SOCIAL WORK FIELD INSTRUCTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CORE ATTRIBUTES: IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP AND GATEKEEPING

Margaret (Peggy) Jayne Adams

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

August, 2011

Committee:

Dr. Patrick Pauken, Advisor

Dr. Thomas R. Chibucos
Graduate Representative

Dr. Christopher Frey

Dr. Joyce Litten

Mr. Gerald Strom.
ABSTRACT

Patrick Pauken, Advisor

This is an exploratory qualitative study whose focus was to ascertain social work field instructors' perceptions of the characteristics and attributes necessary in the provision of competent field instruction. It utilized case study as a framework of analysis. Moral reasoning and adult development provided a theoretical framework for the study. Nineteen field instructors working with an undergraduate program in social work participated in one of five focus groups, and responded to questions related to why they became and remain field instructors, their perceptions of the qualities and characteristics that comprise a competent field instructor, qualities and characteristics of excellent and unacceptable student interns, field instructors' roles in gatekeeping, and field instructors' perceptions of leadership as it relates to field instruction.

Data analysis indicated that there are specific roles, personal attributes, practice skills, and environmental criteria perceived as necessary in order to perform competently as a field instructor. In addition, three themes permeated the discussion of characteristics, gatekeeping and leadership. These themes were role modeling, communication, and nurturing. Leadership skills and characteristics were explored and analyzed according to the models of leadership developed by Kouzes and Posner, and Hersey and Blanchard. Findings indicate that field instructors perceive themselves as learners, as well as teachers. They also do not recognize themselves as leaders, and are generally uncomfortable with the role and responsibility of gatekeeping.

The study recognizes specific implications for practice, as well as future research. It provides social work field directors within the schools of social work with a list of criteria that
may be used to select future field instructors, as well as evaluate current ones. The same criteria can be used by practitioners who wish to become field instructors to assess their readiness for that role and responsibility. The study also provides field directors with a wealth of training opportunities for field instructors, particularly in the areas of leadership and gatekeeping. In addition, the study proposes a more in depth introduction and discussion of leadership and gatekeeping into the curriculum so that students understand their importance in professional practice.

Ongoing exploration of non-positional leadership in social work, particularly in the field, is a topic that invites future research studies. Additional areas for further study include the manner in which field instructors are selected and trained, field instructors' perceptions of gatekeeping as a professional responsibility, and the relationship between field instructors and schools of social work from the field instructors' points-of-view. Comparative studies of leadership and gatekeeping between graduate and undergraduate field instructors, as well as across practice areas, can also be explored.
I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family, my husband, Mark and children Ryan and Christy, in memory of my brother Carl, and to my mentor and dear friends Judy Kiser and Betsy Bunner. Your love, support, guidance, and belief in me and my potential allowed me to realize this dream.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This educational process has been a journey filled with peaks and valleys, joys and disappointments. But, more than anything, it has been a time of self reflection and personal growth. It has opened my eyes to a world of leadership potential that I had never imagined, and has allowed me to create some wonderful relationships that I hope will strengthen through the years. I would like to recognize some of the people who made this process successful.

My sincere thanks to my husband, Mark and my children, Ryan and Christy. Your patience and love have been so incredibly important and appreciated. Thank you for helping with household chores when I had projects and papers due, and for being patient and understanding when I became frustrated. Kids, I especially want to thank you for your help with powerpoints, computer glitches, and for all the little cards, hugs, and pep talks that you gave to me for the past four years. I love you very much, and am so proud of you. I also want to thank my parents, Allan and Jane Fitch, and my siblings Laura Van Liere, Vicky Duvall, David, Eddie, and in memoriam, Carl Fitch. Your support, encouragement and love have been unwavering. You never doubted my abilities, even when I questioned them, and I feel very fortunate to have such a wonderful family.

One word describes my dissertation committee: AWESOME! Dr. Christopher Frey, Dr. Joyce Litten, Dr. Thomas Chibucos, Mr. Gerry Strom, and especially Dr. Patrick Pauken, who so graciously agreed to chair the committee, are an extremely talented group of people. I am so fortunate to have been able to share ideas and work with you on this project. Dr. Frey, you were able to take the ideas jumbled in my head and help me make sense of them to produce a sound research design. I have learned so much from you, and feel much more confident in my research abilities. Dr. Chibucos, I couldn't have picked a better grad rep! Your questions, comments, and
suggestions were very helpful throughout the process, and I enjoyed meeting and working with you. Dr. Litten and Mr. Strom, I am so fortunate that you agreed to participate on my committee. You were able to provide insight and direction in areas I had not considered, and your guidance and support have been immeasurable. I hope that this project leads to many joint ventures in the future. Words cannot express my gratitude to Dr. Pauken. Your patience, persistence, keen eye for detail, and words of encouragement have allowed me to grow and change in ways I never imagined. You have given me a richer, deeper understanding of ethics and leadership, and I have the utmost respect and admiration for you. You are an inspiration for all of us! In short, you ROCK!

To the faculty in the Leadership Studies Program, it has been an honor to have had the opportunity to learn from your collective wisdom. You are a wonderful group of teachers that make the Program fun as well as educational. You truly demonstrate what leadership is all about.

To the members of Cohort 11: Dr. Peter Matseo, Dr. Gretchen Carroll, Dr. Marcia Latta, Dr. David Wagner, Mr. Larry Long, Mr. Steve Varga, IV, Mr. Al Igwebuike, Mrs. Tiffany Whitman, Mrs. Andrea Guice, and, in memoriam, Mrs. Teresa Pauley. It has been a joy to share this journey with all of you, and I feel so blessed to have gotten to know you. I have enjoyed all of our interesting discussions, festivities and Tuesday night potlucks, and most of all your companionship. I will always treasure the time we spent together and I hope that our paths cross often. I wish all of you success in the future, and know that you will all make a difference in this world because you are you.

To my colleagues in the BGSU Department of Human Services and the Care Coordination Department at Toledo Hospital, thank you for all the words of encouragement, the
flexibility with scheduling, and the continuous support you have given to me throughout my educational endeavors.

To all of field instructors who participated in the study, I cannot thank you enough for your willingness to share your thoughts, feelings, and ideas on such important topics. Without you, this project would not have been possible. Your enthusiasm, insight, and support have been invaluable. Even if you do not readily acknowledge it, your professional leadership is amazing.

And finally, to my dear friend and mentor, Judy Kiser, and long-time friend Betsy Bunner, I owe so much to both of you. You have supported and encouraged me from the very beginning of this journey. You gave me guidance and reassurance when I had self doubt, and encouraged me to succeed when obstacles seemed insurmountable. I can never thank you enough for your love, patience and support and will be eternally grateful to you for all you have done for me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moral Reasoning, Adult Development and Leadership</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate and Graduate Social Work Curricula and the Field Practicum</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Supervision and Professional Mentoring</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Suitability and Gatekeeping</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting and Case Selection</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher Bias</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant Selection</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Research</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Subjects Approval</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Instructor Survey</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Focus Group Participant Demographic Data</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An Overview of Focus Group Themes and Chapter Sections</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The Progressive Era, as the latter part of the 19th century in American history is called, gave birth to many social reform movements in reaction to social problems created by increased industrialization and economic turmoil. The massive immigration to the United States that took place during the late 1800s, coupled with the large-scale production of goods in growing factories, led to the population explosion in cities. With the increase in people came an increase in social issues related to poverty, unfair labor practices, and cultural differences (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2010). Two distinct reform responses to social problems emerged during this time. One emphasized the need for reform of individual habits and worked under the assumption that social problems required structural reforms. One organization that promoted reform of the individual was the Charity Organization Society, which believed poverty was the result of an individual's character flaws. These societies believed that if individuals were rehabilitated, societal problems would be resolved. They would send people, known as friendly visitors, to assess individual needs and provide linkage to the appropriate services for assistance (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2010). In contrast, the Settlement House movement was based on the belief that an individual's well being was directly linked to the wider social environment, and not just an individual’s character. Their goal was to advocate for better neighborhood services and public health programs, thereby improving the lives of individuals within the community (DuBois & Miley, 2010).

The social work profession emerged during this period in response to the growth of social problems in society, and the basic practice principles of social work are directly linked to these early reform movements (Zastrow, 2008). Through the efforts of the friendly visitors from
the Charity Organization Societies and the social activists of the Settlement House movement, social work became a service driven profession (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2010). The first social workers were volunteers, but soon it became evident that professional education and training were needed in order to provide adequate services to the public. Many associations developed to provide such training and, in 1952 and 1955, they merged to form the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), respectively (Morales, Sheafor & Scott, 2007). Initially, schools of social work provided only graduate level education (Zastrow, 2008). However in the 1970s, the Council on Social Work Education began to grant accreditation to undergraduate social work programs, and the National Association of Social Workers gave full membership privileges to graduates with baccalaureate degrees in social work, provided the program was accredited by the CSWE (Morales, Sheafor, & Scott, 2007). Today, there are over 700 accredited social work programs in colleges and universities all over the United States (CSWE, 2008).

Field instruction is a critical component of social work education, dating back to the apprenticeships of the Charity Organization Societies (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 2010). For most of the 20th century, little had changed in the framework and philosophy of field education (Raskin, Wayne, & Bogo, 2008). In 1982, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) called for restructuring of the field requirements, including establishing a minimum number of field hours for undergraduate and graduate students. CSWE required that undergraduate social work students complete a minimum of 400 hours of field instruction, and for the first time, field was included as a curriculum area (Raskin, Wayne, & Bogo, 2008). In 2001, the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) of the CSWE mandated administrative changes in the field curriculum. These included the need for a program field director to provide educational
and administrative support to the schools' field programs, recognition of these responsibilities as resource intensive and recommendation that they be compensated with appropriate workload credit, and a mandate that programs provide staff to assist in student advising and field liaison responsibilities (Raskin, Wayne, & Bogo 2008). Most recently, in its 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, CSWE identified field education as the “signature pedagogy” of the profession (CSWE, 2008).

Practitioners and educators credit the field practicum as the most critical component for integrating classroom content with the development of practice skills, as well as the socialization of students into professional roles (Bogo, Hughes, Regehr, Woodford, Power, & Regehr, 2004). Trends resulting from rapid changes in the social, political and economic systems world-wide, and in the United States, have led to challenges in field education. Social work practitioners and student interns have needed to expand their cultural sensitivity, deal with overwhelming caseloads of multi-problem clients, and be more responsive to societal issues such as poverty, homelessness, and a scarcity of resources (Lager & Robbins, 2004). Changes in demographics and the subsequent effect on urban areas, increasing use of technology globally, and the need for more collaborative partnerships have challenged the organizational contexts in which social workers work, and where students participate in field experiences. Budgetary constraints and funding cuts, increased productivity demands, and decreases in agency staff negatively affect the amount of time and resources that social service agencies have available for student interns (Jarman-Rhode, McFall, Kolar, & Strom, 1997). Marked increases in economic and social disparity, coupled with increased demands upon social service agencies to provide more services with fewer resources, place demands on students entering field to have more practice knowledge and experience than ever before (Reisch & Jarman-Rhode, 2000). Historically, field education
has been a complex, comprehensive, instructional mission. The challenge for the future is to have field education expand its mission to include shaping social work education and influencing the direction of social work practice (Lager & Robbins, 2004). Field education is being challenged to develop a vision for the future, and assume a position as the pivotal focus of quality social work education.

Field education is an essential component of social work education and qualified field instructors are a critical element of field education. The literature is abundant with information regarding a field instructor’s responsibility as an evaluator of student performance (Bogo, Regehr, Power, & Regehr, 2007; Fortune, Cavazos & Lee, 2005), the learning process that takes place between the practitioner and student during the field practicum (Miller, Corcoran, Kovacs, Rosenblum & Wright, 2005), and issues of supervision (Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick, & Ellis, 2008; Moore, Dietz, & Dettlaff, 2004; Peleg-Oren, Macgowan, & Even-Zahav, 2007). Additionally, the need for ongoing training for field instructors is well documented (Dalton, Stevens, & Maas-Brady, 2009; Deal & Clements, 2006; Raskin, Bogo, & Wayne, 2008). The competencies required to become a field instructor, however, are less prevalent in the literature. While there is discussion about the implementation of competency based training programs (Clark, 1995; Gourdine & Baffour, 2004), as well as identifying and assessing field instructor competencies (Murdock, Ward, Ligon, & Jindani, 2006), the literature relies on information provided by field directors in social work programs. The literature does not specifically contain information from field instructors directly, and the discussion of leadership as an attribute or competency of field instruction is nonexistent. Further investigation into the literature regarding the roles in field education provides valuable information regarding the role
of the faculty liaison, the field director and the student in the field process. However, the role of
the field instructor is less articulate.

Statement of the Problem

The social work field instructor, by definition, has multiples roles. First, as a practitioner
working in a social service agency, the field instructor assumes the role of employee and service
provider. Secondly, with the extension of the classroom into a field setting, the field instructor
assumes the role of educator when he/she agrees to train and mentor a student intern.

Another role inherent in field instruction is as supervisor. This role can be particularly
challenging for direct care practitioners who do not supervise staff as one of the assigned duties
of their position (Deal & Clements, 2006; Knight, 2001; Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick & Ellis,
2008). One of the most controversial and challenging supervisory responsibilities a field
instructor has is that of a gatekeeper for the profession (Bogo, Regehr, Power, & Regehr, 2007).
While gatekeeping measures are prevalent in the admissions procedures to social work programs
(Cole & Lewis, 1993; Homonoff, 2008; Tam & Coleman, 2009; Younes, 1989), often students’
unsuitability is not apparent until they enter the field practicum (Bogo, Regehr, Power, &

Field instructors provide one of the most critical roles in undergraduate social work
education, yet there is little empirical evidence identifying the competencies and attributes of.
qualified field instructors (Holosko, 2009). By identifying field education as the signature
pedagogy of the profession, the Council on Social Work Education has invited the field
instructors to participate in the visioning process to upgrade the profession and its educational
mission. This process, as well as the oversight and supervision skills needed to be an effective
field instructor, demand that field instructors possess a degree of leadership. Yet, there have
been only two studies to date that have directly asked field instructors for their perceptions into the competencies required or gatekeeping skills needed to be effective, and both of these studies were conducted in Canada (Gillis & Lewis, 2004; Tam, 2004). Additionally, the literature related to leadership in social work focuses primarily on leadership positions in professional organizations, social service agencies or deans/directors in schools of social work (Fisher, 2005; Holosko, 2009; Mary, 2005; Rank & Hutchinson, 2000; Reamer, 1993). The literature is limited regarding leadership attributes of practitioners in direct care positions.

Schools and programs of social work maintain academic expectations that reinforce student success and program excellence. A key component of academic and professional quality is the gatekeeping that is necessary to maintain the standards of professionalism needed to perform effective social work practice (Hicks & Swain, 2007; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004; Reamer, 2001; Urwin, Van Soest, & Kretzschmar, 2006). The nature of professional practice demands that schools of social work have different expectations of students than do non-professional disciplines (Gibbs & Blakely, 2000; Moore & Urwin, 1991). Historically, students entering the profession had a sense of mission and altruism and the programs were highly selective (Dubois & Miley, 2008; Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2010). However, in more recent times, schools of social work have seen differences in the types of students applying for social work majors. Some feel that this is due to the increase in the number of social work programs across the country and the corresponding decline in overall applicant pool (Feldman, 1999; Urwin, Van Soest, & Kretzschmar, 2006). Others attribute it to differences in student experiences with psychosocial trauma and ability challenges (Alperin, 1998; Cole & Cain, 1996; Hawkins & Hawkins, 1996), more pragmatism in selection of careers (Rompf & Royce, 1994); and students who display immaturity, self-preoccupation, poor interpersonal relationships, and
value conflicts that affect their ability to be competent practitioners (Urwin, Van Soest, & Kretzschmar, 2006). Despite gatekeeping standards at admission, often these students can perform acceptably in the structure of a classroom setting, and their unsuitability for practice is not visible until they enter the field practicum (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Furman, Jackson, Downey, & Seiz, 2004; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004; Tam & Coleman, 2009; Watkinson & Chalmers, 2008). This makes the field instructor's role of gatekeeper a critical component of field education.

Purpose of the Study

Compared to other aspects of professional social work, empirical studies on the effectiveness of field instruction are few. Without research to validate effectiveness, the field instructor's transition from practitioner to educator is even more challenging (Knight, 2001). The purpose of the present study is to identify the core attributes or characteristics that field instructors feel are essential in providing undergraduate social work field education. By asking field instructors directly, the study provides information from the perspective of those who are providing the field instruction to students, rather than assumptions or observations made by third parties. Moral reasoning and adult development provided a theoretical framework for the focus groups in the study. Additionally, field instructors were asked how leadership affects their role as a field instructor, particularly in the area of professional gatekeeping. The results of the study add to the scholarly literature on the topic of field education, as well as provide a basis upon which to build future field instructor training programs for schools of social work.

Research Questions

The questions addressed in this study were:
1. What leadership attributes and/or other characteristics are essential in providing competent and effective field instruction?

