledge is a complex phenomenon that encompasses several distinct processes. One of the processes Eraut (1999) refers to is "metaprocess." The term "metaprocess" is used to describe the thinking involved in directing one's own behavior and controlling one's engagement in the other processes contained in processes knowledge, and includes the central features of self-awareness and self-management (Eraut, 1999). Professional education traditionally consists of classroom learning based on propositional knowledge, with little attention paid to the processes needed to develop the professional thinking skills (metacognition) which are needed to apply the acquired knowledge to the practice setting (Eraut, 1999).

There are, however, a variety of teaching strategies that have been developed to facilitate the metacognitive processes of self-awareness and self-management in the classroom setting. Kuiper (2002) used self-regulated learning prompts as a teaching strategy to assist nursing students in developing metacognitive critical thinking skills. Nursing students who were currently in an internship, were required to complete

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reflective journaling assignments in which they were instructed to write whatever came to mind while reading the self-regulated learning prompts and reflecting on the past week's clinical experiences. The journals were kept for an eight week period and were then analyzed. The study found that critical thinking skills are integrated within self-regulation strategies and therefore support promoting self-regulation as a teaching strategy to promote critical thinking (Kuiper, 2002).

Schön (1983, 1987), also addressed the gap between theory and practice with his focus on the application of professional knowledge. He posits that learning that takes place within a "professional context" is influenced by the epistemology of that specific profession. He espouses that professions who hold a Positivist philosophy believe that practitioners solve problems by the routine application of theory and technique derived from the most current scientific-based research, and professions who hold a Constructivist philosophy believes that real world practice is messy, unpredictable, value laden, and indeterminate.

Schön (1983, 1987), believes professional education has missed a key component in preparing students for the demands of professional practice. He states that performance is an "art," and a process that is mastered through what he has coined as "reflection-in-action" (Schön (1983, 1987). Reflection-in- action is a metacognitive process which includes the development of the following competencies: independent thinking, creativity and curious mind set, a comfort level with ambiguity and vagueness, a keen awareness of self and others, global thinking, the ability to recognize what needs to be seen, and the ability to describe accurately what is seen (Schön (1983, 1987).

His teaching practices are beyond the scope of this document; however, two of the signature elements are that the instructor makes the implicit, explicit through verbalizing his or her metacognitive processes and feedback is given to students' frequently. The concept of reflection-in-action appears to be a teaching method that is congruent with the profession of social work in that it would promote the acquisition of the metacognitive competencies of self-awareness and self-management and assist in the development of practitioners who can think on spot and make sense out of confusing and conflicting information.

Goldstein (2001) has written about the theory practice disconnect in social work education and promotes experiential learning as the teaching method capable of closing the gap. He points to the reflective learning model, which utilizes small group discussions and journal writing, as the primary tool used to integrate theory (knowledge learned in the classroom) and practice (experience gained in the field) in the field seminar setting. He also describes three experiential educational programs that incorporate courses taught from the problem-based learning model in their social work curriculum.

Research Implications

A beginning level of theory development on the phenomenon of professional performance was garnered from the textual data gathered in this study. Further research validating this theory would be a valuable particularly in light of the recent changes in the 2008 EPAS. Social work programs will be adjusting their curriculum to incorporate the outcome performance approach of competency-based education; it would be useful to have a framework depicting the intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities that appear to be foundational to competent professional performance.

Although not all the components of Goleman et al., (2002) framework of Emotional and Social Competencies were present in the findings, there appear to be multiple correlations between it and the characteristics and abilities that contribute to competent professional performance in social work practitioners. Additional research could be done with a larger sample using Emotional and Social Competencies Framework (Goleman et al., 2002). A survey could be conducted asking social work practitioners, field instructors, and educators to evaluate the relevance of each of competency. Additionally, Boyatzis developed an Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, and research could be conducted to assess its applicability to the social work education.