2. How do field instructors perceive their role in professional gatekeeping?

3. What leadership attributes and/or other characteristics are needed to be an effective and competent gatekeeper?

Significance of Study

While the process and standards of gatekeeping vary according to discipline, many education, allied health, and human service professionals agree that gatekeeping is a necessary component to a profession's credibility and integrity (Brear, Dorrian, & Giuseppa, 2008; Hester, Schonfeld, & Amoura, 2007; Vacha-Haase, Davenport, & Kerewsky, 2004; Younes, 1998). In the social work profession, gatekeeping is an ongoing process. It begins prior to admission into social work programs with a selection process, which gives educators the responsibility for first-line gatekeeping for the profession (Cole, 1991; Urwin, Van Soest, & Kretzschmar, 2006; Younes, 1998). Gatekeeping is especially important for undergraduate educators as they must decide initially who is competent to enter the profession of social work (Moore & Urwin, 1991). Accreditation standards also recognize the importance of student selection and retention (CSWE, 2008). As students progress through the curriculum, educators are responsible for ensuring that students are academically, behaviorally, and ethically suited to practice as social workers (Cole & Lewis, 1993). In cases where students have been determined to be unsuitable, academic and non-academic measures may be initiated to terminate students’ continuation in the social work program (Cole & Lewis, 1993; Tam, 2004; Wayne, 2004). Despite these efforts, students’ unsuitability for professional practice is often not obvious until they enter the field practicum (Bogo, Regehr, Power & Regehr, 2007; Moore & Urwin, 1991; Tam, 2004). This puts the
critical responsibility for gatekeeping on the shoulders of field instructors. Yet, there are questions as to the competencies necessary for field instructors to effectively carry out this responsibility.

While social work field instructors are competent practitioners, as evidenced by licensure and evidence-based practice in social service agencies, there is little evidence in the literature to support that they are competent as educators and supervisors. As previously mentioned, the stress on practitioners to provide more service with fewer resources has made it difficult for field instructors to set aside time for supervision (Reisch & Jarmon-Rhode, 2000). A study conducted by Tam (2004) found that some field instructors were reluctant to fail an inadequate student for a variety of reasons, and that many field instructors were unaware of the significance of their gatekeeping role. In another study, field directors' felt that field instructors needed specific training in the areas of supervision and acting as a person of authority, the ability to differentiate the teacher and practitioner role, and the ability to integrate classroom content with practice (Murdock, Ward, Ligon, & Jindani, 2006). Bogo et al. (2007) found that a lack of standardized evaluation criteria made student evaluation and gatekeeping difficult for field instructors. The field instructors in Bogo's study felt caught in a value conflict between the need to determine skill levels and their professional values of being nonjudgmental and viewing people from a strengths perspective. All of these studies encouraged ongoing exploration to clarify the issue of field instructor roles and competencies.

Another area of significance for this study is that it contributes to the knowledge base of the social work profession. From the 1915 Flexner Report, which determined social work was not a profession, to the establishment of a working definition of social work practice in 1958, to social work state licensure in the 1980s, the profession has a long history of being scrutinized
and its professional status questioned (Dubois & Miley, 2008). One of the criticisms of the social work profession is that it has not produced the massive amounts of empirical and qualitative research as the related academic disciplines of psychology and sociology. This has contributed to a lower professional status for the social work profession. It has also contributed to the confusion the general public has about the educational standards needed to practice social work and the definition of what social work practice entails (Dubois & Miley, 2008). This study helps to fill part of the void in the professional literature regarding field education.

Delimitations

There are several delimitations to this study that need to be addressed. First, the study concentrated on field instructors who supervise undergraduate social work students during the field practicum. Due to the fundamental differences in the type, amount and quality of supervision needed for undergraduate students, as compared to graduate students, the researcher felt it was important to limit the scope of the study to undergraduate supervisors. These differences are discussed more completely in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Another delimitation of the study regarding the sample and population is that only field instructors contracted with one university were used. There is a stark contrast between how the selected university's students complete their field practicum compared to other local universities. The students at the selected university complete a block placement. This type of field placement involves completing the required 448 field hours within one intensive semester. The students typically work 32 hours per week in a social service agency, and have completed all of their required coursework prior to entering the field placement. Other universities in the same state choose to extend the student field placement for one academic year. These programs require their students to work 16 hours per week for two semesters, and also require that students take
practice classes concurrently with field placement. Although ultimately the end result is the same in terms of courses and hours completed, the supervisory demands among schools are very different (Theriot, Johnson, Mulvaney, & Kretzschmar, 2006).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used:

**Countertransference:** The projection of feelings onto clients (students) by the worker (field instructor).

**Faculty Liaison:** The faculty person assigned by the university social work program to monitor the student’s performance during the field practicum. The faculty liaison has responsibility for assisting the field instructor in problem-solving with the student, and in making certain the students’ experiences during the practicum are educationally focused (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 2010).

**Field Instruction:** In social work education, an integral part of the educational curricula, providing students with supervised opportunities to engage in direct social work practice with individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations. Students are helped to refine professional skills, acquire and solidify social work values, and integrate the knowledge acquired in the academic setting with that obtained in the field (Barker, 1999). It is also known as the field practicum.

**Field Instructor:** A social work practitioner, often a direct care or line staff employee, who agrees to assume supervisory responsibility for training social work students during their field practicum.

**Gatekeeping:** The evaluation of student suitability for professional practice. It is a mechanism that aims to ensure the health and integrity of the profession by controlling access to it. It
involves the establishment of evaluative criteria to be used in determining student readiness (emotionally, behaviorally, and intellectually) to engage in profession practice.

**Leadership:** The process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation. Leadership is making what you believe in…happen (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001).

**Psychiatric Disability:** Any emotional, behavioral, or psychiatric problem that may negatively affect a student's performance in a social work education program. The student may or may not have a documented psychiatric disability (Gillis & Lewis, 2004).

**Transference:** The projection of feelings by clients (students) onto the worker (field instructor).

**Unsuitability:** An inclusive, relatively non-emotive and non-value-laden term that can be applied to the academic, personal and professional elements of social work education and suggests that, although students may not be suited to practice in social work, there are other career paths to which they may be better suited (Brear, Dorrian, & Luscri, 2008).

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 describes the background and purpose for the study. It provides the definitions of key terms to be used during the study, as well as explanation of the research questions to be addressed. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to social work field instruction, gatekeeping and leadership. Chapter 3 provides the research focus for the study. Using a qualitative exploratory framework, focus groups composed of social work practitioners currently engaged as field instructors were used to collect the data used in the study. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the results of the data collection, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results, conclusions of the study, and implications for future research and practice.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of the literature will explore the following concepts relevant to social work field education: the constructs of moral reasoning, adult development, and leadership as they relate to field education, similarities and differences between undergraduate and graduate social work curricula and the field practicum; the field supervisory process and professional mentoring; and student suitability issues and professional gatekeeping.

Moral Reasoning, Adult Development and Leadership

Moral reasoning is an important component of social work education. Educators in institutions of higher education have demonstrated a greater interest in moral development, and feel that teaching students how to behave and think in a morally responsible manner is important to the students’ educational experience (Good & Cartwright, 1998). Kohlberg's theory of moral development identifies several moral issues and six specific stages that people experience in order to achieve moral development (Hoskisson & Biskin, 1976). These stages are characterized in terms of the level, the perception of what is right, the reasons for doing right, and the social perspective of the individual. In stage one, the individual’s interpretation of what is right is based on an avoidance of punishment and/or physical damage to persons or property, as well as the acknowledgement of the superior power of authorities. It tends to be a very egocentric point of view, and the individual does not recognize the interests of others. Stage two is characterized by a concrete, individualistic perspective in which an individual acknowledges that everyone has the right to pursue his own interest, and what is right is relative to the situation. Stage two morality involves an awareness of fair and equitable treatment. The third stage in Kohlberg’s model involves a personal need to be good in one’s own eyes. This stage is characterized by an awareness of shared feelings, a desire to live up to expectations imposed through significant interpersonal relationships, and behavior consistent with the Golden Rule (treat others as you would like to be
treated). Stage four begins to take the focus off the individual, to an awareness of the social system and social conscience. This stage is marked by understanding the point of view of the system that defines roles and rules, and an awareness of the need for everyone to conform to societal rules and responsibilities. The key component to the fifth stage of moral development is the concept of obligation to abide by the societal laws. During this stage, an individual’s perspective reflects an awareness of the values and rights of society, an appreciation for the legal point of view, and understanding that values and rules are relative to a specific group. Individuals at this stage are concerned that rules and laws reflect the utilitarian concept of the greatest good for the greatest number. The final stage in Kohlberg’s model is the recognition of universal ethical principles. Behavior at this stage involves a commitment to and belief in self-chosen ethical principles, including universal principles of social justice, human rights, and respect for the dignity and worth of human beings as individual persons (Kohlberg, 1984). The moral issues Kohlberg identifies are consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and include obligation, responsibility, the value of human life, the welfare of others, respect, justice and reciprocity. The essence of how moral development is integrated into the social work field practicum is summed up in the following statement:

"Successive stages of moral development occur as a result of an interaction between an individual and his environment. When the individual confronts moral reasoning in conflict with his own, a state of disequilibrium results and he is forced to modify his existing moral perspective. Results of past research on acceleration of moral reasoning indicate that the success of a developmental moral education program is contingent on meeting two criteria. The program must provide a situation in which the student experiences conflict or difficulty in applying his current level of thought to moral
problems. And the program must also expose the student to the next higher level of thought in a situation where he actively participates in a social problem-solving process and where he has opportunity to assume the role of another and see his point of view” (Hoskisson & Biskin, 1976, p. 291).

According to Kohlberg's theory, the achievement of higher stages of moral development in individuals demonstrates an ability to conceptualize and resolve moral and ethical dilemmas in a more stable and self-consistent way (Reimer, 1977).

Gilligan's theory of moral development, particularly her discussion of the ethics of care and justice, validates the essential foundation of social work practice. She states that the ethics of justice and care are not opposites, but ways to organize the basic elements of moral judgment which are the self, others, and the relationship between them (Rhodes, 1985). Gilligan feels that organizing relationships in the context of attachment, rather than equality or principles, impacts the way human connection is accomplished. She asserts that recognition of the value of relationships, and the ability to see people’s needs and concerns, are fundamental parts of the ethic of care (Beck, 1994). Gilligan emphasized the connectedness of people and the importance of human relationships which is consistent with the cornerstone of social work practice, values and ethics (Rhodes, 1985; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). Beck (1994) discusses the activities inherent in the concept of caring. These include receiving another’s perspective, responding appropriately to that perspective, and a commitment to others and to the relationship. Chu, Tsui, and Yan (2009) describe social work as a profession which puts humanistic values into practice using critical self reflection, moral knowledge, and moral attitudes within a contextual awareness of one's own personal moral code, as well as the socio-political and cultural context of the client and society. In a 10 year longitudinal study, Rest and Narvaez (1991) concluded that education
is one of the best predictors of moral development, and that a liberal arts education provides students with a stimulating and challenging environment, encourages students to take more interest in their communities and society as a whole, and encourages lifelong learning. Gorman, Duffy, and Heffernan (1994) concluded that service learning improved students’ moral development and allowed them to experience greater empathy with disadvantaged populations. All of these researchers’ findings support the mission of the social work profession and the foundation of social work education. The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2008) clearly states that social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, to appreciate the dignity and worth of all people, and to act in a moral and ethical manner. Lemieux and Allen (2007) found that service learning opportunities promoted self reflection and better developed relationships between social work students and the community members with whom they engaged. Fenzel, Peyrot, Speck, and Guerty (2003) surveyed almost 300 college students and found behavioral and attitudinal differences between those that had participated in service learning as part of their educational requirements compared to those who did not. Service learning has been instrumental in assisting social work students to develop a better awareness of ethical boundaries and ability to recognize unprofessional behavior in the field (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Although service learning is different from field education, where the emphasis is on skill development, it serves an important part in social work education in the preparation of students for field education (Lemieux & Allen, 2007).

In addition to moral reasoning, another important component of field education is adult development. Adult development, like child development, has many theoretical concepts and models. Some define it as change over time, others as an adaptational response to situations and expectations as one matures, and still others as self-directed learning (Merriam & Clark, 2006;
Shannon, 2008; Taylor, 2006). Whatever the context, two important factors remain constant—adult development demands an element of self-directed learning and experience and maturity have an effect on one’s learning (Demick, 2006; Kitchener, King, & DeLuca, 2006; Merriam & Clark, 2006). One category of self-directed learning models represents frameworks that can assist teachers in helping students to become more self-directed learners. One model, developed by Grow, was grounded on the model of situational leadership developed by Hersey and Blanchard (Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). This model described four stages of learners, similar to the four stages of situational leadership, each with distinctive characteristics and behaviors. Erickson's theory of developmental stages, particularly those involving young and middle adulthood, are very applicable to field education. The stage of middle adulthood entitled *Generativity vs. Stagnation* is characterized by a concern for future generations, as well as one's own legacy (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). It is at this stage of adult (and career) development that many social work practitioners decide to become field instructors. A study conducted by Peleg-Oren and Even-Zahav (2004) indicated that even field instructors who chose to drop out of field education felt that field supervision was an essential component and an important function of professional social work practice. Many participants indicated that they engage in field supervision because they enjoy that aspect of teaching and they feel they are contributing to the next generation of practitioners (Peleg-Oren & Even-Zahav, 2004).

Finally, leadership and the development of leadership attributes are an important part of field education. Starratt (1991), in his discussion of the ethic of critique, stated that there is a moral obligation in education to see that it not only serves the individual, but also society as a whole. He called upon educational leaders to recognize the inequality of power relationships, as well as the need to encourage freedom, creativity, and autonomy to allow the educational
institution to fulfill its obligation to all of its constituents: the individual student, the profession, and society as a whole. Like Starratt, the Council on Social Work Education (2008), in its identification of the field practicum as the signature pedagogy for the profession, challenged social work educators and field instructors to engage in practice that will impact the future of social work education and the social work profession as a whole. This is consistent with the visionary thinking and behavior associated with transformational leadership and many models of leadership behavior (Collins, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). One model, the Hersey Blanchard Model of Situational Leadership, is rooted in the idea that leadership behavior is a result of the interconnection between relationship and task behavior (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). The model addresses the connection between inspiring actions (vertical axis) and structuring actions (horizontal axis) ranging from low to high to develop four specific leadership strategies. These strategies are identified as Enforcing, Enabling, Enlisting, and Endorsing. In a similar manner, the model identifies four specific levels of organizational readiness for change. Correctly identifying the context in which change will occur is a key to determining the appropriate leadership strategy to use. The leadership style one assumes may change depending on the situation that needs to be addressed, but the consistency with which followers can expect a leader to perform is critical to determining leader effectiveness. In their discussion of transformational leaders, Sahgal and Pathak (2007) state that leaders emerge from a journey of personal life experiences and processes that enable them to accomplish a sense of professional growth and success. Their model of transformational leadership emphasizes the notion of mission-driven leadership, and requires the development of a vision and followers to help support that vision. These concepts were also part of the leadership model developed by Kotter (1996), when he spoke of a guiding coalition and vision that guides transformational
leadership and effective change. Kotter also emphasized that leadership can occur at all levels of an organization (Kotter, 1996). This is consistent with Kouzes and Posner's (2004) pillars of leadership, which involve inspiring a shared vision, encouraging the heart, challenging the process, modeling the way, and enabling others to act. Collins (2001) also discusses the need for visionary thinking and development of leadership characteristics and leaders in all levels of successful organizations. Unfortunately, a review of the literature related to social work leadership has been focused on identified positional leadership (Gellis, 2001; Gourdine, Crewe, & Brown, 2008; Holosko, 2009; Levine, 2008; Mizrahi & Berger, 2005; Rank & Hutchinson, 2000). There is nothing in the available literature that addresses leadership attributes or behavior at non-positional levels. The present study addresses that void in the literature.

Undergraduate and Graduate Social Work Curricula and the Field Practicum

Early leaders in the social work profession realized the need for formal education and training for practitioners. The earliest formal social work education program began at the New York School of Philanthropy (now known as the Columbia University School of Social Work) in 1904 (DuBois & Miley, 2008). As the profession grew and became more diversified, social work educators felt that a set of common standards was needed to provide consistency and uniformity, as well as develop a sound professional knowledge base (Morales, Sheafor, & Scott, 2007). In 1952, the Council on Social Work Education was formed. The mission of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is:

"to promote and strengthen the quality of social work education through preparation of competent social work professionals by providing national leadership and a forum for collective action. CSWE pursues this mission through setting and maintaining policy and program standards,
accrediting bachelor's and master's degree programs in social work,
promoting research and faculty development, and advocating for
social work education." (CSWE.org)

Today, CSWE is recognized as the sole accreditation body for social work education. In its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) of 2008, the Council on Social Work Education identified ten competency areas that need to be addressed throughout the curriculum in both undergraduate and graduate social work education. These competency areas are: (1) identify self as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly, (2) apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice, (3) apply critical thinking to apply and communicate professional judgments, (4) engage diversity and difference in practice, (5) advance human rights and social and economic justice, (6) engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research, (7) apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, (8) engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services, (9) respond to contexts that shape practice, and (10) engage, assess, intervene and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (CSWE, 2008). In addition to its core curriculum standards, with specific differences between undergraduate and graduate study, social work education maintains a strong liberal arts foundation:

"Social work education is grounded in the liberal arts, which provide the intellectual basis for the professional curriculum and inform its design. The BSW curriculum prepares its graduates for generalist practice through mastery of the core competencies. The MSW curriculum prepares its graduates for advanced practice through mastery of the core competencies augmented
by knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration." (CSWE.org)

Throughout the entire social work curriculum, graduate or undergraduate, there are specific themes. These are (1) an emphasis on critical thinking; (2) development and implementation of professional ethics and values; (3) awareness and appreciation of diversity; and (4) knowledge of human behavior, policy, and research to enhance practice skills (Mason, D., personal communication). These themes are infused throughout the coursework, and build the students' skill and knowledge base that becomes the focal point for the integration of classroom and practice experience during the field placement. These themes and coursework lay a solid foundation from which students can develop their skills in working with client systems of all sizes, and can demonstrate competency in the skill areas defined by CSWE that makes field education the profession's signature pedagogy. Bachelor level programs prepare students for direct service positions such as case manager, mental health worker, group home or residential worker; while master's level programs prepare students for advanced clinical work in a chosen field, and assist them in developing skills in performing clinical assessments, performing supervisory responsibilities, and implementing effective service delivery.

Historically, social work education and practice reflected the social climate of society. The individual nature of the Charity Organization Societies grew into what is now known as casework, while the contributions of the Settlement House movements laid the foundation for group work and community organizing. During the 1920's, a focus on casework became prominent in social work education primarily due to the influence of the mental hygiene movement (Popple & Leigninger, 2010). The devastating effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and the advocacy of social workers in key governmental positions at that time, focused the profession's view of social problems as structural, rather than individual, issues. By the end
of the decade, the majority of social programs were publicly funded. In the 1940s, public backlash against New Deal reforms, the escalation of World War II, and the increased interest in the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud led to social work's renewed focus on the individual as the subject of treatment (Popple & Leigninger, 2010). During the next two decades, the focus of social work education and practice shifted again, primarily due to the effects of the civil rights movement. These changes also directly led to the interest in expanding social work to include undergraduate, as well as graduate, education. In the 1970s, the first undergraduate social work programs were formed. Since the 1980s, the politically conservative national climate has increased both an emphasis on the individual nature of problems, and increased advocacy for social justice for all citizens (Popple & Leigninger, 2010). The profession's swings between individual and societal focus is summed up by Popple and Leighinger (2010):

"The profession's history of swings between an individual and an environmental focus may suggest a dichotomy between these emphases, yet it can be interpreted in another way. That is, social work can be viewed as having developed a unique dual perspective-an awareness of the interplay between individual behavior and larger social, economic, and political structures. Social work practice can, in fact, be rather schizophrenic as workers try to deal both with individual and family issues and with the impact of the larger environment. But it is this dual perspective that gives social work its greatest strength". (p. 79)

Today, social work education at the undergraduate level exposes students to the three core areas of practice: casework, group work, and community organizing. Graduate education also emphasizes interventions with micro (individual) and macro (community) systems.
In addition to education, social work is also a licensed profession in all 50 states and the District of Columbia (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Although the type and scope of practice of the license is determined by each state, there is a definite distinction between the responsibilities assumed by bachelor and master level practitioners. A bachelor level practitioner in Ohio is able to perform responsibilities related to psychosocial interventions and counseling, intervention planning, and evaluation. A master level practitioner in Ohio may perform all of the above responsibilities, as well as the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders; organizational assessment, planning, development, accountability, and supervision; and program assessment, planning, development, implementation and evaluation (Ohio Revised Code, § 4757-21-02 & 4757-21-03).

The field practicum has been identified as the signature pedagogy for the social work profession, and provides an opportunity for students to integrate the theoretical concepts of the classroom with real life situations. In both graduate and undergraduate field placements, the ten core competencies must be demonstrated through learning opportunities provided to the student and be grounded in research-based practice. All field students need to complete an application and screening process to be entered into the field practicum; however, the process is determined by each specific program and there are no uniform standards regarding the selection of field interns. There are, however, specific differences between requirements in an undergraduate and graduate field practicum. An undergraduate practicum requires a minimum of 400 hours of supervised practice in a social service setting with a field instructor who holds either a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. The experience needs to provide students with opportunities to engage in generalist practice at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. The graduate practicum requires 900 hours of supervised experience with a field
instructor who holds an MSW. The experience needs to provide the student with opportunities to develop advanced clinical and administrative skills in a specific field of practice (CSWE.org).

Field Supervision and Professional Mentoring

Professional mentoring is common in many human service professions including education, medicine, and social work (Buddegerg-Fischer & Herta, 2006; Campbell & Brummett, 2007; Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly, & Carty, 2009; Howe & Daratsos, 2007). In higher education, the major participants in the mentoring process are the student, the college faculty members who provide the foundational knowledge, and the professional practitioners in the field (Campbell & Brummett, 2007). The literature agrees that early mentoring is desirable in the development of professional identity, encourages self assessment, and assists in the transition from student to professional (Allen, Cobb, & Danger, 2003; Bower, Diehr, Morzinski, & Simpson, 1998; Krull, 2005; Taherian & Shekarchian, 2008). Within the social work field, the field instructor assumes the role of mentor and supervisor during the student’s field practicum (Barretti, 2007).

Field supervision can be a rewarding yet challenging job. It involves being a mediator between the student and other agency staff and administrators; takes sensitivity, skill, and commitment; and requires the ability to appreciate the teaching aspects of supervision (Garthwait, 2008). Many field instructors are direct care practitioners who do not have staff supervisory requirements as part of their job description, yet they assume these responsibilities when they agree to admit a practicum student. Kadushin and Harkness (2002) identify three basic functions that are integrated into agency based supervision: administrative, supportive and educational. The administrative function includes responsibilities such as recruiting students, facilitating communication between and among the student and agency staff, orientation and
assignment of workload, and evaluating student performance. The educational function provides formal and informal training of student interns, while the supportive function involves developing morale, building a sense of teamwork between the student and staff, and dealing with work related conflicts. The social work field instructor needs to attend to all of these functions in order to effectively supervise an intern.

The ability to provide quality field supervision is not naturally derived from clinical training or years of practical experience (Miller, Corcoran, Kovacs, Rosenblum & Wright, 2005). Social work experts in field education mention that there is little formal training for the role of field instructor, or on major learning theories related to field education (Deal & Clements, 2006). While there is consensus in the literature that there is a need for formal field instructor training, the type and extent of training is up for debate (Gourdine & Baffour, 2004; Peleg-Oren, Macgowan, & Even-Sahav, 2007). Typically, schools of social work offer training on practical things such as learning contracts, evaluations, and course curricula. They may also offer instruction on how to teach a specific skill (Ames, 2008; Deal & Clements, 2006). But there is little in the literature related to empirically tested models of field instruction or field supervision. There is much discussion in the literature about the process of learning that takes place during field supervision. A recent study asked students and field instructors to use Kolb’s model of learning to explain the process that occurs in field instruction (Miller et al., 2005). The study found that relationship attributes such as honesty, trust, support and collaboration were significantly related to the participants’ perceptions of quality supervision. Several other studies addressed the personality characteristics of the supervisor and student, and their impact on the supervisory process. Dettlaff (2005) and Moore, Dettlaff, and Dietz (2004) addressed the influence of personality type on the supervisory relationship and suggested using a Myers-Briggs
type of indicator to determine a best fit between the personality profiles of students and field instructors. These studies emphasized that the supervisory relationship can be enhanced by understanding the personality type of the student and field instructor, and can be a source of education on both sides to learn to work effectively with different personality types. The authors caution, however, that the use of the Myers-Briggs instrument should only be used ethically and for training purposes. They state that the instrument can be used to help both field instructors and students respect the value and contributions of the different personality types, to help identify areas of strength and potential growth regarding students, and to help field instructors understand and clarify behavior and the learning needs of students. It should not be used to match students to agencies or field instructors to students, and should never be used to pass judgment or to become a mandatory part of the field process (Detlaff, 2005; Moore, Detlaff, & Dietz, 2004). Other researchers have used attachment theory as a framework to understand the supervisory relationship developed during field education (Bennett & Saks, 2006; Bennett, Mohr, BrintzenhofeSzoc, & Saks, 2008). Both studies confirmed the need for further exploration on the issue, but did conclude that field instructors who understood the concepts of attachment theory could apply it as a lens through which to assess the connection between the student and field instructor in the supervisory relationship, as well as understand the patterns of behavior that occur as part of the field supervisory process. The authors also concluded that the theory may improve understanding of the learning process that takes place during field (Bennett & Saks, 2006). Finally, the authors suggested that generally avoidant students may be more at risk than others for developing problems in field placement relationships, and confirmed that supervision-specific attachment plays a significant role in student perceptions of supervisors and the working relationship (Bennett, Mohr, BrintzenhofeSzoc, & Saks, 2008).
Student Suitability and Gatekeeping

The issue of student suitability for professional practice has been an ongoing concern in the social work profession for many years. Social work professional values and ethics promote practice that encourages acceptance, respect, and a nonjudgmental attitude when working with people (DuBois & Miley, 2008; Morales, Sheafor, & Scott, 2007). Suitability issues can challenge these personal and professional values, and create an ethical conflict between acting in a nonjudgmental manner and field instructors' professional responsibility to promote competent practitioners (Bogo, Regehr, Power & Regehr, 2007). Additionally, the profession is grounded in the belief that individuals have the capacity to change, and it is difficult to judge people that might be unready, rather than unsuitable, for practice (Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004).

Finally, it is difficult to define and measure personal qualities and attributes in a way that is consistent with university policies and principles of social justice (Cole, 1991; Wayne, 2004). Some schools of social work have adopted suitability criteria, as opposed to unsuitability criteria, in order to stress the importance of a positive set of professional values, attitudes and behavior critical for professional practice (Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Evaluating suitability for entry into the social work profession is essential to assure that only suitable social work graduates become practitioners (Tam & Coleman, 2009).

Unsuitability criteria for professional practice fall into two basic categories: academic and non-academic. Academic unsuitability involves such things as grade point average, incomplete coursework, or course work completed below a minimum standard (Cole & Lewis, 1993). Non-academic unsuitability is much more difficult to define and address, and the literature discusses different forms of non-academic unsuitability. These forms include psychiatric disability and/or behavior inconsistent with established ethical and legal guidelines.
(Koerin & Miller, 1995; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004). Several authors suggest that social work interns are entering field placements with more serious unresolved life issues (Gillis & Lewis, 2004; GlenMaye & Bolin, 2007; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Regehr, Stalker, Jacobs, & Pelech, 2001). In a study conducted by Gillis and Lewis (2004), 34% of the field instructors in the survey reported that they had students with psychiatric problems during field placement. The problems included depression, anxiety, unresolved trauma and victimization, character issues, and substance abuse. Additionally, the authors found that 13% stated that a student had been terminated from placement due to nonacademic concerns. These included noncompliance with conditions for continuation (such as receiving therapy or taking medication), unprofessional conduct (including threatening behavior and refusal to follow agency policies), inappropriate contact with clients, and racist attitudes towards clients and others (Gillis & Lewis, 2004). While students with documented disabilities are entitled to and can request assistance in fulfilling academic requirements, and social work programs are legally bound to make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities, legal precedents have been set that mandate universities are not required to make accommodations that would lower the educational requirements or academic standard of the program (Gillis & Lewis, 2004). The Council on Social Work Education requires that programs determine student suitability for field placement; however, neither they nor the EPAS accreditation standards clearly state specific criteria to be used (GlenMaye & Bolin, 2007; Tam & Coleman, 2009). With the emphasis on competency-based education in social work, it becomes even more critical that students demonstrate not only knowledge, but also skills in developing therapeutic relationships, capacity for critical thinking, as well as identification with and implementation of professional values and ethics (Tam &
Coleman, 2009). Thus, the gatekeeping responsibilities of the profession are critical to maintain an appropriate level of student suitability prior to entering professional practice.

There are many definitions of gatekeeping in the professional literature. Cole and Lewis (1993) state that the function of social work gatekeeping is to determine the suitability of the student for the field placement, for working with clients, or even for entering the profession. Moore and Urwin (1991) describe it as a responsibility of social work educators, in the schools and agencies, to make sure that graduates of social work programs are suited to the profession. Brear, Dorrian, and Luscri (2008), in their discussion of the counseling profession, suggest that gatekeeping is a mechanism to ensure the health and integrity of the profession by controlling access to it, evaluating student suitability for it, and holding those in gatekeeping positions accountable and responsible for the decisions made. Cole and Lewis (1993) observe that social work programs are accountable to many different populations. They are responsible for serving the individual student, but are also held accountable to the rest of the academic community, the social services agencies in which they place students, the clients served within the social services agencies, and ultimately to the social work profession and society as a whole. The authors further state that often social work educators are the first line gatekeepers to the profession, and have the responsibility of graduating students who are academically, behaviorally, and ethically suited to practice as social workers. Gatekeeping occurs at various points within social work education (Barlow & Coleman; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Urwin, 1991). It begins at admission with a screening process, and continues throughout the curriculum through advising and academic performance. It occurs again at the point of field placement, as students have to apply for field education, and ends at the point of graduation or termination from the field placement. The difficulty with gatekeeping measures is that, except for completion of field
work, the criteria for suitability is primarily based on academic performance (Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Within social work education, the majority of substantive evaluation of a student’s suitability for professional practice occurs in the field practicum (Reisch & Jarmon-Rhode, 2000). The Council on Social Work Education (2008) has identified field education as the “signature pedagogy” for the profession within its most recent accreditation standards. Therefore, the responsibility for gatekeeping decisions falls squarely on the educators and field instructors directly involved in field education.

The literature regarding ethical and legal dilemmas associated with gatekeeping and field education tends to address three main concerns. They are supervisory liability, academic dismissal and due process, and confidentiality. In their discussion of supervisor liability for students’ inappropriate or unethical behavior, Reamer (1989) and Strom-Gottfried (2000) introduce the concept of respondeat superior, which means “let the superior answer”. This legal concept encompasses both the field instructor and university faculty in social work education, and holds them equally responsible for the handling of student unsuitability for social work practice; yet the limits of responsibility are not clearly delineated. Gelman and Wardell (1988) surveyed a number of deans and directors of social work programs about the issue of liability in field education and concluded that there are no clear-cut answers to resolve the gatekeeping issue of liability in field. Their study discovered that many schools of social work did not have specific guidelines or policies in place to address issues of liability. Since that initial study, Reamer (1989) and Strom-Gottfried (2000) observed that schools have initiated some requirements to alleviate liability concerns. These measures include requiring students to purchase liability insurance for the duration of their practicum experience, discouraging students
from transporting agency clients in their personal cars, or going on home visits without agency personnel present.

Cole and Lewis (1993) explore the issue of academic dismissal and the legal/ethical justifications to be aware of during this process. They explain the need for balancing protection of a student’s right to due process with the duty to protect the profession and society from incompetent practitioners. In their discussion of the ethics of justice and critique, Kohlberg (1984) and Starratt’s (1991) question on how shall we govern ourselves is also applicable to the discussion of professional gatekeeping and due process issues. They agree that a balance of individual and societal rights needs to be maintained in order to protect the public good while allowing for individual freedom. Social work educators and field instructors need to be aware of the fundamental basic rights of due process as they apply to field education. They include a written or oral description of expectations, the opportunity to be heard before an unbiased or impartial decision maker, and the opportunity to appeal an adverse decision (Wayne, 2004).

Strom-Gottfried (2000), in an analysis of complaints to the National Association of Social Workers, identified the need to have clearly defined expectations regarding student behavior and achievement. These expectations need to address issues such as faculty-student boundaries, field instructor-student relationships, and fair supervisory practices. Student issues of transference and countertransference, that often are not detected until the field practicum, can create a host of supervisory and boundary concerns that need to be addressed fairly and in a timely manner. Roles also need to be clearly articulated at the beginning, and throughout the field practicum, in order to maintain appropriate boundaries between the student and various professionals. Since academic dismissal is an emotionally charged issue in most circumstances, clearly defined standards for competence and behavior are critical in alleviating legal issues. Lafrance, Gray,
and Herbert (2004) caution that having too specific criteria can also cause concerns for social work educators and field instructors. On the one hand, it is helpful to have guidelines and criteria upon which to judge suitability for professional practice. However, it is also possible that such criteria will increase student fears of unsuitability and create an unsafe or potentially harmful atmosphere for the student’s learning.

The third area of discussion regarding ethical dilemmas and gatekeeping is that of confidentiality. Hicks and Swain (2007) talk about the balance between the student’s right to privacy and the placement agency’s right to know information about the student. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states:

"Social workers should respect confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationship and transactions. Social workers should ensure that such colleagues understand social workers' obligation to respect confidentiality and any exceptions to it." (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008, §2.02)

The NASW Code of Ethics also states clearly that social work professionals have a responsibility to protect their clients, and society as a whole, from incompetent or impaired practitioners. This responsibility also extends to students:

"Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague's impairment (or incompetence) that is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties and that interferes with practice effectiveness should consult with that colleague when feasible and assist the colleague in taking remedial action.... Social workers who believe that a social work colleague's impairment interferes with practice effectiveness (or is incompetent) and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to
address the impairment (or incompetence) should take action through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, NASW, licensing, and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations." (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008, §§ 2.09 & 2.10)

DuBois and Miley (2008) identify several reasons that students enter the profession of social work. Among these reasons is a sense of giving back that stems from personal experiences or trauma, or first-hand experience coping with mental illness or substance abuse. While students can complete coursework without interference from these things, participation in a field practicum dealing with people who may be experiencing similar issues can be overwhelming for students and cause relapse behavior. These circumstances give credence to the need to know about a student’s personal issues prior to placement in a field agency. However, Strom-Gottfried (2000), Reamer (1989), and Cole and Lewis (1993) caution that social work educators and field instructors need to be cognizant of the standards set forth in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 that prohibit the dismissal of a student from an educational program without due process. The above-identified conditions may identify a student as a person with a disability who is protected by the law. These same laws also provide for special provisions of confidentiality to protect people from discrimination, and thus may cause ethical dilemmas regarding the need for disclosure and the right to privacy. Therefore, field instructors need to be very clear regarding the ethical and legal boundaries balancing the student's right to privacy and the agency and/or profession's need to know about potential incompetent or impaired practitioners.