Another possibility would be to develop a framework by incorporating the intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies advanced by Reynolds, Robinson and Towle, into the framework developed from this study's findings. A larger sample of social work practitioners, field instructors, and educators could be surveyed to evaluate the relevance of each of competency.

An additional research implication is in the area of cultural impact on the mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. It is imperative that assumptions are not made and that criteria are not developed that are rigid and indicative of only the dominant culture. A variety of research modalities could be utilized in this area.

Future research evaluating the efficacy of purposefully incorporating the awareness and beginning level of mastery of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies into social work curriculum would be beneficial. A study could have a control group of social work students who did not participate in such a curriculum and a

group of students who did. Field evaluations could be used as the indicator of the curriculum's impact.

Finally, research evaluating the efficacy of specific teaching strategies that promote the development of metacognition could be conducted. There are multiple adult learning theories and teaching strategies, as well as experiential learning modalities that could be utilized to promote the development of metacognition in social work students. The scholarship of teaching is an area that is gaining attention and approval in the university setting and is an area in the discipline of social work where research is needed.

Conclusion

This study began by asking social work field instructors, practitioners, and educators what they believed the intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics and abilities are that contribute to competent professional performance. As noted in an earlier confession, I doubted that they would have much to say on the subject. However, the voices of the social work professionals who participated in this research study clearly asserted that intrapersonal characteristics and abilities are foundational to competent professional performance in social work practitioners.

The themes and sub-themes from the categories of self-awareness and self-management were prominent aspects of every conversation. It is my hope that this research study prompts social work educators to rethink the place of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies in the social work curriculum and that it ignites a desire to develop innovative teaching strategies that nurture their development.

In closing, the findings of this study affirm the philosophy of the foremothers of social work education who believed that: "Education for any profession aims not only to

teach the specific knowledge and skills necessary in its practice, but it undertakes also to

make over the personal self of the "lay" student into a professional self. This is

particularly true in education for social case work whose helping function demands the

most conscious and responsible use of a professional self"

(Robinson, 1936, p.196).

Introductory E-mail to Solicit Volunteers

Dear Social Work Professional:

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting exploring the personal components of professional competence in social work students and practitioners. You may not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may contribute to an increased understanding of professional competence. This understanding may assist social work educators and field instructors in creating learning opportunities that promote the development of the personal components of professional competence.

You are being invited to participate because of your expertise and knowledge about the profession of social work. I am interested in your perspective on professional competence and would like to ask you a few questions in a face-to- face interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. In order to capture your answers in their entirety, the interview will be audio taped. I will also be conducting second interviews with a small number of participants and will invite you to sign a letter of interest at the conclusion of the first interview.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in the study without penalty or coercion. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may chose not to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without any negative consequences. If you are in any way affiliated with Grand Valley State University (GVSU), it is important that you aware that my association with GVSU as a faculty member is not in any way related to this research study. Your decision to participate or not to participate in this study is completely voluntarily and will not impact any relationship you may have with GVSU. You have the right to ask to review the responses you gave during the interview(s) before giving your permission for them to be used in the study.

You have a right to confidentiality. All audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed and typed into a Word document. Your name will not appear on any of the documents. The only identifying information that will be connected to your answers will be your age, race, gender, years of social work experience, current area of social work practice and your role as either a social work faculty, field instructor or practitioner. It is highly unlikely that someone could link your responses to particular participant given these demographics, however, I cannot guarantee complete anonymity. I can and will protect your confidentiality to the maximum extent of the law.

You have the right to privacy. All audio-recorded interviews from this study will be transcribed and typed into a Word document. All data will be stored in a locked

cabinet at GVSU and all Word documents will be protected with a password.
Please respond to this email if you are willing to participate in the study and would allow me to contact you to set up an interview. Also include the best day and time for the interview to occur and a location that is convenient for you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Shelley Schuurman, LSW, PhD. Candidate

Appendix B

Letter of Informed consent

Grand Valley State University	**Michigan State University**
College of Community & Public Service	College of Social Science
School of Social Work	School of Social Work
Shelley Schuurman, LMSW	Rena Harold, PhD, ACSW
Affiliate Professor	Associate Director and .
	Coordinator of Graduate Programs

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERSONAL ABILITIES AND BEHAVIORS THAT ADVANCE THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE, VALUES AND SKILLS IN A PROFESSIONALLY COMPETENT MANNER

Informed Consent To Participate By Allowing Responses To Interview

Questions To Be Used In A Research Study.