In summary, the concept of social work field education is very complex. It is grounded in the theoretical constructs of moral and adult development, and places great emphasis on the
relationship between the student and field instructor. Curriculum standards imposed by the Council on Social Work Education, and ethical guidelines established by the National Association of Social Workers provide moral, ethical, and educational standards that need to be maintained to protect the integrity of the profession. The supervision and mentoring that occur during field education are critical to the socialization of the student into the professional role, as well as the determination of student suitability to enter professional practice. The gatekeeping responsibilities of field instructors are an important component in quality field education. Equally important is the competency of the field instructors to perform these responsibilities consistently.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory qualitative study that used case study as a framework of analysis. A case study investigates a phenomenon in depth and within its real life context (Yin, 2009). It also involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research allows more flexibility in research methods, and seeks to generate deeper meanings and richer observations about particular human experiences (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). This particular case study focused on the qualities and characteristics identified by social work field instructors to be essential in the performance of their duty as field instructors, especially in the area of leadership. It also sought field instructors' perceptions on their role in gatekeeping for the profession.

Setting and Case Selection

Miles and Huberman (1994) articulate the importance of defining the case in qualitative research. They describe the case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, in effect, your unit of analysis" (p. 25). The community environment provides an important context for understanding this case study. The setting for this study, Midwestern University (a pseudonym) enrolls approximately 20,000 students, and is located in a rural area of a Midwest state. The student population is quite diverse ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically, and students come from all 50 states, as well as 92 other countries. The student population of the social work program at the university is predominately white, middle class, female students who primarily lived in rural or suburban areas prior to attending college. The rural community surrounding the university is predominately White (93%), Christian (82%), and politically conservative (54%) (city-data.com; factfinder.census.gov).

Within this setting, the case focuses on field instructors in the social work program at Midwestern University. It concentrated on undergraduate, as opposed to graduate, social work
education. The participants in the study are current field instructors selected from a database of those overseeing undergraduate social work students in the Midwestern University Social Work Program. All participants selected for this study had supervised an undergraduate social work student in the past three years. The focus groups in the study were conducted in the field, within the agencies or geographic area in which the participants work. For example, several field instructors work in agencies located in a large city twenty miles from the university; therefore, one of the focus groups was held in that city to accommodate them. The research questions focused on field instructors' perceptions of the qualities, particularly leadership qualities, needed to perform their role as field instructor. In addition, their perceptions regarding their role as professional gatekeepers were explored. These criteria determined the boundaries of the cases to be studied.

Just as important as describing what was studied, Miles and Huberman (1994) also discuss the need to articulate what was not studied. This helps to clarify the case boundaries, and set up parameters for the framework to be used. This study did not involve field directors, students, or field instructors who do not meet the aforementioned criteria. It did not investigate issues related to the supervisory relationship, field instructor training, or outcome measures associated with field instruction. These issues have been previously studied within the available literature (Knight, 2001; Miller, Corcoran, Kovacs, Rosenblum & Wright, 2005; Moore, Dietz, & Dettlaff, 2004; Murdock, Ward, Ligon, & Jindani, 2006).

The Role of the Researcher

I am a social work practitioner with 30 years clinical experience. I have been a field instructor for 15 years with undergraduate and graduate students, primarily working in the areas of health and mental health. I have also been a social work educator for 18 years; five years as a
part-time instructor, and the past 13 years as a full time social work faculty member. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Social Work and a Master of Social Work degree, and have been a state-licensed social worker since 1984. I am also a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers, a credential awarded by the National Association of Social Workers. Currently, I am the field director in a social work program at a mid-sized, four-year institution of higher learning in the Midwest. My work as a practitioner, field instructor, and educator give me the credibility necessary to perform research in this area of social work practice.

The research relationship is an important factor in the role of the researcher (Maxwell, 2005). Currently, I have a relationship with each of the participants in the focus groups based on their connection to the university as field instructors. Additionally, many of the field instructors have been colleagues throughout my career. Maxwell (2005) states that the relationship between researcher and participant is complex and ever changing. He observes that negotiating and conceptualizing the research relationship is a critical component in the overall design of a qualitative study. In this study, the research relationship is a new dimension in an already established complex relationship with the participants. It did not enhance or hinder the data collection process by fostering collaboration or creating dissonance between the participants and me. Because the actual research project means different things to the participants and to me, care was taken to be sure the research did not intrude upon or assume certain aspects of the relationship. For example, I made sure that an atmosphere of collegiality was fostered in the focus groups, which allowed participants to feel comfortable in sharing their opinions without risk of judgment. This atmosphere would not have been as conducive to open discussion if I had assumed a position of authority based simply on the fact that I was conducting the research.
The role of the researcher in this study was one of participant-observer (Creswell, 2009). This type of research method has been used extensively in the fields of sociology, social psychology, and anthropology for many years (Lohman, 1937), and has been used in education since the 1960s (Bogdan, 1973). Shuter (1975) observed that a participant observer relies on description of observable phenomena and probing interviews to gather information while attempting to decrease social distance between oneself and the people being studied. Participant observation is characterized by a prolonged period of contact with participants in the place they normally live or spend their time. Its purpose is to develop an in-depth understanding of complex social situations and relationships without doing anything to disrupt or disturb them (Bogdan, 1973). In this study, focus groups took place in agencies that provide field opportunities for students. These agencies were familiar to the study participants either because it was their place of employment, or it was an organization with which they have a working relationship. The discussion conducted within the focus groups allowed participants to verbalize their opinions within a familiar and comfortable context, and provided an opportunity for them to share their perceptions with others engaged in similar situations. My focus as the participant observer was to listen and to be nonjudgmental in the focus groups. Although I facilitated the conversation, I reserved my own opinions for discussion at a later time. It was more important for me to listen and allow the conversation to flow among the participants so that I could obtain the largest amount of data possible from the discussion without unintended influence from me.

Johnson, Avevarius, and Weatherford (2006) state that one of the major factors contributing to difficulty in qualitative research is the researcher's status as a stranger or outsider to the social system under study. Labaree (2002) discusses the dilemma of being an insider and an outsider in participant observation. As an insider, a researcher can facilitate greater access to
special groups, to critical information, and to a feeling of trust at the beginning of the research process. Additionally, the insider must be aware of preconceived beliefs, values and assumptions about the community or participants being studied (Beoku-Betts, 1994) as they may distort the researcher's objectivity during the research process. According to Maynard and Purvis (1994), being an insider participant observer can create a "consciousness of comfort" in which the researcher will overlook or discount ordinary or mundane information that may contribute to the study. Bulmer (1982) also discusses the need to investigate the familiar or ordinary actions and events that contribute to daily life in order to gain more comprehensive insight into the study. Unfortunately, the insider participant observer's position is not without risk. Labaree (2002) cautions that the researcher needs to maintain a clear and transparent research agenda to avoid any ambiguity regarding the role of the researcher or the intent of the research. The researcher also needs to be vigilant in avoiding perceptions of hidden agendas and improper partnerships within the researched community. These perceptions can have negative effects on current and future relationships between the researcher and the study participants if not carefully monitored. Since I was an insider participant observer in this study, I needed to make a conscious effort not to assume that I know what people are saying without engaging in probing and clarifying statements. I also needed to be very clear about my intentions as a researcher, and that the information obtained in the study will in no way affect the ongoing relationship between the participant, the researcher, and the university regarding their role as a field instructor. This was also addressed in the Human Subjects Review Board procedures required by my university for the study.
Researcher Bias

As stated previously, I have a prior relationship with each of the field instructors in this study. Six of the field instructors and I have been colleagues when we worked in the same agency. One was a former student. I have known all of them for at least seven years during my tenure as field director for the social work program at Midwestern University. I would characterize my relationship with all of them as colleagues, two I consider close friends.

My interest in this area stems from my own experience as a field instructor as well as a field director. I have been in the position of supervising marginal or unacceptable students as a field instructor, and wondered if others approached these students the same way I did. Since professional gatekeeping is such an emotionally charged topic in the literature, I wanted to see how the people actually doing the gatekeeping felt about the topic. Additionally, my current position as field director mandates the determination of practitioners as field instructors. My fundamental question was to inquire about what other field instructors perceived as the most important qualities and characteristics for that position.

I tried very hard to remain objective throughout the focus group discussions. I asked the questions, but refrained from answering them or trying to lead the discussion in any particular direction. I did clarify questions when asked, but again remained what I perceived as nonjudgmental throughout the discussion. I honestly believe that my relationship with the field instructors helped facilitate the focus group discussion. Many of the field instructors knew one another, either because they worked together in the same agency or because they had worked together with mutual clients or community groups. The spirit of collegiality was very strong in the groups, and the participants seemed generally at ease throughout the conversation.
Participant Selection

The population for this study was the 65 field instructors who were affiliated with the Midwestern University Social Work Program. The study utilized a purposive sample drawn from this population. A purposive sample is “a type of non-probability sample in which we select units to be observed on the basis of our own judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p. 623). The study sample was composed of the 42 field instructors who had supervised at least one student from the Midwestern University Social Work Program within the past three years. Since field instructors’ perceptions are the main focus of the study, it is logical that the sample was drawn from current field instructors with recent experience in the supervision of undergraduate students. All 42 field instructors were invited to participate in the study.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using focus groups. First, a series of five focus groups were scheduled at various locations and times to accommodate the field instructors’ time and travel abilities. Field instructors were able to choose to attend any one of the groups. The Midwestern University Social Work Program has field agencies located in the region within about 60 miles of the university, though many are located in the town in which Midwestern University is located. Two focus groups were held in these outlying areas, two were held a nearby large city home to a number of the field agencies, and one was held in the town in which Midwestern University is located. The intent of the focus group was to promote self-disclosure among the field instructors, while allowing them to feel comfortable, respected and free to give their opinion in a nonjudgmental atmosphere (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Each session lasted 90 minutes. The field instructors were asked to complete a short, demographic data sheet prior to
the beginning of the group. The sheet contained questions related to their area of specialty, years in practice, and years as a field instructor. It also asked for their level of education, number of students supervised in their career, level of current agency position, and amount of supervisory responsibility in their current position. It asked them to define what a leader is, and identify their own leadership qualities, as well as the amount of training they have had in supervision.

I began the focus groups by thanking the field instructors for attending, answering any preliminary questions they had about the building facilities, explaining the confidentiality protections afforded to them as participants in the study, explaining the rationale for the study, and facilitating introductions. Following introductions of the group members, the field instructors were asked to discuss the following questions:

1. How did you decide to become a field instructor?
2. What motivates you to continue in that role?
3. What challenges do you experience as a field instructor?
4. Describe the ideal or perfect field instructor;
5. Describe the excellent and the unacceptable student intern;
6. How do you see your role as a professional gatekeeper? and
7. How does leadership fit into the role of a field instructor?

The first four questions were intended to ascertain field instructors' perceptions of the qualities and characteristics needed for competent field instruction. Questions five and six were intended to develop the discussion on gatekeeping, and question seven was intended to elicit the field instructors' ideas regarding leadership. The questions on the data sheets completed prior to the group were also intended to address leadership issues.
I used a flip chart to write down key points during the focus group discussions. At the end of the discussion, once the field instructors had left the room, the number of the focus group was placed on the top of each page. The focus groups discussions were audio taped and transcribed. Additional sources of data were a reflective journal and field notes that I kept. I took field notes throughout the focus group process. They served as reminders to discuss key concepts, observations of the interactions between field instructors, and my interpretations of comments made by the field instructors. The reflective journal contained entries documented by me after each focus group or interview. They contained my observations and impressions of the interaction including the setting, atmosphere, nonverbal communication among the field instructors, and my thoughts throughout the process.

Throughout the focus groups, I served as observer-participant (Creswell, 2009). One advantage of this role was that I had a prior relationship with all of the participants due to my position as field director for the Midwestern University Social Work Program. This relationship allowed me to maintain a comfortable interaction with the participants, and allowed recording of information as it occurred. It also allowed the field instructors to openly discuss their ideas, and validate their experiences with other professionals acting in a similar role. Another advantage was that by audio taping the interactions, I was able to review the experience more objectively at a later time. It was difficult to maintain complete objectivity while participating in the focus groups. I needed to be mindful of the timeframes and, at times, guide the discussion to be sure that all field instructors had equal opportunity to speak. My role as group facilitator demanded attention to group processes that distracted from the ability to absorb all of the information being shared (Toseland & Rivas, 2009). By reading the transcription and reviewing the tapes, I
increased my awareness of the group dynamics occurring throughout the interactions, and gained a greater appreciation of the field instructors’ perspectives throughout the process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research. It involves continual reflection completed concurrently with writing reports, analyzing findings, and making interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2009). The analysis of this study had multiple levels. First, all of the focus group discussions were transcribed. After each group's transcription was completed, I reviewed it with the audio tape of the focus group making sure that there were no errors or omissions in the transcript. Once I was certain that the transcripts were accurate, I began a system of coding the data.

I reviewed each group's transcript looking for key words or phrases in the text. Next, I completed a frequency analysis of those words and phrases, noting how often it was used or referred to in the discussion. After that, I reviewed the data again looking for commonalities among the responses and developed groupings for them. Once I completed this process on each group separately, I merged the data into a spreadsheet and analyzed it for frequency and commonality across groups. I used the information to develop groupings and themes for discussion of the results.

Once the data analysis from the transcripts was completed, I utilized the same process to analyze the data from the flip chart notes. I compiled a list of responses for each question in the focus group discussion from each one of the groups, then put them in a spreadsheet so that I could analyze the information across the groups. I looked for common descriptors or phrases, and then grouped like responses. I then merged the two data sets and completed a frequency analysis of key words and phrases, developed groupings and identified common themes.
Once the focus group discussion data were completed, I analyzed the data from the surveys completed prior to the beginning of each group. First, I tabulated the demographic results of each demographic category. This was done using a simple frequency analysis of the data. Next, I utilized the same type of coding process that was used to analyze the groups' transcripts and flip chart notes. I listed all of the responses to each of the questions per group, then put all the group comments for each question in a spreadsheet and identified key words and phrases. I then looked for commonalities among the responses, developed groupings and identified common themes.

The next aspect of analysis focused on field instructor perceptions of the process and information revealed in the focus group discussions. Five field instructors, one from each group, were asked to review the transcript for accuracy, and to identify key words or phrases they felt were important during the discussion. All five field instructors sent back documents that listed the question being discussed, followed by key words or phrases that came from that discussion. These data were compared to the data I had coded from the respective groups.

The final aspect of data analysis was the use of my reflective journal and field notes regarding the focus group discussions. I used the information in these documents to support the descriptors, key phrases, groupings and themes identified in the study. I compared my impressions and thoughts with the comments made by focus group participants to articulate information regarding the atmosphere in the room, the field instructors' interactions among one another, as well as with me, and the overall comfort with the group process.

Validity

There were multiple measures of reliability and validity used in this study. First, I read the transcription of the focus group and interview discussions thoroughly to identify mistakes.
Once the transcripts were complete, the coding procedures were reviewed for consistency. The transcripts were also read by two educators serving on my dissertation committee who cross-checked the codes. This inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2009) provided evidence of reliability in the coding procedures.

One source of validity was triangulation. This involves the use of multiple sources of data to build a coherent justification for the themes of the study (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). In this study, the data include the transcripts from the focus groups and interviews, the data sheets completed by focus group participants, and my reflective journal entries and field notes. Another validation strategy used was member checking (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). This was done by taking drafts of the document (themes, analysis, case description) to five focus group participants for their review and comments. A third method of validation was description of the researcher bias (Creswell, 2009). This involved a detailed explanation of my relationship with the participants, interest in the area of study, and possible limitations of my objectivity.

Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical issues considered in this study. First was the issue of confidentiality. The identities of the participants remained anonymous in any reporting of the data. Although excerpts or passages from conversations are embedded in the final document, the participants' identities are not disclosed. Participants' identities were kept anonymous, and were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Additionally, the all documents related to the study (transcripts, data sheets, field notes, reflective journal) are kept in a locked cabinet in my office. No one is allowed access to the information without permission from me.

Secondly, the study obtained the approval of the university Human Subjects Review Board. This process provided verification that the process was ethically sound, that the
participants of the study were treated with respect, and that the participants would not suffer any undue hardship or unethical treatment as a result of their participation.
CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The information obtained from the focus groups provided insight into practitioners' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as field instructors. The focus group participants, who were all social work practitioners as well as field instructors, discussed their desire to become and remain a field instructor. They identified personal traits and characteristics needed for field instruction, leadership qualities as they related to field instruction, and perceptions of their role as a professional gatekeeper.

Overview of Focus Group Participants

Of the 42 eligible field instructors selected for participation in the study, 19 (45%) were able to attend. There were five field instructors in the first two groups, and three in the last three groups. In each of the last three groups, two field instructors who had planned to participate could not due to work responsibilities. The demographic information revealed that three (16%) were male and 16 (84%) were female; three (16%) were African American while 16 (84%) were Caucasian. Educationally, nine (49%) held a Master of Social Work degree, eight (42%) held a Bachelor of Social Work degree, and two (9%) had a Bachelor of Social Work with a master's degree in another area. All of the field instructors were currently licensed social work practitioners. The majority of the field instructors were seasoned professionals. Their years of practice ranged from seven to more than 30 years. Eighteen (95%) of the field instructors had been practicing at least ten years, six (32%) had over 30 years of experience, and their aggregate experience totaled over 400 years.

Focus group participants were asked to respond to questions regarding years of experience in practice and as a field instructor, as well as number of students supervised in their career using the following ranges: 1-3; 4-6; 7-9; 10-12; and 13+. For the years of experience in
the 13+ range, an actual number of years in practice was ascertained. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographics.

Table 1

*Focus Group Participant Demographic Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Field of Practice</th>
<th>Type of Agency</th>
<th>Years of Practice Experience</th>
<th>Agency Position</th>
<th>Years as a Field Instructor</th>
<th>Number of Students Supervised in Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (40)</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>13+</td>
<td>13+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (28)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>13+</td>
<td>13+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (20)</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (20)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (33)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>13+</td>
<td>13+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (17)</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Corrections</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Behavioral Health</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (32)</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>BSW/MA</td>
<td>Family Violence</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (40)</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>13+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>BSW/MA</td>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (17)</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamika</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Behavioral Health</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (16)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Corrections</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (17)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Behavioral Health</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13+ (32)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>13+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (40)</td>
<td>direct care</td>
<td>13+</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jody</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Private, Non profit</td>
<td>13+ (20)</td>
<td>supervisor</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The field instructors participating in the study came from a variety of agencies and areas of practice. Ten (52%) of the field instructors worked in public agencies, nine (48%) worked in private non-profit agencies. Their areas of practice included five (26%) medical; three (16%) behavioral health or child welfare; two (10%) corrections, school-based, or poverty and homelessness; one (6%) family violence or the elderly. They had worked in their current positions from seven to more than thirteen years, eighteen (95%) of the field instructors had worked at their agency at least ten years. One had recently retired after 36 years at her place of employment. Nine (48%) of the field instructors held positions as a supervisor or middle manager, eight (42%) held direct care or line staff positions, and two (10%) held positions that had a combination of direct care and supervisory responsibilities. When asked specifically about their amount of supervisory responsibility (other than supervision of students), those in direct care reported minimal to no responsibility while those in middle management or supervisory positions reported moderate to a lot of supervisory responsibility. Some had received supervisory training primarily from annual field instructor trainings held at local universities, while others had received supervisory training through their place of employment specific to job responsibilities. Seventeen of the field instructors had attended at least one three hour workshop or conference that involved supervision training.

In addition to being seasoned practitioners, the field instructors participating in the study also had much experience in their role as field instructors. Their experience ranged from one year to more than 13 years, with an average of 7-9 years. Nine (63%) have been field instructors for at least seven years, and nine (48%) have been field instructors for more than ten years. The number of students supervised ranged from one to more than 13, with an average of 7-9 students per field instructor.
Rationale for Becoming and Remaining Field Instructors

The longevity of the field instructors in their role prompted me to ask them why they became field instructors initially. Many stated that they were encouraged by others who felt they had the necessary skills to succeed in the field instructor role. Some stated that they wanted new challenges in their current job responsibilities. Jack, a 40-year veteran, remarked "I was restless and bored...it was like a shot in the arm to me". Others wanted to try something new. Joyce, another participant with 40 years experience, stated "I wanted to try some administrative tasks to see if I would like them". The majority discussed their own personal experiences with field instruction and how it affected them as practitioners. Ruth, a practitioner with over 10 years experience working with people in poverty, said "I had a really positive field placement experience with a wonderful field instructor, and I wanted to be able to give an opportunity to another student to have that kind of experience", while Rhonda, who has worked in the social work profession for 32 years, remarked "I did not get the wonderful experience that others had...not having any real hands on experience or explaining....I wanted to give students a more well-rounded field experience." Whether the experience was positive or negative, the field instructors stated they wanted to give students a positive, realistic experience so they would be prepared upon entry into the profession.

In addition to asking why they began as field instructors, participants were also asked why they continue in that role. While the participants agreed that assuming responsibility for a student places more demands on them, they felt that the benefits of being a field instructor outweighed the costs of time and resources in training students. The field instructors stated that one of the main reasons they continued to take students was because they enjoyed it. Several commented "I enjoy the student perspective on things...it is kind of exhilarating", "I enjoy having
them around and listening to their stories", and "I enjoy their eagerness to learn". The field instructors all agreed that the students bring a new freshness of ideas and life into the field. Karen, a veteran of 28 years, commented "They bring life into the field. Sometimes you can get stale and feel like you aren't getting things accomplished, then you see a student who is so excited and eager and you feel like this is what it is all about". Lisa, a school social worker, said "I enjoy the freshness and always invite my interns to share their gifts", and Melissa, whose experience in child welfare totals 17 years, observed "It is so refreshing...they seem so excited and it's nice to see that energy". Many field instructors felt that students help keep them ethically grounded and up to date on current information and research in the field. Several commented "I'm always learning something from them". Karen elaborated on the topic and said, "They keep me grounded ethically. We are guests in a host setting and can be co-opted into that mindset. They help me remember that I am here to provide a different framework and a different reframe of the problem". Lisa added, "They bring new things to us. They bring new knowledge, the way they are always thinking of things, and I try to take one new thing from them and incorporate it into my practice".

All of the field instructors stated that they felt a responsibility to the profession and future generations of social workers. They also stated that they enjoyed being a part of someone's future, that it was a very rewarding experience. Among their comments were:

- "I get concerned when I hear people say they don't have time to have an intern. Somebody had to make time for us, I wouldn't be here if somebody didn't make time for me". -- Connie

- "I get a call back or an email from one of the students and they have gotten a job. It's kind of neat being part of someone's future". -- Victoria
• "What motivates me is pride in what I do and I want to share that and help people grow with it so they can pass it on". --Monica

• "I had a professor that made a statement that has always stuck with me and that statement was 'don't forget someone had to be your field instructor and remember you need to do that in return'." --Rhonda

• "We have an ethical responsibility to the next generation". --Joyce

These statements conveyed the sense of responsibility the field instructors had to the profession and its future. Finally, the field instructors identified that having students is a training tool for the agency. The agency can experience first-hand the students' work performance, and can make better decisions on hiring them for open positions. Ruth remarked, "We know they're going to come to work every day. We can say okay, we have a trained person, and if we're able to hire it's the perfect training tool to use as an agency".

Overview of Analysis

The analysis was divided into three distinct sections: qualities and characteristics of field instruction, leadership, and gatekeeping. Each of these is discussed in detail throughout the rest of this chapter. In addition to the three sections listed above, three themes emerged from the focus group discussions. These themes permeated the discussion, not only regarding qualities and characteristics of field instructors, but also the discussions of leadership and gatekeeping. The three themes were (1) role modeling and setting professional boundaries, (2) communication, and (3) nurturing. Each topic is discussed from the unique perspective in each part of the chapter. For example, communication is discussed as an essential characteristic of field instructors regarding their role as a field instructor in this section. It is addressed again in the section on leadership, and is identified as a key component to being an effective leader.
Finally, it is discussed in the section on gatekeeping as a central focus of the relationship between the field instructor, the student, and the university. The other themes are addressed in a similar manner across the chapter. Even though they may appear redundant, the focus of the discussion on the theme in each section of the chapter is different. Table 2 outlines the themes and their relevance to each section of the chapter.

Table 2

An Overview of Focus Group Themes and Chapter Sections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities and Characteristics of Field Instructors</th>
<th>Role Modeling and Boundary Setting</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Nurturing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- demonstrate professional demeanor, attire and work habits</td>
<td>- distinguish relationship boundaries between field instructor and student</td>
<td>- honest conversations with students about their skill level</td>
<td>- demonstrate patience, understanding, and care with student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- assist student to distinguish between personal and professional issues in the workplace</td>
<td></td>
<td>- setting clear and realistic goals with student</td>
<td>- development of trusting relationship between student and field instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- providing negative criticism and addressing conflict</td>
<td>- provision of encouragement and mentoring to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>- teaching and modeling for others to learn leadership behavior</td>
<td>- communicating a clear vision</td>
<td>- inspiring others to lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- motivating and encouraging others to adapt to change</td>
<td>- effective oral and written communication skills</td>
<td>- caring about students and helping them reach their full potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- leading by example</td>
<td>- build a team and set a direction</td>
<td>- building trust and confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeeping</td>
<td>- responsibility of determining suitability of student for profession</td>
<td>- building solid relationship between field instructor, student and university</td>
<td>- struggles with values and ethics regarding conflict between student abilities and professional obligations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualities and Characteristics of Field Instructors

Focus group participants in the study were asked to describe the perfect field instructor. They identified characteristics and skills that they felt were essential in providing quality field instruction to students. These characteristics and skills were then categorized into four specific groups: roles, personal traits, practice skills, and environmental criteria. These are discussed in detail in this section of the chapter.

Roles of the Field Instructor

Four specific roles were identified as essential components of quality field instruction. Of the four, the role of teacher/educator was the most prevalent. All of the focus group participants commented on the need to teach students the tasks of social work practice. They also commented on how field instruction is an extension of the classroom, and it was important that they know how to integrate theory with practice and be able to demonstrate that to students. Statements like "you've got to teach them" and "you have to have the desire to teach" were common in the discussion of field instructor roles. Recognizing that there were differences in how students learn, and being able to distinguish different ways of teaching were also things the focus group participants felt were critical to their role as an educator. Rhonda commented, "You have to recognize a teachable moment and use it." Jack stated, "We know that people learn, and that there are different types of learners. So, the field instructor needs to at least be able to deal in a couple of those kinds of learning modalities." Melissa observed "you need to develop ways to teach and educate that are relevant and useful to the students". One challenge identified in the discussion of teaching was differences in student expectations. Several focus group participants noted that teaching the enthusiastic, motivated student is a pleasure but also a challenge. Karen stated,
"They are so enthusiastic and the quantity of work they put out is just astounding, and it's good work. But there are still things they don't know, and I need to be more aware of that, work harder at just not letting it go, but kind of reining them in and thinking about what maybe they still need to learn."

The participants discussed how easy it is to fall into the habit of letting students do tasks because they learn the task quickly, but not taking the time to teach them the rationale or theoretical explanation behind the task. They feel that they train the students, but do not teach the students in these situations and that is not acceptable field instruction. The focus group participants recognized that it is easy to focus on the task-oriented aspect of field instruction because students enjoy that the most. The students feel more competent when they have the ability to demonstrate skills, and the participants' daily work activities are getting accomplished quicker with students' help. However, the focus group participants acknowledged that competent social work practice involves more than just completing activities. It involves a thorough understanding of the theoretical and clinical rationale for interventions and the ability to critically evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions. This is the core of the teaching aspect of field instruction, and is the part hindered when field instructors' attention is focused more on the training of skills, rather than the teaching of practice.

The second role identified in the study was acting as a role model. All of the focus group participants felt that the students looked to them to define what constitutes professional behavior and demonstrate it so the students could imitate what they see. Lisa summed the concept up nicely when she said, "You are a role model, you are motivated and not just watching the clock, you are using electronic devices appropriately, everything you do is role modeling to the students." Issues such as work attire, punctuality, work ethic, and communication in its many
forms were areas in which field instructors commented on how they needed to role model for students appropriate professional behavior. Sherry stated,

"They don't really get what a work environment is until they start, and it's just constant work with them on being in a professional environment, whether that's getting to work on time or being prepared when you come to supervision or dressing appropriately, ...all of those little things."

The third role identified by the field instructors was mentor. While it may appear to be an extension of role modeling and teaching, the mentoring aspect focused on building a relationship with the student rather than showing them tasks or modeling professional work behavior. All of the focus group participants discussed the need to get to know the student, to understand them personally and professionally, and to help them develop a professional identity. They identified the need to have realistic expectations about the students' abilities, to help them set goals and help them build independence. Tonya and Diane described the process as similar to parenting in the respect that parents will provide children the foundation upon which to be a successful adult, while a field instructor will provide a foundation upon which to build a successful practice. Connie stated, "Helping them build independence...if you are watching over them, guiding them, and directing them constantly, they're not going to be able to do it independently at all." Another component of mentoring was helping the student identify strengths and weaknesses, and being able to provide honest feedback about those things to the student. Melissa clarified this point when she said, "We've had honest conversations with them about their skills and where they would be best suited...there are tremendous skills in other areas and you hone in on those, and they'll find gainful employment that they will actually enjoy."
Jody commented,

"It's important to have an honest conversation with them about strengths and weaknesses because I don't think we'd be doing our job as field instructors if we didn't.... We all have weaknesses, and I think part of the learning process is to learn what your weaknesses are and what can you do about them."

Many focus group participants stated that giving negative criticism is the least favorite activity they do with students, but they also agreed that it is a necessary part of professional growth and development.

A fourth role identified by the focus group participants was advocate. This role was explained in two ways. First, participants felt that it was important to make sure that students were given appropriate tasks. Karen used her own experience to illustrate the point, "I had two different field placements and neither one was that great. I thought there's got to be a better way to do this." Jason stated, "They were doing cleaning for almost all the time...I saw other classmates going through terrible internships". The focus group participants stated that it was important to advocate on behalf of interns to make sure that theirs was a learning experience, and not just unpaid labor for the agency. They acknowledged that there are always common tasks that need to be done, and are not the type of tasks students expect to do. Amy pointed out, "Social work often includes clerical work and all these other things that we all know we just have to do. Not just fun stuff." However, they were adamant that these tasks are important to understanding the overall social work role and practice within the agency. Jane stated, "It is helping them understand that it is the small tasks that you might consider menial that we do every single day that build on the important things that we do."
Secondly, focus group participants stated that students need to be treated well by the agency staff. Diane said, "They are shaky when they get up here....I have to make sure that they have a comfort level because it's kind of scary for them." Sherry remarked, "You need to treat them as a professional. If you treat them as a student, they're going to act as a student versus as part of the professional team." Several focus group participants talked about personality clashes between the students and other staff and how they handled those situations. They agreed that it was important to educate other staff regarding the student's role and expectations, and be available to intercede on behalf of the student if conflict arose. They also discussed organizational behavior and dynamics and how they could affect a student. Tamika stated, "Sometimes our staff can be pretty uninviting and not tolerant of new people." Focus group participants agreed that other staff perceptions of a student's abilities, or lack of ability, can create negative situations that require field instructor intervention. Clarifying boundaries and responsibilities are seen as advocating for the student within the workplace.

*Personal Characteristics and Attributes*

Personal attributes were also identified as an important topic for field instructors. The focus group participants identified five specific personal factors critical to field instruction. The first was a passion for social work. Jody stated plainly, "You have to LOVE social work." This attitude was reflected in comments made by many other group participants. They felt that a field instructor's attitude about his/her current position and the profession as a whole should be positive, inviting, and mirror the enthusiasm of the students. Focus group participants felt that good field instructors are comfortable and content in their position, and are not experiencing the symptoms of burn out. Steve commented, "If you're burned out, the students will pick right up
on that", while Connie said, "if we don't care about our jobs, I can't imagine putting a student with us. What a terrible experience that would be for a student."

One way of demonstrating passion for the profession, according to the focus group participants, is being a competent practitioner with a good knowledge base and a desire to keep learning. All of the focus group participants commented on the need to remain knowledgeable and current on practice trends and also on content covered in the classroom with students. Jack noted,

"Right off the bat, we have to have a sufficient competency in understanding the underlying theories and things that constitute practice so we can help frame what we're doing in that context. I think students are expected to do that so we need to know that, too."

Several participants commented that it is not merely obtaining continuing education for licensing or job responsibilities; good field instructors really demonstrate an interest in additional reading and training because it is important for their practice. Jody clearly illustrated the point by stating, "you need to have a thirst for knowledge and a passion for what you are doing" while Steve remarked, "you are never going to get done... it's a lifelong learning kind of deal."

A second personal characteristic important for field instruction is self-awareness. The focus group participants described this as the ability to know one's limits, as well as recognize issues of transference and counter-transference with the student. It also involves practicing in an ethical and honest manner. Transference is defined as "the projection of feelings by members (clients) onto the leader (worker)" and counter-transference is the projection of feelings onto to members (clients) by the leader (worker)" (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Within the field instructor-student relationship, transference issues can occur when the student responds to the field
instructor in a manner as a projection of another relationship. For example, the student may respond to constructive criticism in the same manner he/she responds to criticism by a parent. It is similar for counter-transference, although in this case the field instructor is treating the student as she would her child. For example, if a field instructor was frustrated because her child demonstrated a lack of initiative at school or home, and then was given a student in field placement who also demonstrated a lack of initiative, the field instructor may respond to and treat the student in a similar manner as she would her own child. Recognizing issues of transference and counter-transference is essential to competent clinical practice, and an important part of self awareness and recognizing one's limits. Karen commented, "You need to know who you can mentor and who you can't. You need to be really honest with yourself and know your limitations." The focus group participants shared examples of students that they felt had challenged them in recognizing their limitations, and who had also assisted them in identifying areas of strength and weakness as a field instructor. All of the focus group participants stated that the "know-it-all" student was very challenging, and it was important that they recognize the root of that behavior and attempt to address it, even if it is uncomfortable. To the focus group participants, self awareness is considered an ethical responsibility. Joyce stated, "It's part of the ethical code--self awareness". All of the focus group participants agreed that ethical behavior and honesty were essential qualities of a good social work practitioner, especially a field instructor. Steve commented that "you have to have ethics, you have to be able to teach it to students, and you can't do that if you don't know it yourself." Jack told a story about a student who identified an ethical breach during her internship, and approached her field instructor with the situation. The field instructor pursued the matter and assisted in resolving it. As a result, another staff person received disciplinary action. It was an uncomfortable situation,
but one that was necessary to demonstrate to the student and the rest of the staff that ethics and
honesty in practice is important.