You are being invited to participate in a research project. As a doctoral student in social work at Michigan State University, I am currently working on my dissertation and am conducting a study exploring the personal components of professional competence in social work students and practitioners. You may not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may contribute to an increased understanding of professional competence. This understanding may assist social work educators and field instructors in creating learning opportunities that promote the development of the personal components of professional competence

You are being invited to participate because of your expertise and knowledge about the profession of social work. I am interested in your perspective on professional competence and would like to ask you a few questions in a face-to- face interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. In order to capture your answers in their entirety, the interview will be audio taped. Signing this form indicates you agree to allowing the interview to be audio taped. I will also be conducting second interviews with a small number of participants and will invite you to sign a letter of interest at the conclusion of the first interview.

Please review the conditions expressed below and decide whether you want to participate in the study by being interviewed and allowing your responses to be used in the study.

1. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to

participate in the study without penalty or coercion. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may chose not to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without any negative consequences. If you are in any way affiliated with Grand Valley State University (GVSU), it is important that you aware that my association with GVSU as a faculty member is not in any way related to this research study. Your decision to participate or not to participate in this study is completely voluntarily and will not impact any relationship you may have with GVSU.

2. You have the right to ask to review the responses you gave during the interview(s) before giving your permission for them to be used in the study.

3. You have a right to confidentiality. All audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed and typed into a Word document. Your name will not appear on any of the documents. The only identifying information that will be connected to your answers will be your age, race, gender, years of social work experience, current area of social work practice and your role as either a social work faculty, field instructor or practitioner. It is highly unlikely that someone could link your responses to particular participant given these demographics, however, we cannot guarantee complete anonymity. We can and will protect your confidentiality to the maximum extent of the law.

4. You have the right to privacy. All audio-recorded interviews from this study will be transcribed and typed into a Word document. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet at GVSU and all Word documents will be protected with a password.

5. If you have any questions about this study, please contact the investigator Shelley Schuurman at 401 West Fulton St., School of Social Work, GVSU, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 or (616) 331-6590 or schuurms@gvsu.edu.

6. If you have any questions about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Director of MSU's Human Research Protection Programs, Dr. Peter Vasilenko, at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824. The primary investigator and supervising faculty member also is available to address your concerns. You may contact Dr. Rena Harold, 254 Baker Hall, School of Social Work, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824-1118; she also can be reached by phone at (517) 353-8616, or by email to haroldr@msu.edu.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

_____   _____
            Printed name   Signature/date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Social Work Faculty and Field Instructor Interview Protocol Questions

INITIAL INTERVIEW

Introduction to Study
Hello_____.

Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. As mentioned in the introductory e-mail, you are being asked to participate because of your expertise and knowledge about the profession of social work.

<u>Letter of Informed Consent</u>

Before we get started, I would like to obtain your written consent for participation in this study. I have with me a letter that explains how your participation is voluntary and discusses the issues of privacy and confidentiality. If you could please take a few minutes and read through the letter and sign it on the bottom if you are in agreement. Thank you.

<u>Primary Question</u>

As noted in the letter, the interview will be audio-recorded. Would it be okay with you if I began recording at this time? Thank you. As you know, MSW programs are mandated to teach specific social work knowledge, values and skills. Social work students can master all of this information; however, their effectiveness in applying it depends on a variety of personal abilities and behaviors. I am interested in your perspective on what these would be and would like to ask you a few questions.

Please take a minute or so and picture in your mind a social work student who you think of as an outstanding example of professional competence, someone who effectively applies social work knowledge, skills and values in a professional manner.

A. Consider how this student effectively applies *social work knowledge*, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

B. Consider how this student effectively applies *social work values*, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

C. Consider how this student effectively applies *social work skills*, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

<u>Subquestions</u>

Subquestions will be used as needed to stimulate interviewee's thinking and structure the interview as needed. Possible subquestions are:

1) Three distinct categories that personal abilities and behaviors can fall into are thinking, feeling and doing. An example of thinking would be the ability to use

critical thinking or problem solving skills. An example of feeling would be the ability to understand and manage emotions about oneself. And an example of doing would be the ability to apply emotional understanding when dealing with others. Does thinking of it in this way help generate examples?

2) Consider the various roles a social worker plays. What personal abilities or behaviors are needed to effectively perform each of these roles in a professional manner?

3) How would you be able to tell if a social worker is *not* competently applying social work knowledge, values or skills? What personal qualities or behaviors would tell you this?

Probes

Following the primary question, a variety of probes will be used through out the continuing conversation to elicit detailed descriptions and specific definitions of the concepts as they arise.

Some examples of the types of probes to be used are:

Elaboration probes will ask for more detail or an explanation of a concept.

Examples: "Can you tell me more about that?" " Can you give me an example?"

Clarifying probes will be used to sort out unclear statements and clarify specific points. Example: "Can you say that part again, I'm sorry I didn't follow you?"

Steering probes will be used to keep the conversation on the intended track.

Example: "Sorry I distracted you by asking about ____ can we circle back to___?"

Sequencing probes will be used to help unravel causation and explore the order of events.

Example: "Could you please repeat that again, step by step?"

Wrapping up the Interview

Before we close the interview, I'd like to review the notes I've taken with you. Your job will be to let me know whether I've accurately captured your ideas. At this I will read my notes and ask for suggestions, adjustments, or confirmation of the data intent.

Second Interview Participation

Upon completion of the interview wrap-up, participants will be thanked and asked if they would be interested in signing a form that would allow me to contact them regarding a possible second interview. (Appendix E)

SECOND INTERVIEW

Introduction to Study

Hello_____.
Thank you for being willing to participate in this second interview. As I mentioned after the first interview, I would like to share the information that has been gathered thus far in the study.

Sharing of Information

At this time I will share in both verbal and written format concepts that have developed from the data collection and analysis.

Question One

What do you think of the information I just presented?

Does it gel with your ideas?

How is it different?

How is it the same?

Question Two

Does discussing the topic now, after you've had some time to think about it and hear what others think, stir up any additional thoughts or ideas that you'd like to share?

Question Three

This question will only be asked if interviewees have identified individual characteristics or abilities..

Primary Question

Could you please describe how and where in a master's of social work program you believe students learn to develop the personal abilities and behaviors that we just discussed?

Subquestions

1) Is it learned in coursework?
   If so, is it through readings, lectures, videos, group exercises, or assignments?

2) Is it learned in Field Education?
   If so, is it through the relationship with your field supervisor, client interaction,

colleague interaction, or trainings provided by field placement site?

3) Is it learned through an Advising or mentor relationship with a faculty member? If so, please explain.

4) Is it learned in any other format that was not mentioned?

<u>Probes</u>

Following each question, elaboration, clarifying, steering and sequencing probes will be used to elicit detailed responses and clarify concepts as they arise. Each probe is described in detail under the Initial Interview heading.

<u>Wrapping up the Interview</u>

Before we close the interview, I'd like to review the notes I've taken with you. Your job will be to let me know whether I've accurately captured your ideas. At this time I will read my notes and ask for suggestions, adjustments, or confirmation of the data intent. Finally, I will thank participants for their participation.

Appendix D

Social Work Practitioner Interview Protocol Questions

INITIAL INTERVIEW

Introduction to Study

Hello_____.
Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. As mentioned in the introductory e-mail, you are being asked to participate because of your expertise and knowledge about the profession of social work.