The third personal characteristic field instructors determined essential was nurturing. Nurturing was defined by the focus group participants as the demonstration of patience, encouragement, and understanding with students. All of the focus group participants agreed that patience and encouragement are cornerstones of the field instructor/student relationship. Tonya stated, "I think you have to nurture and encourage and find ways to praise....You have to be excited when they do something." Amy remarked, "Some of the students are so shy and kind of introverted; they're really afraid. So you watch the student to learn their personality and learn what they're about." Several focus group participants stated that the nurturing skills used in effective mentoring are also applicable to being a good field instructor. They acknowledged that for many students, the field internship is the first time they have actually dealt personally with many of the social problems they read about in the classroom. They felt that being able to provide a safe, comfortable environment in which students could express their fears, observations, and concerns was an essential component in their relationship. Victoria observed, "If the student is feeling uncomfortable, or they need to vent, knowing that it's a safe place...because it's their first time they are exposed to a lot of things", while Karen stated, "you have to be able to praise; you have to be able to criticize, too. Not criticize, but give them feedback". The focus group participants indicated that recognizing student limitations and their idealistic point of view are also important in understanding and nurturing student interns. Sherry stated, "sometimes they come in and I think they know more than what they do...I've actually got to evaluate more before I give them tasks." Jane remarked, "I think you need to have realistic expectations, the things that we've all learned we didn't know the first day on the job", while
Ruth and Joyce observed, "let me understand that these are students going into the field with their ideal ideas and you don't want to break their bubble" and "you don't want to break their spirit."

The fourth personal characteristic essential for field instructors was creativity. This was defined as being flexible, having a sense of humor, and being open to new ideas. Comments like "the ability to think outside the box", "you have to take a new angle from day-to-day life", and "you need to be creative" were common in the discussion. Some focus group participants felt creativity was essential in being able to teach students effectively, especially challenging students. Many talked about being flexible and using humor as a tool to shape the field instructor/student relationship. Jason stated, "A sense of humor goes along with flexibility because sometimes some people say the craziest things and you just have to learn to move past it and joke about it, as opposed to harping on it as being a major issue." Others talked about the need to laugh and use humor as a way to cope with job responsibilities, including those of field instruction.

The final personality characteristic identified in the study was being nonjudgmental. This was defined as a field instructor's ability to be objective, to be tolerant of student differences, and to demonstrate an understanding of students' idealism. Many focus group participants recognized these characteristics as part of the profession's ethical practice principles, and felt they were particularly important when training new professionals and helping them develop a professional identity. Several participants discussed students whose personality and work performance promoted awareness of their own biases and objectivity concerns. The participants told stories of students who presented themselves as "know-it-alls", had loose boundaries leading to too much self disclosure, or were immature in their behavior, and how difficult it was at times
to remain nonjudgmental working with them. Tonya commented, "It's finding the right way to confront them about their problems. The worse the problem is, the harder it is". Several focus group participants talked about diversity issues with students. They acknowledged that students are often naive, and can be unintentionally judgmental. Joyce stated, "When they come in and say 'those clients' and things that are anti-poor people, it gives me cold chills." The focus group participants articulated the need to be nonjudgmental about the students' naiveté, and use situations like this to teach and model professional values and ethics. They also talked about perceptual differences between traditional and non-traditional students and their abilities. Several focus group participants explained that they needed to keep a realistic perspective regarding each student, and not be biased or judgmental or assume they have skills they do not. Jane illustrated this point by stating, "Sometimes with students, because of their age, you think they can do more than they are able. You get the impression that just because they have life experience they have social work experience, and I have to remember that that isn't the case."

**Practice Skills**

Being a competent and ethical practitioner is the minimum criterion needed to be a field instructor. These things were validated by the researcher when the field instructors were asked to participate in the study, and again by comments made by the focus group participants. In addition to being a competent practitioner, the focus group participants identified three specific practice skills needed to be an effective field instructor: communication skills, ability to set clear and realistic boundaries, and organizational skills. The focus group participants unanimously agreed that well developed communication skills are essential. This includes written, verbal, and non-verbal communication. When asked about the characteristics of a good field instructor, communication skills were one of the first things that most of the focus group participants stated.
Comments like "documentation is huge", "need to communicate in a variety of ways", "need good listening skills", and "ability to give feedback" were frequently part of the discussion. The focus group participants felt that communication is a central component of supervision, and supervision is a critical part of field instruction, therefore communication skills are essential in being able to appropriately supervise students.

The second key practice skill identified by focus group participants was the ability to set boundaries. In each group, examples were given of students who struggled with personal issues during their field placement, and how the situations were handled. Several participants remarked about the need to maintain clear, professional boundaries with students to demonstrate appropriate professional behavior. Joyce commented, "I think the most difficult times I've ever had have been when I've had students who have personal issues, and because I am a good therapist I have to be careful about not turning it into a therapy session and staying focused on student learning." Victoria stated plainly, "I want to know who they are as a person...I don't want to be their therapist".

Another boundary issue discussed was the line between supervisor and friend. Focus group participants talked about the field instructor/student relationship and acknowledged that it is important to maintain a distinction between personal and professional relationships. This point was illustrated by Jason who said "having that definitive supervisor/employee line instead of friend or buddy" was very important to the field instructor/student relationship. Melissa summed it up nicely when she stated, "Having that definitive supervisor/employee line instead of friend or buddy...some of them haven't had that job experience where they've had a supervisor and know what it's like."
The third practice skill identified by the focus group participants was organizational skills. Field instruction involves balancing demands of a job along with teaching a student new skills and socializing them into the profession. Several focus group participants voiced feeling overwhelmed at times and made comments like "it's like having a new staff person all the time, and that's hard" and "so much to tell them about...every setting has its own ways of doing things...there's so much with always getting someone acclimated to a new position." Steve observed, "You lose focus on what your job really is with the agency because you're trying to train someone to fulfill that role...it takes you away from your day-to-day business." Despite the difficulties and demands of field instruction, focus group participants stated that they enjoyed being field instructors and found it rewarding. Connie summed it up nicely when she said, "It is that transition from student to professional in a 12-15 week period of time that's eye opening and rewarding for everybody, not just for the student, but also for the field instructor and all the staff that interact with that person."

**Environmental Criteria**

There were two specific elements that focus group participants felt were essential in their ability to be field instructors: agency support and community contacts. Agency support was defined as the time and space needed to properly supervise student interns, and the willingness of the agency to provide opportunities for students. When focus group participants were asked what challenges they faced as field instructors, their universal answer was time. They talked about needing time to supervise interns and time to balance their tasks as an employee and as a field instructor. Lisa stated, "willing to take the time to do supervision...supervision is really, really important...very time consuming, but very important." Jason said, "I think the time commitment's difficult, especially early on when you're trying to teach them the ropes", while
Tamika acknowledged, "it's a time commitment to be able to train someone correctly...time is huge." Despite the amount of time it takes to be a field instructor, the focus group participants acknowledged how important being a field instructor can be. Connie stated, "I get concerned when people say I don't have time to have an intern. Somebody had to make time for us, you know. I wouldn't be here if somebody didn't make time." The focus group participants also talked about space issues in the agencies. Many of them work in very small offices, and need to share that space with the students. They acknowledge that there is little private time, and that can be a difficult adjustment. Jason said, "I'm office based, so I have a threshold of how much time I can tolerate you in the office. It's just that I like my space and I have other people coming in."

Participants discussed the ability to use other aspects of the agency to provide opportunities for students while allowing the participants to maintain some personal space. They also felt that it was important for the agencies to support the internship program by allowing field instructors to provide students a variety of opportunities. Focus group participants labeled this a challenge when agencies were too rigid or inflexible to allow students access to different parts of the agency. They acknowledged their responsibility in providing students with appropriate learning experiences. Victoria stated, "We look for a lot of different programs that the kids can get involved in." Amy commented, "you have to make a constant, continual effort to make sure that they are fulfilling all of the requirements of their field placement", while Rhonda said, "we have a whole lot of experiences that they can have...you want them, you took them on, and you have that desire to give them that best field experience possible."

The ability to utilize community contacts effectively was also an environmental criteria determined essential for quality field instruction. Focus group participants discussed the
importance of teaching students that clients and social problems do not function in a vacuum, and that it is important to be able to interact professionally with a variety of disciplines. Diane stated, "Whatever setting you're in, you are going to be working with other disciplines. I'm thinking just being able to navigate and have those social interactions with folks is significant."

Participants acknowledged that "having community contacts is important" and these types of contacts assist field instructors in providing students opportunities to see different aspects of the field not available in their own agency.

Leadership Issues

Leadership, in the context of field education, is a concept that was interesting to me because it is underrepresented in the literature. I also think that it is something few field instructors discuss or even consider in their daily activities with students. I felt it would be interesting to ask focus group participants about the concept of leadership to ascertain if and where it fits within the realm of field instruction. Participants defined leadership as it related to field instruction, and identified their strengths and weaknesses as leaders. Leadership and its relationship to professional gatekeeping were also explored, and is discussed in more depth in the next section.

Leadership Defined

The focus group participants defined leadership in a number of ways. First, many saw leaders as being role models. They talked about taking responsibility for the student interns they supervise, guiding and giving direction to students and to other staff, and demonstrating professional behavior at all times. The following comments supported this premise:

- "I think we take responsibility when we step up and we take responsibility for following through on things, even when it isn't necessarily our job."--Monica
• "Role modeling before the student as well as the staff demonstrates leadership."--Amy
• "I think giving instructive direction and being able to be their guide through the process."--Victoria
• "Leadership is being capable of providing supervision at all levels."--Rhonda
• "Teaching, observing, and letting others observe you and your strengths and weaknesses."--Tamika

Steve summed it up stating succinctly, "leadership is the process of learning first, practicing second, and then teaching and modeling for others to prepare them to be leaders themselves".

The second way focus group participants defined leadership was one's ability to address change. This includes not only motivating and encouraging others to implement change, but also a desire to try new things and not become complacent or afraid to be assertive. They talked about providing opportunities for growth through education and training, and the process of providing consultation, direction, and expert advice to others. Rhonda remarked on "how people gravitate around the person making the decisions" and alluded to the leader's charisma or "presence" as being very important in that process. The focus group participants also talked about fulfilling the mission of the agency or organization, and encouraging students to act in accordance with ethical values and practice principles. Several participants discussed working on interdisciplinary teams, and the determination it takes to maintain social work values and principles when they are incongruent with those from other disciplines. Melissa stated, "Having to mingle with all the different disciplines forces the student (and us) in some ways to be independent and confident, which are some of those characteristics that go with a leader... it's intimidating to be in our worlds." Several focus group participants talked about their experience in the focus group as a part of leadership. Lisa said:
"Coming to things like this, that's part of leadership. We want others out in the community in our field to be willing and interested to take on interns. They need to be able to understand what the experiences are, what are the pros/cons, what our thoughts are, hopefully to encourage and support their willingness to become field instructors. And so leadership is to encourage others to do this as well.

Coming to the opportunities you offer for supervisors is part of leadership".

Many of the participants felt that leadership was directly linked to the ability to teach, and came from their own experiences in direct care. They talked about working in entry level positions, working their way up the positional ladder in an agency, and then using what they had learned in their supervision with students and in interactions with other staff.

Addressing change also includes motivating oneself as well as others. The danger in becoming complacent is that one becomes stagnant and avoids new perspectives. The focus group participants discussed the concept of change, and how it is handled. They felt that facing change directly and challenging old ways of doing things demonstrated a dimension of leadership. Participants talked about "taking an active role", "thinking out of the box", "being creative", and advocacy. They gave examples of changes in policies, funding, and politics, the impact of the changes on the agency and service delivery, and ultimately on the participants' leadership ability. Victoria, a veteran with 40 years experience, stated "People don't stay the same, nothing stays the same...being able to adjust to that without totally being so rigid that you can't help falling apart", while Diane remarked, "knowing what you can't control is kind of the key...there are obviously things and changes that you can control, but knowing when you can't and how to handle it is key." Healthy adaptation to change was something the focus group participants felt was a strong characteristic of a good leader.
Another way focus group participants defined leadership was through nurturing and encouraging others to reach their full potential. Lisa commented, "A leader is an individual who sees the gifts and talents in individuals and empowers them to be all they can be." Others discussed the ability to encourage a person's growth and bring their strengths and weaknesses to the surface where they can be enhanced or improved. Jack observed, "It's about empowering them to be all they can be and allowing them to see how they fit into the future of social work."

Many participants felt that leadership included honesty and respect. They talked about how important it was to listen to what people say, and be able to admit mistakes when they happen. Connie commented, "I think in order to be a good leader, you need to really just take the time to listen to them and hear and to provide appropriate guidance, not coddling guidance." Ruth stated "I think when the situation arises a good leader is comfortable in showing their own weaknesses and their struggles in the field." Many participants felt that the nurturing qualities and characteristics that made them good field instructors also enabled them to be good leaders.

Finally, the focus group participants defined leadership as a visioning process. Many participants talked about leaders having the ability to set goals, to see the bigger picture, to establish group cohesion, and to inspire others. Melissa stated:

"You're working towards one goal...everyone is working toward that ultimate end piece that your mission is... whatever avenue you are in, people function to the best of their abilities so ultimately you are working toward that mission...we're going to make mistakes on the way, but we're getting to the same mission, the same goal, and that's where we're going".

Jason commented, "Leadership is being very clear and having goals that are set down." Jane stated, "The leader has goals for the department or the program or agency and we're all working
Many participants agreed that leadership happens at all levels in an organization and talked about people who are placed in leadership roles who are ill prepared for that role, while others in the agency are overlooked and should be leaders. Rhonda observed, "I can think of some leaders in our agency that may be in a leadership position, but they aren't respected by those under them. Then, there are others who should be in a leadership position, but are not."

**Strengths and Weaknesses as a Leader**

The focus group participants identified five specific strengths that enhanced their leadership abilities. The first was role modeling. The focus group participants talked about "leading by example" and "practicing what they preach" as central to their ability to be an effective leader. They stated that role modeling allows them to observe and assess the needs of others, and also demonstrates to others what leadership entails. The participants commented on the need for well developed organizational and time management skills as further demonstration that leaders can balance multiple tasks and still be effective. They discussed the guidance and teaching that are part of role modeling. Amy stated "Leadership is always trying to learn new skills and techniques to provide better service." Tamika remarked "I see myself as a leader in the sense of providing guidance and direction in a teaching sense." Finally, they commented on their responsibility to demonstrate to students a realistic view of the profession and professional practice. Ruth observed, "The need to be willing to teach, guide, and devote time to allowing an intern to experience the real world." Victoria stated, "I am very concerned about interns having a great educational experience."

The second leadership strength the focus group participants identified was effective communication skills. They commented on the need to have open, honest communication with
the students and staff about areas of strength and weakness, and not be afraid to share their own limitations. They acknowledged the need for good listening skills, direct and positive rapport building skills, and effective oral and written communication skills. Participants also commented on the need for flexibility and understanding, and effective ways to communicate these things to students.

The third strength necessary for effective leadership was being a visionary. The focus group participants talked about a leader who has a vision, is goal oriented, and is looking toward the future. Melissa's definition of visionary included "the ability to see the bigger picture and guide staff in doing the same", while Connie observed that vision is "the ability to manage a team and get the mandates met." Using experience to address future needs was also a component of the visioning process. Jody summed it up well when she said, "Vision is the ability to build a team, and set a direction and philosophy for the staff."

Another strength identified by the focus group participants was confidence. They commented on being confident not only in their own abilities, but also trusting in the abilities of the student and other staff. Jane stated, "Leadership involves confidence in the strengths and abilities of others with cognizance of their weaknesses." They discussed their confidence in the ability to train and educate students and staff, and to be focused on details, policy and procedure in the agency, and confidence in who they are as professionals.

The final strength the focus group participants identified was caring. They felt that a good leader cares about the students and staff, as well as the agency. They used the adjectives supportive, understanding, knowledgeable, patient, tolerant, and considerate to define caring. Lisa and Connie described leadership as helping others reach their full potential by supporting and encouraging ideas.
Focus group participants identified three areas of weakness affecting their leadership ability. The most prevalent was unrealistic expectations. Monica stated that sometimes she "expects others to be as motivated and committed to the task as I am", and Joyce experienced a dilemma in leadership when she was "wanting others to be interested in participation in setting goals when they just want to be told what to do. I thought everyone cared as much as I did, but that isn't the case." Diane observed, "I may expect too much from an intern, there are times I think they know more about something than they do." The unrealistic expectations were not limited to the students and staff, the focus group participants also had unrealistic expectations for themselves. They talked about taking on too many tasks, procrastination, and "getting so focused on the little issues that the big picture gets lost."

The next area of weakness identified was addressing conflict. Focus group participants talked about the difficulties they had in setting limits and disciplining students and staff. Karen stated, "I feel bad when I need to confront a student regarding a problem." Amy acknowledged that she is guilty of "not being very direct if things are not going well", and Jason said at times he is "trying very hard not to hurt someone's feelings." This leads to a hesitancy to act and at times, avoidance of the issue, which participants felt was inappropriate as a supervisor. Participants also talked about their lack of patience when they have to repeat information to students who don't retain it the first time, and also when they are exposed to "people's pettiness" in the office.