<u>Letter of Informed Consent</u>

Before we get started, I would like to obtain your written consent for participation in this study. I have with me a letter that explains how your participation is voluntary and discusses the issues of privacy and confidentiality. If you could please take a few minutes and read through the letter and sign it on the bottom if you are in agreement. Thank you.

<u>Primary Question</u>

As noted in the letter, the interview will be audio-recorded. Would it be okay with you if I began recording at this time? Thank you. As you know, MSW programs are mandated to teach specific social work knowledge, values and skills. Social work students can master all of this information, however, their effectiveness in applying it depends on a variety of personal abilities and behaviors. I am interested in your perspective on what these would be and would like to ask you a few questions.

Please take a minute or so and picture in your mind a social work practitioner who you think of as an outstanding example of professional competence, someone who effectively applies social work knowledge, skills and values in a professional manner.

A. Consider how this practitioner effectively applies *social work knowledge*, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

B. Consider how this practitioner effectively applies *social work values*, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

C. Consider how this practitioner effectively applies *social work skills*, what individual characteristics and abilities does she/he display?

<u>Subquestions</u>

Subquestions will be used as needed to stimulate interviewee's thinking and structure the interview as needed. Possible subquestions are:

1. Three distinct categories that personal abilities and behaviors can fall into are thinking, feeling and doing. An example of thinking would be the ability to use

critical thinking or problem solving skills. An example of feeling would be the ability to understand and manage emotions about oneself. And an example of doing would be the ability to apply emotional understanding when dealing with others. Does thinking of it in this way help generate examples?

2.   Consider the various roles a social worker plays. What personal abilities or behaviors are needed to effectively perform each of these roles in a professional manner?

3.   How would you be able to tell if a social worker is *not* competently applying social work knowledge, values or skills? What personal qualities or behaviors would tell you this?

Probes

Following the primary question, a variety of probes will be used through out the continuing conversation to elicit detailed descriptions and specific definitions of the concepts as they arise.

Some examples of the types of probes to be used are:

Elaboration probes will ask for more detail or an explanation of a concept.

Examples: "Can you tell me more about that?" " Can you give me an example?"

Clarifying probes will be used to sort out unclear statements and clarify specific points.

Example: "Can you say that part again, I'm sorry I didn't follow you?"

Steering probes will be used to keep the conversation on the intended track.

Example: "Sorry I distracted you by asking about ____ can we circle back to ___?"

Sequencing probes will be used to help unravel causation and explore the order of events.

Example: "Could you please repeat that again, step by step?"

Wrapping up the Interview

Before we close the interview, I'd like to review the notes I've taken with you. Your job will be to let me know whether I've accurately captured your ideas. At this I will read my notes and ask for suggestions, adjustments, or confirmation of the data intent.

Second Interview Participation

Upon completion of the interview wrap-up, participants will be thanked and asked if they would be interested in signing a form that would allow me to contact them regarding a possible second interview.

SECOND INTERVIEW

Introduction to Study

Hello_____.

Thank you for being willing to participate in this second interview. As I mentioned after the first interview, I would like to share the information that has been gathered thus far in the study.

Sharing of Information

At this time I will share in both verbal and written format concepts that have developed from the data collection and analysis.

Question One

What do you think of the information I just presented?

Does it gel with your ideas?

How is it different?

How is it the same?

Question Two

Does discussing the topic now, after you've had some time to think about it and hear what others think, stir up any additional thoughts or ideas that you'd like to share?

Question Three

This question will only be asked if interviewees have identified personal abilities or behaviors.

Primary Question

Could you please describe how and where in a master's of social work program you believe students learn to develop the personal abilities and behaviors that we just discussed?

Subquestions

1.   Is it learned in coursework?
      If so, is it through readings, lectures, videos, group, exercise, or assignments?

2.   Is it learned in Field Education?
      If so, is it through the relationship with your field supervisor, client interaction, colleague interaction, or trainings provided by field placement site?