Finally, focus group participants discussed a lack of time and training in supervision as a weakness. Melissa stated, "I wish I had more time to role model and demonstrate more in the field." Another reflected on her own weakness in leadership and observed "I think a lack of training in supervision and not delegating well" affect her ability to be a good leader. Several participants talked about "being too trusting", "not having enough time to get things done", and
"knowing that there are areas in which I need additional training". When asked about the training they received for field supervision, or supervision in general, many focus group participants indicated that the only formal training they have had involved periodic workshops related to licensure or annual training provided by social work programs. Many focus group participants function in direct care positions that do not require supervisory responsibilities. One observation made by the researcher was that although conflict, particularly in the areas of discipline and limit setting, was difficult for all of the participants it was especially difficult for those who did not have supervisory responsibilities as part of their regular work assignment.

Leadership Skills Essential for Field Instruction

Leadership skills related to tasks included communication skills, maintaining focus, and teaching the tasks needing to be accomplished. Focus group participants were clear about the need to maintain open and honest communication throughout the field instruction process. This includes setting clear, realistic goals and expectations for students and their performance. It also includes giving students constructive criticism, a willingness to discuss concerns and confront student problems in learning or in performance, and willingness to listen carefully to students in assessing their needs. The leadership skills needed to maintain focus included taking time to process cases appropriately, demonstrating time management skills, and helping students prioritize and stay focused on tasks. Finally, teaching the tasks needing to be accomplished requires a degree of leadership. Several focus group participants stated that "being devoted and
interested in teaching the intern and having them have a good experience" was an essential leadership quality, while others stated "being a patient teacher and listener" are important leadership skills.

While task completion is important, another important aspect of leadership involves the development and nurturing of the field instructor/student relationship. The focus group participants used the adjectives "patient, kind, understanding, confident, honest, flexible, open, and being approachable" as key leadership components in this relationship. They also identified as having a positive attitude, demonstrating empathy, and being available to the student as important leadership qualities.

Finally, leadership qualities that promoted professionalism and a professional vision were identified. Focus group participants linked leadership to ethics, and felt that role modeling ethical behavior was an important aspect of leadership. This includes demonstrating self-awareness, "knowing who you cannot and/or do not choose to lead", as well as "knowing the limits of the student". Focus group participants also felt that ethical leadership included demonstrating professionalism with others. They stated "never slandering co-workers in front of others", "working as part of a team", and "maintaining a level of tolerance and acceptance of personality differences" were all ways in which leadership promoted a sense of professionalism. In addition, focus group participants acknowledged a need to have a vision for the future. They described this as the "ability to get students to fully understand the what, why, when and how and to prepare them for the high demands of the working world and profession", being "inspirational", and "a love of showing students the social work profession and the impact they will make".
Gatekeeping

The issue of gatekeeping initiated an emotionally charged discussion within all of the focus groups. As a participant-observer, I was struck by the significant change in participants' affect and overall group atmosphere as the conversation transitioned from student expectations to gatekeeping responsibilities. The group atmosphere became more solemn, less jovial, and conversations were more "to the point". During the conversation regarding student expectations immediately prior, focus group participants were smiling, very informal with one another, and more light-hearted in their comments. The mention of gatekeeping, however, made them stop, re-position themselves, and become more somber. Several participants asked for clarification of the term to be sure they understood, while others stated they did not like the word at all. For those focus group participants who were direct care practitioners without daily supervisory responsibilities, the concept of gatekeeping appeared to be something they rarely thought about, and initially did not want to think about it. After I asked one group "what if you have some really significant doubts about their (students') ability to be a social worker", one participant blatantly stated "I don't want to think about that". Tonya, a direct care worker with 20 years experience reflected, "You know, I've had so many good students, but I look and I do wonder sometimes about some of the other ones." Karen, another experienced direct care worker, commented "Sometimes I wonder that I didn't help them (students) enough to see where their weaknesses and strengths were....I like doing the cheerleading and telling them that they are doing a great job, but I don't like the part that sometimes might be more helpful." Those participants who were in supervisory positions understood and appreciated the concept, and felt they had a professional responsibility as field instructors to help guard the professional gate.

Jody, a veteran social worker with 10 years supervisory experience, stated "I think it's critical
because of our role as a field instructor....As a (classroom) teacher or instructor you can only see so much, but when they are out in the field interacting with clients, that's a whole other part of the picture exposed." Connie stated, "I really like the term gatekeeper...we are, as field instructors, responsible for sending them out into the world and being able to do this and keep themselves safe and keep their future clients safe." Within the gatekeeping conversation, focus group participants identified three basic areas essential to addressing gatekeeping concerns in the field. These are (1) responsibility to the student as a supervisor, (2) the relationship between the field and the university, and (3) the field instructors' responsibility to the profession.

Focus group participants acknowledged that the hardest conversations they have with students are those related to poor performance or not meeting professional expectations. Jack stated, "I have more trouble confronting a student than I would a client." Many focus group participants said that their hesitancy related back to their social work values of being nonjudgmental and the belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to change and grow. Ruth remarked, "We're supposed to be nonjudgmental. When it comes to one of these students that shouldn't be in the profession, we don't want to be judgmental. We try to frame as constructive criticism instead of saying this isn't for you." Tamika said, "Who am I to say that she can never do social work anywhere?" Some focus group participants were concerned about the time and money students spend on education, and feel guilty about not allowing them to finish. Tonya stated, "They earn all those credits. I don't know how many hours they get, but if you flunk them in field placement, they can't graduate I assume." Karen remarked, "you just get this tinge of, oh Lord, I have someone who has gone all this far. They're really looking to you for help and hope that they are going to make it because it's their last (semester). I don't want to be the one that is the reason they are not getting a degree." Several participants shared stories of students who
may not have been appropriate for the profession, their role in making that decision, and how
difficult that was for them. Monica stated, "She did not get her degree. I still cringe when I
think about that." Despite their discomfort, focus group participants felt it was their
responsibility as a supervisor to talk to students about their deficiencies and limitations. Connie
observed, "I think it's important to have an honest conversation with them about strengths and
weaknesses, because I don't think we'd be doing our job as field instructors if we didn't identify
both strengths and weaknesses...it's got be really honest and straightforward."

Another topic generated throughout the gatekeeping discussion involved the relationship
between the university and the field instructors. Focus group participants stated clearly that they
felt the ultimate responsibility for not allowing someone to enter the profession fell to the school.
However, they also felt that they had a responsibility in making gatekeeping decisions. Jody
stated, "I think it is unfair to put it back on the school to do that. I think that is part of what we're
signing up for as field instructors." Steve said,

"I had a student come who never even got to the placement. Clearly, based on her
interview with me and the information that was submitted, social work would not
have been an appropriate field for her. So I didn't even take her into the
placement. I immediately notified [the field director] to let her know that this
person slipped through the cracks somehow and social work wasn't for this person
at all, based upon what she was saying."

All of the focus group participants talked about the need to inform and involve the school if they
had concerns about a student's performance in field. Sherry stated, "I think the first thing to do is
immediately contact the field supervisor at the school to let them know the concerns...", while
Jane observed, "I think it is our responsibility to come to you if we're having problems with the student at length early on." Victoria validated the point by stating,

"I think you've got to have a good enough relationship with the placement school that you can have that open line of communication. If this isn't working, I'm going to be OK and able to tell you that it's not working and it's not going to necessarily affect how you (the school) views the agency... you've got to have that level of trust with us...to trust our judgment, if it's not going to work it's not going to work."

Finally, focus group participants discussed the idea of gatekeeping as a protection for the profession and future clients. All of the focus group participants felt it was difficult to judge, particularly at a bachelor's level, whether or not someone was not suitable for the profession. Tamika remarked, "They are coming to me and this is their very little bit of work experience as a social worker. How can I grade them for the rest of their lives?" Jason stated, "I think the threshold of 'you can't be a social worker' is high...If we looked at everybody in our field and picked up their nuances and niches and quirks, there's going to be none of us working." The focus group participants felt that the schools are effective at weeding out unsuitable people, and that problematic students are a rare occurrence. Ruth observed, "I've never had anyone that, when I've been working with them I thought, well they're really not probably suited to this work." They stated they felt their gatekeeping issues were more because a student was misplaced in an internship, rather than unsuitable for the profession. Many participants told stories about students who had difficult internships because of the agency in which the placement occurred. Two participants remarked,
"I don't know whether I see myself as a gatekeeper...I see them coming in to try out the field, to see if they like it. Just because they don't work out in the hospital, even though they do the whole internship, doesn't mean they're not going to work out in working with children or working in the court system....I'm not comfortable being that gatekeeper and saying, no you're not a good social worker because the individual may be a good social worker in a different discipline"

and

"maybe helping students if they are in the wrong place, helping them to take a look at what you see as their strengths and other placements that might be more appropriate. I think sometimes they think this is where they want to go and find out it isn't what they thought it was going to be. I've seen students who failed miserably in one setting; you put them in a different setting and they think they (the student) is the best thing since sliced bread".

Melissa commented, "I don't think that it's a failure if they end their internship knowing they don't want to work in child welfare. I consider that a success for them. It will help them make better choices when it comes to finding a job." The focus group participants felt that it was important to recognize areas of concern and identify remedies to address those issues. They felt that they not only had a responsibility to the student, but also to future clients. Joyce stated, "You don't want to prevent them from graduating, but by the same token, you also don't want them to be in and harming themselves or harming someone else because of their lack of understanding of boundaries....We have the responsibility to keep them safe and to keep safe the clients they will eventually have."
Summary

The focus group participants provided insight into their perceptions of the role and responsibilities of a field instructor. They identified the roles, personality characteristics, practice skills, and environmental criteria needed to be an effective field instructor. Among these were a genuine desire and willingness to teach, a nurturing personality, skills in communication and supervision, and time. The focus group participants also discussed the concept of leadership, and identified specific leadership skills needed for field instruction. Finally, the participants articulated their perceptions of their role and responsibility as a professional gatekeeper. Although some participants were uncomfortable in that role, they all acknowledged the need for monitoring of student behavior, and protection of the profession and future clients from unethical or unprofessional practice.
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The premise for this dissertation was borne from discussions in courses related to ethics and leadership. Its primary purpose was to ascertain perceptions from field instructors regarding the key characteristics and personal attributes necessary for effective field instruction. Additionally, the study was designed to address field instructors' perceptions on their role in professional gatekeeping, and to determine whether leadership concepts and attributes were part of that role. Competent social work practice dictates that the best source of information on an issue comes directly from the identified client affected by the issue (Dubois & Miley, 2008). In other words, who would best know the situation and problems to be resolved more than the person facing them? Using this logic, I reasoned that field instructors would know best what makes someone effective in that role. Since the literature had focused primarily on perceptions from students and program field directors regarding this issue (Miller, Corcoran, Kovacs, Rosenblum & Wright, 2005; Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick, & Ellis, 2008; Moore, Dietz, & Dettlaff, 2004; Peleg-Oren, Macgowan, & Even-Zahav, 2007), this study aimed to fill a gap by asking field instructors directly about their perceptions of their role and responsibilities. Additionally, since field instruction has been identified as the profession's signature pedagogy (CSWE, 2008), the voices of field instructors needed to be heard to recognize and validate the importance of their contributions to social work education.

This chapter discusses the results of the data analysis in the context of the research questions and various theoretical constructs in ethics, leadership, and adult development. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first is a discussion of the research questions. The second section is a discussion of the findings utilizing theories in leadership, ethics, and adult development. Section three presents implications for practice, while section four discusses
potential for future research. The fifth section discusses the limitations of the study, and the final section is a summary of the study conclusions.

Review of Research Questions

The focus group discussions provided much insight into why practitioners become and remain field instructors. They revealed that the most frequently given reasons for becoming and remaining a field instructor were a sense of responsibility to the profession and to future generations of social workers, and a desire to share their passion and enthusiasm for the profession with others. This is consistent with the findings of Rothman (2000) who found that field instructors have a desire to make lasting contributions to the profession, enjoy what they do as a social worker, and want to communicate their passion for the profession to others.

The study addressed three primary research questions, and each will be presented in turn.

1. *What leadership attributes and/or other characteristics are essential in providing competent and effective field instruction?* The focus group discussions led to the identification of several attributes and characteristics which are critical to competent field instruction. Data analysis revealed that the attributes and characteristics were divided into four specific groups: roles, personal attributes, practice skills and the environment in which field instruction occurs. The role of teacher was identified as the most prevalent in providing competent field instruction. This is consistent with texts on field instruction which define it as an extension of the classroom (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2011; Rothman, 2000). Additionally, the roles of mentor, role model, and advocate were also identified as important components of a field instructor. The literature agrees that, in particular, role modeling and mentoring are important aspects of field instruction (Allen, Cobb, & Danger, 2007; Barretti, 2007; Fortune, Lee & Cavazos, 2005).
Particular personal attributes were also determined to be essential components of a competent field instructor. These attributes were identified as a passion for social work, self awareness, nurturing, creativity, and a nonjudgmental attitude. The focus group discussions revealed that field instructors were very proud of their profession, enjoyed professional practice, and wanted to share their enthusiasm and creativity with others. In a survey of social work students, Knight (2001) found that nurturing and nonjudgmental behaviors were positively associated with student perceptions of effective field supervision. Fortune, Lee and Cavazos (2005) found that field instructor enthusiasm is critically important in student motivation.

Effective communication and organizational skills, as well as the ability to set clear boundaries were the practice skills identified in the study as important components of competent field instruction. These skills are cornerstones of effective social work practice (DuBois & Miley, 2008; Segal, Gerdes & Steiner, 2010), so it is reasonable to assume that they would also be central skills needed in teaching students to be future social work professionals.

Finally, a work environment that supported the concept of field instruction and allowed a field instructor to utilize a range of community contacts to provide opportunities for the student was considered important for competent field instruction. In their discussion of the changing social service environment and its impact on field education, Reisch and Jarmon-Rohde (2000) stated that 21st century social work practice may be radically different due to changes in the social and political structure of society and social services agencies. They cautioned that field education will need to adapt to this change, and it may be more difficult to find field sites that can provide the breadth of opportunities essential for field education. The focus group data are consistent to a degree with that discussion. The data indicated that those agencies in which field instruction is viewed by agency administrators as a positive contribution to the agency, the
concept of field instruction is supported and encouraged. However, availability of time continues to be an issue regardless of the agency's commitment to field education. While field instructors in the study recognized time as a challenge, they agreed that it would not prevent them from continuing in their role as a field instructor. This is consistent with Homanoff's (2008) study of award-winning social work field instructors who discussed best practices in the field.

2. How do field instructors perceive their role in professional gatekeeping? It was not surprising that the study participants put the majority of the responsibility for gatekeeping on the schools of social work. That idea has been discussed and validated in several studies (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Cole & Lewis, 1993; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004; Moore & Urwin, 1991). However, one of the significant findings in this study was how positions of leadership affected field instructors' perceptions of their gatekeeping responsibilities. Those study participants who maintained regular supervisory responsibilities in their work environments were more accepting and appreciative of their role regarding professional gatekeeping than those in direct care positions. Those in positional leadership were able to see the larger implications of gatekeeping: protection of future clients from harm, the ability to perform as a competent practitioner, and preserving the integrity of the social work profession more readily and felt a responsibility to "do something" if the issue arose. This is consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) that holds students to the same accountability as professionals, particularly during field instruction. Those in direct care positions saw their role less as a gatekeeper, and more of a teacher. They felt that their responsibility lay in helping the student determine suitability for a specific area of practice, rather than suitability for the profession. This is consistent with Bogo, Regehr, Power, and Regehr (2007) whose study of social work field directors indicated that many field
instructors had difficulty making a determination of student suitability for the profession. One thing that everyone agreed upon was the need for ongoing and frequent communication between the schools of social work, the field instructors, and the students in addressing gatekeeping dilemmas.

3. What leadership attributes and/or other characteristics are needed to be an effective and competent gatekeeper? Within the gatekeeping conversation, field instructors identified strong communication skills, honest appraisal of student capabilities, and modeling appropriate professional behavior as the key characteristics needed to be an effective gatekeeper. Bogo, Regehr, Power, and Regehr (2007) found that providing negative criticism to students, a lack of training and preparation in the evaluation role of supervision, a lack of support from and communication with schools of social work, and the negative impact of possible termination of a student intern from field instruction are major concerns of field instructors regarding their gatekeeping responsibilities. Additionally, they found that regardless of the end result it was critical to maintain ongoing, honest communication with the student and with the university. This is consistent with the findings of this study, and reinforced the need for effective and honest communication with students about their level of skill, and for the need for field instructors to display professional behavior at all times in the relationship.

Application of Themes to Theoretical Contexts

In addition to the findings discussed in the previous section, there were three prevalent themes that were pervasive across the focus group discussions. These themes were role modeling, nurturing, and self awareness. The themes will be discussed in terms of their alignment with the theoretical contexts of the study: leadership, adult development, and ethics.
Leadership

Kouzes and Posner (2002) provide a leadership model that effectively illustrates the findings of this study. Their model is based on five pillars of leadership: model the way, encourage the heart, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act. Role modeling was a theme that permeated the discussion, not only in characteristics and attributes of field instruction, but in the leadership and gatekeeping discussions as well. It was clear that “model the way” is an important component when working with students. It was described as leading by example, and incorporated the behavioral aspects of professional practice including presenting oneself in a professional manner, demonstrating effective communication, and teaching students the skills needed as new professionals. The theory maintains that effective leadership needs direction and guidance by someone who can demonstrate ways to achieve desired outcomes. The role modeling described by the field instructors in the study is consistent with the modeling described by leadership theorists (Collins, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Kriegel & Brandt, 1996).