3.   Is it learned through an Advising or mentor relationship with a faculty member?
      If so, please explain.

4.   Is it learned in any other format that was not mentioned?

<u>Probes</u>

Following each question, elaboration, clarifying, steering and sequencing probes will be used to elicit detailed responses and clarify concepts as they arise. Each probe is described in detail under the Initial Interview heading.

<u>Wrapping up the Interview</u>

Before we close the interview, I'd like to review the notes I've taken with you. Your job will be to let me know whether I've accurately captured your ideas. At this time I will read my notes and ask for suggestions, adjustments, or confirmation of the data intent.

Appendix E

Second Interview Participation form

I would like to conduct a second interview with a small number of participants. During this interview I will share information that has been gathered thus far in the study. I will ask participants to share their response to this information, as well as any further thoughts they might have on the topic. Signing this form provides your consent to be contacted about participating in this second interview. You are under no obligation to say yes at the time of contact.

_____ _____
Signature   Date

Please complete the sentence that best describes how you would like to be contacted.

The best way to contact me is by phone, and I can be reached at: _____.

The best way to contact me is by e-mail. I can be reached at: _____.

Appendix F

Educational Policy 2.1-Core Competencies

Educational Policy 2.1.1--Identify with the social work profession and behave professionally.

Social workers serve as representatives of the profession, its mission and core values. They understand the profession's history and commit to its enhancement and to their own professional conduct and growth. For example, social workers:

- Ensure client access to the services of social work.

- Engage in self-reflection, self-monitoring and self-correction.

- Attend to professional roles and boundaries.

- Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication.

- Engage in career-long learning.

- Use supervision and consultation.

Educational Policy 2.1.2--Apply ethical principles to guide professional practice.

Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in reasoned ethical decision–making. For example, social workers:

- Recognize and manage personal values such that professional values guide practice.

- Make ethical decisions by applying principles derived from appropriate professional codes, such as the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics and the International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work Code of Ethics.

- Tolerate ambiguity in resolving ethical conflicts.

- Apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions.

Educational Policy 2.1.3--Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.

Critical thinking is informed by principles of logic and reasoned discernment, and is augmented by creativity and curiosity. Critical thinking requires the examination,

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analysis, synthesis, and communication of relevant information. For example, social workers:

- Distinguish, appraise and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge and practice wisdom.

- Analyze models of assessment and models of intervention.

- Use creativity to enhance the organization of information.

- Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, and colleagues.

Educational Policy 2.1.4--Engage diversity and difference in practice.

Diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. Dimensions of diversity include factors such as age, class, culture, disability, gender, political ideology, race, religion, and sexual orientation. As a consequence of one's difference, one's life experiences may include oppression, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. It can also result in pride, ambivalence, social isolation, or indifference. For example, social workers:

- Recognize the extent to which the dominant culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.

- Use an understanding of personal biases and values as they relate to diverse groups.

- Recognize and communicate to the other the profundity of difference in life experiences.

- View themselves as learners and engage those with whom they work as informants.

Educational Policy 2.1.5--Promote human rights and social justice.

Each person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights, such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social work incorporates social justice practices in organizations, institutions and society to insure that these basic human rights are distributed equitably, and without prejudice. For example, social workers:

- Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination.

- Advocate for human rights and social and economic justice.

- Engage in practices which advance social and economic justice.

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Educational Policy 2.1.6--Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

Social workers utilize practice experience to inform research, employ evidence-based practices, evaluate their own practice, and use research findings to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery. For example, social workers:

- Use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry.

- Use research evidence to inform practice.

Educational Policy 2.1.7--Apply knowledge of the human condition.

Social workers apply insights on the human experience derived from the humanities and from the social, behavioral and life sciences. For example, social workers:

- Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention and evaluation.

- Critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment.

Educational Policy 2.1.8--Engage in policy practice to deliver effective social work services.

Social work practitioners understand that policy affects service delivery and they actively engage in policy practice. For example, social workers:

- Analyze, influence, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance societal wellbeing.

- Collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action.

Educational Policy 2.1.9--Respond to and shape an ever-changing professional context.

Social workers are informed, resourceful and proactive in responding to the constantly evolving societal, organizational and community contexts at all levels of practice. For example, social workers:

- Continuously discover, appraise and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends in order to provide relevant services.

- Provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services.

Educational Policy 2.1.10--Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations.

Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels.

Educational Policy 2.1.10.1—Engagement

Social workers, for example:

- Substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations.

- Use empathy and other interpersonal skills.

- Develop a mutually agreed-upon focus of work and desired outcomes.

Educational Policy 2.1.10.2—Assessment

Social workers, for example:

- Collect, organize and interpret client data.

- Assess client system's strengths and limitations.

- Develop mutually agreed upon intervention goals and objectives.
s
- Select appropriate intervention strategies.

Educational Policy 2.1.10.3—Intervention

Social workers, for example:

- Implement interventions that enhance client capacities.

- Assist clients to resolve problems.

- Negotiate, mediate, and advocate for client systems.

- Facilitate transitions and endings.

Educational Policy 2.1.10.4—Evaluation

Social workers, for example:
- Critically analyze, monitor and evaluate interventions.

Intrapersonal themes and sub-themes

SELF-AWARENESS

Emotional Awareness

Awareness of what they are feeling

Ability to self-observe

Displays insight into personal family of origin issues

Awareness of personal bias's and values

Awareness of personal status in relation to diversity issues

Accurate Self-Assessment

Awareness of personal strengths and limitations

Ability to engage in self-reflection

Open and receptive to feedback about performance

Self-Confidence

Possession of a strong sense of self-worth

Comfortable "not knowing it all," ability to make mistakes without losing faith in their competence

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Emotional Self-Control

Ability to habitually self-observe & monitor their internal emotional responses

Ability to let the client own the problem

Does not take client's behavior personally

Ability to separate personal and professional issues

Ability to be deliberate & intentional vs. reactive

Ability to take risks

Ability to adapt to change/tolerate ambiguity

Ability to manage personal stress

Authenticity

Displays a genuine openness to others

Is comfortable with themselves

Relates to others in a relaxed manner

Flexible Thinking

Displays flexible thinking patterns

Ability to use multiple personal styles

Ability to use multiple theories

Ability to problem-solve when there's a need to change plans

Ability to hear the whole story & then discern what all the pieces mean & what pieces have clinical significance

Ability to generalize knowledge to new & different situations

Ability to think quickly

Abstract Thinking/Masters Complex Ideas

Ability to think abstractly

Ability to understand and articulate the theory behind the choice of interventions

Ability to consider polar opposites & critically evaluate benefits & risks at the same time

Ability to understand complex needs & complex options

<u>Investment in Professional Growth</u>

<u>Initiative</u>

<u>Optimism</u>

Appendix H

Interpersonal themes and sub-themes

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Basic Professionalism

Aware of appropriate work attire

Aware of professional body language &demeanor

Prepared & organized

Prompt & dependable

Accurate Empathy

Ability to step outside one's self emotionally & take the other's perspective

Ability to read other's verbal & nonverbal reactions to them

Organizational Awareness

Awareness that you are practicing within the context of an agency and understand the role of risk management

Conscious Awareness of Social Work values and ethics

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Engagement

Ability to relate to others with respect, in a nonjudgmental & trustworthy manner

Ability to listen attentively & be fully present

Ability to have a "curious" approach towards clients

Ability to meet clients where they are at, share power, partner with them

Communication

Ability to be articulate

Ability to be assertive

Ability to give others constructive feedback in a nonthreatening way

Ability to be receptive & open to others ideas and feedback

Professional documentation skills

Communication with Clients

Communication & Collaboration with Colleagues

Ability to give others constructive feedback in a nonthreatening way

Actively seeks out colleagues for consultation and uses teammates as resources to learn from

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