Another theme that crossed all areas of discussion was nurturing, in other words “encourage the heart”. The study participants stated clearly the need to understand students and appreciate them as individuals, as well as use patience and understanding in the didactic relationship between the student and field instructor. It involved not only helping students reach their full potential, but also in developing the self awareness necessary to engage in critical self reflection.

In this study, vision was described as the process of setting goals and inspiring others to work toward those goals. It involved the ability to look, not only at the immediate problem, but also at the long-range implications and interventions to address the issue. The futuristic thinking
needed to set goals, encourage people to comply with those goals, and avoidance of complacency defined the visionary thinking identified as an essential leadership characteristic of a good field instructor. The focus group participants in this study identified the need to have a clear vision and mission to guide decision-making, and the ability to communicate that vision to students and other agency staff. They also recognized that not everyone in the agency has the same dedication and commitment to agency long-range goals, and acknowledged their leadership is important in helping people appreciate and worked collaboratively toward those goals. This is consistent with the leadership behavior discussed by Kotter (1996) when he talked about finding a guiding coalition to work toward a common goal. The field instructor engages students as part of a team, and they work together to learn the tasks and develop the professional demeanor inherent in professional social work practice. The field instructor’s vision of what the student needs and can aspire guides the process and encourages life-long learning.

Challenging the process in this study was the ability of field instructors to demonstrate creativity and flexibility, and their attitude toward change. Spencer Johnson (1998) wrote that change was inevitable and it is how one responds to change that makes the difference. The results from this study support Johnson’s premise. A key leadership characteristic was one’s adaptation to change. Change impacts all levels of field instruction: from personal job responsibilities and expectations to agency funding and service delivery to significant changes in political and social structure. All of these things can bring concerns and distress, as well as opportunities for growth. Participants in this study acknowledged that all of these things have an impact on students, and felt that it was their responsibility as field instructors to motivate and encourage students to address change directly, to try new things and not be afraid to make a
mistake, and to view change in a positive rather than negative framework. Again, role modeling, self awareness and nurturing are key components to accomplishing these tasks.

Gatekeeping is also a key part of challenging the process. The schools of social work engage in gatekeeping measures from students' admission into the program through the field education process. However, as pointed out by Lafrance, Gray, and Herbert (2004), the personal attributes determined important by field instructors and social work faculty as suitable for professional practice are often overlooked, or not as heavily weighted, in the schools' admission criteria as are students' GPA and perceived academic ability. Their study identified the following characteristics as important for students during the field process: a capacity and willingness to increase self-awareness, maturity, honesty and integrity, and transparent and open communication. The field instructors' discussion in this study of what they perceived to be characteristics of the exceptional and unacceptable student validated the results of the previous study. It also impacted the discussion of gatekeeping and student suitability for the profession, particularly when student unsuitability for practice often is not evident until they reach the field (Moore & Urwin, 1991). Field instructors realized that part of their role is to assist the universities in being professional gatekeepers, and not allow students to successfully complete coursework just because they (field instructors) did not want to experience potential negative feedback from the student or the school.

The final pillar is enabling others to act. For field instructors, this is their ability to motivate students to achieve goals, to develop competent practice skills, and to enhance their ability for critical thinking and critical self-reflection. Fortune, Lee, and Cavazos (2005) found that student motivation is directly linked with students' ability to watch role models perform clinical interventions. They also found that students perform better when they set goals that are
meaningful and realistic, received verbal encouragement and praise regularly, and received an accurate appraisal of their abilities frequently from the field instructor. This study found that the nurturing relationship between field instructor and student, as well as the role modeling prevalent during field instruction, assist students in developing the skills and performing the tasks essential for competent social work practice.

One significant finding of this study was that field instructors did not identify themselves in terms of leadership. Although they acknowledged qualities and characteristics associated with leadership, they did not readily see the connection between their role as a field instructor and a leader. This is not surprising since leadership, particularly non-positional leadership, is an area neglected in the current social work literature. An example from this study aptly illustrates this point. Diane talked about significant changes in her responsibilities at work, her perception of these changes as a major challenge to her view of what social work practice entailed, and how these changes were affecting her behavior as a professional. She resolved her dilemma by recognizing the positive aspects of change, and chose to model professional behavior, not by complaining about or blaming administration for her new responsibilities, but by performing the new tasks to the best of her ability. She saw this as adapting to change; however, her colleagues saw her behavior as demonstrating leadership. When this example was discussed in the focus group, Diane was genuinely surprised at her peers' reaction and admitted that the idea of leadership had never crossed her mind.

Another finding in this study was differences in the type of leadership field instructors' portrayed. Field instructors categorized their leadership skills into three groups: those that attend to tasks, those that attend to the relationship needs, and those that promote professionalism and visioning. These categories are consistent with the model of situational leadership designed by
Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (2001), and recognize the connection between task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership behavior. The field instructors recognized their responsibility in providing educational supervision, as well as task-oriented supervision, to students and strongly stated that failure to do both was unacceptable behavior as a field instructor. However, when asked about their individual leadership style, most field instructors identified themselves as a transactional or managerial type of leader. They acknowledged that they preferred to have the structure of policies, focus of direct tasks and problem solving, and advocacy for clients guide their leadership capacity. Only four of the nineteen field instructors identified themselves as a transformative leader, and described themselves as visionaries and "big picture thinkers". These four field instructors were all in supervisory positions in their agencies, and had been supervisors for many years. They also felt that it was important to role model and encourage leadership behavior in students in order to better prepare them for professional practice. The other field instructors did not disagree with this idea; however, they stated that they were not doing anything currently to promote it. As stated earlier, the idea of leadership was a new concept to many of them.

One explanation for the differences in field instructor self-identified leadership styles may be due to the historical pendulum-like nature of social work practice and education. As stated earlier, the practice emphasis within the profession has shifted from conservative to liberal to conservative, and from individual focus to community activism and back to individual focus over the past century. The shifts within the profession were driven primarily from societal forces and political influences. These forces continue to impact social work practice and social work education. The current primary focus on addressing individual and family concerns, coupled with major movements like managed care and social policies like Temporary Assistance for
Needy Families (TANF), commonly referred to as “welfare”, encourages social work field instructors to be more task oriented practitioners and leaders. Additionally, the lack of time and pressure to work harder with fewer resources forces field instructors to balance responsibilities, often by becoming more task-oriented. As one focus group participant noted “I don’t have time to be visionary.”

A study by Holosko (2009), argued that social work academics are educationally remiss for not addressing issues of leadership adequately in the course content of social work programs. The five core attributes he found in his study (vision, influencing others to act, teamwork/collaboration, problem-solving capacity, and creating positive change) were very closely aligned with the five pillars of leadership created by Kouzes and Posner (2002). It is unrealistic to expect students and practitioners, particularly field instructors, to recognize and behave as leaders if they have not been trained, or at least exposed to, ideas of leadership and gatekeeping in the curriculum. Additionally, discussing concepts such as leadership and gatekeeping can help students understand that the desire to enter a profession does not translate into entitlement (Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004).

Adult Development

Theories of adult development helped build the conceptual framework for this study. In particular, the work of Erikson (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010) provided insight into the field instructors' developmental perspective on field instruction, and the themes that were prevalent in the focus group discussions. The Eriksonian theory of adult development maintains that the stage of middle adulthood is characterized by a concern for future generations and an individual's legacy (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). In this study, the field instructors' years of personal growth and practice experience places them in the middle stage of their careers which relates
directly to this developmental stage. Many of the field instructors in the study stated that one reason they became and remain field instructors is a sense of responsibility to the profession and to future generations of social workers. Intrinsically, they found pleasure in being able to shape future professionals, and viewed students in part as a personal legacy and testament to their professional abilities. This is consistent with a study conducted by Peleg-Oren and Even-Zahav (2004) regarding the reasons social work practitioners become field instructors.

There is another aspect of adult development prevalent in the field instruction process: the developmental stage and learning style of students. One perspective of adult development views it as an adaptational response to situations as one matures and gains life experience (Merriam & Clark, 2006). This view sees adult development as a growth oriented process, one in which we learn from past mistakes or previous situations. This perspective is critically important when considering the reasons why students (and field instructors) enter the profession. DuBois and Miley (2008) state that some of the reasons people choose to become social workers include an unselfish regard and altruistic attitude toward others, a desire to promote social justice, and to reciprocate for help they received or to prevent others from experiencing similar situations in the future. Previous studies on student suitability have explored this issue, and determined that there are some students who have significant deficits or unresolved issues from childhood trauma that can affect their ability to practice effectively (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004; Tam & Coleman, 2009). This literature supports the notion that some students may enter the social work profession as a method of resolving their personal issues, albeit unconsciously. By extension, this emphasizes the importance of professional gatekeeping, and the field instructors' responsibilities in that role. This study supports that premise. The field instructors in this study identified the potential transference and countertransference issues that
can occur with students, in part due to students and/or field instructors' unresolved and unconscious personal concerns. They (field instructors) recognized the critical value that self-awareness and personal reflection play in this process, and see those things as important characteristics for all field instructors to possess. The field instructors also acknowledged the need to recognize the individuality of each student and his or her ability to learn, as well as capacity for personal growth. They recognized that initial perceptions of student immaturity, in terms of work behavior or client interactions, may be developmental in nature. They also admitted that life experience, especially in older students, did not necessarily translate into better practice behaviors.

One unexpected finding in this study was the realization that field instructors identified themselves as learners as well as teachers. Merriam and Clark (2006) emphasize that the fundamental concepts in adult learning are that life experiences inspire growth and that there is an interaction between people that facilitates the learning. It was apparent from the data that teaching was a central focus of the field instruction process, and that role modeling professional behavior and developing a nurturing field instructor-student relationship were key concepts in teaching. It was also evident that the teaching aspect of field instruction involved a degree of self awareness and self reflection, particularly in the area of setting boundaries and communication. However, the field instructors in the study also talked extensively about the learning they do in the process. They discussed learning cutting edge technological skills and current research on practice trends as benefits from field instruction. Several people talked about the special gifts and talents that students bring to the field, and that the field instructors can learn. Many field instructors recognized that because of their role as field instructors, they have become better practitioners.
Ethics

Starratt's (1991) model, which includes the ethics of critique, care and justice, provides a framework for the discussion of ethics and the focus group themes. His model postulates that the three ethics are not mutually exclusive, but rather form a triadic relationship in which the three ethics complement one another. The ethic of care is clearly demonstrated in the theme of nurturing. Patience, understanding, encouraging, and a nonjudgmental attitude were adjectives describing the nurturing aspect of field instruction. These qualities were determined to be essential in developing the student/field instructor relationship, and in helping students develop strong therapeutic relationships with their clients. A strong relationship is a key factor in any aspect of social work practice (Zastro & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). This also includes the relationships formed during field instruction (Rothman, 2000). Effective relationships were characterized by empathy, caring, and compassion. Gilligan's discussion of the value of relationships, within the ethic of care, emphasized the connectedness of people and the importance of human relationships which is consistent with the cornerstone of social work practice, values and ethics (Rhodes, 1985; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010).

Within this study, role modeling and self awareness are key issues in the ethic of critique. The field instruction process is inherently evaluative. Field instructors model appropriate professional behaviors in the hope that students will imitate them in practice. Field instructors also engage in critical self reflection to be sure that they are developing appropriate professional and personal boundaries with students, and encourage students to do the same. Throughout the field instruction process, the field instructor evaluates students' progress in various areas and determines whether or not the student is acceptable for professional practice. All of these things are reflected in the ethic of critique.
Starratt (1991), in his discussion of the ethic of critique, stated that there is a moral obligation in education to see that it not only serves the individual, but also society as a whole. Like Starratt, the Council on Social Work Education (2008), in its identification of the field practicum as the signature pedagogy for the profession, challenged social work educators and field instructors to engage in practice that will impact the future of social work education and the social work profession as a whole. The field instructors in this study validated the issues raised by Starratt and CSWE, particularly in the area of gatekeeping. They acknowledged that they have a responsibility to maintain the integrity of the profession, as well as to protect future clients from incompetent practitioners. The first step in this process is the gatekeeping needed to determine student unsuitability for the profession. While this is a highly emotional topic for field instructors, they recognized that they have a responsibility to address these issues with the students and universities, and need to maintain open and honest communication to facilitate the process.

The final ethical issue is the ethic of justice. This study's examination of gatekeeping and leadership provided information relevant to the ethic of justice. Field instructors discussed their concerns for students who do not perform as expected during the field practicum, and their hesitancy to pass judgment on students' suitability for practice. Many field instructors, particularly those in direct care positions, prefer to see the students' deficiencies as problems in a particular area of practice, but not their inability to practice in the profession as a whole. They clung to the values inherent in social work practice: the dignity and worth of people, a person's capacity to change, and acting in a nonjudgmental manner. It was not surprising that the field instructors questioned their ability to determine professional suitability in students. Even though they acknowledged the difficulty of the decision-making, most field instructors said that they felt
more comfortable with gatekeeping issues if they were dealing with master's level students. Their idea was that a graduate student already had at least one professional experience, and should have gleaned the minimum standard of professional behavior and practice as a result of that experience. For many undergraduate students, the field practicum is their first experience in demonstrating professional behavior. Many field instructors in the study felt it was unfair to judge someone for the rest of their life on the basis of this first experience. It was surprising, however, that they did not see the larger impact of gatekeeping decisions, particularly in light of the Code of Ethics (2008) and licensure laws (Ohio Administrative Code, § 4757-21-02 & 4757-21-03) that have sections specifically related to practitioner competency. Perhaps another perspective is that they recognized the gatekeeping dilemma, but did not feel it was solely their responsibility to resolve it. This perspective validates again the need for a strong relationship and fluid communication between the field instructor and university field director.

Implications for Practice

This study provides social work program field directors with valuable information in the selection and training of field instructors. Field directors can utilize the characteristics and attributes identified by the focus group participants as criteria in the selection and training of social work practitioners who voice a desire to become field instructors, as well as in evaluating their performance as field instructors. Utilizing consistent criteria will ultimately assist the field director in developing standards for field instruction, and provide some structure to an area of the curriculum that has historically been lacking in standardization.

Another practice implication for field directors is addressing the chasm between the classroom and field. Traditionally, field directors have not been the leaders in the schools of social work. This is due primarily because the majority of field directors are practitioners, and do
not have the terminal degrees recognized in higher education (Strom, G., personal communication). As a result, field directors have not enjoyed the same professional status as other social work academicians. When field education was identified as the profession’s signature pedagogy, field educators’ (both field directors and field instructors) importance was elevated. This recognition places field directors and field instructors in positions of leadership within social work education. Field directors need to seize this opportunity to provide professional leadership and use it to elevate their status within social work programs. They need to acknowledge their role in brokering partnerships between the field and the university, and strive to help the university recognize the value of field instructors as educators, while encouraging field instructors to feel more connected to the social work programs.

The study also validated the need for ongoing communication and support between the field instructor and school of social work, and the development of a strong relationship based on mutual respect and trust. The field instructors were clear, especially during the conversations on gatekeeping, that they need to feel supported by the field directors when they have to discuss issues of unsuitability with students and feel they cannot perform their role as gatekeeper effectively if this support is not evident. They need to feel that the university is willing to listen and assist them in these supervisory and decision-making processes, and become frustrated when they perceive that they are not adequately prepared or supported when those difficult situations need to be addressed. This is consistent with the findings of Barlow and Coleman (2003) and Bogo, Regehr, Power, and Regehr (2007) who found that field instructors who felt detached and unsupported by the university were less likely to dismiss a student, even when the student’s inappropriateness for practice was evident.
The study also provides field directors with a wealth of opportunities for future field instructor trainings, particularly regarding issues of leadership, adult development, and gatekeeping. As stated earlier, there are many field instructors who are not aware of the key role they play as professional gatekeepers. This study validates their request for ongoing training and supervision in this area. Training in gatekeeping issues is needed so that field instructors feel competent in identifying and addressing issues of professional unsuitability with students, as well as being able to articulate how those issues can affect the profession and future clients. The training can include identifying and resolving problematic behaviors in students, the fundamental ethical and legal concepts involved in social work gatekeeping, the role and responsibility of key players involved in the gatekeeping process, and skills in facilitating strong and open relationships built on trust and respect between university social work programs and field instructors/agencies. Theories and concepts in adult development is another area of potential training for field instructors. It is obvious that there are differences between the way adults and children learn, and it is critical that field instructors recognize those differences. The students they teach as field instructors are adults, and are usually engaged in a different developmental stage than that of the field instructor. It is important to recognize these differences in the development of the field instructor-student relationship, the recognition of the different learning types and styles of students and field instructors, and in the differences in interactions between the student, field instructor, and potential clients. Finally, the area of leadership is very important in social work field instruction. It was clear in this study that field instructors do not recognize themselves as leaders, yet are expected to display leadership behavior on a daily basis. It is important that they, as well as future social work professionals, recognize the value of
leadership at all levels of an organization. This recognition can help elevate the professional status of social workers in all aspects of professional practice.

Social work field instructors also benefit from this study. Because of the overlapping responsibilities of field instruction and supervision, understanding the attributes needed for effective field instruction can assist them in refining their skills in supervision. It can also assist them in recognizing their own leadership abilities, regardless of their position within an agency. This is particularly important since the field instructors participating in the study did not recognize their leadership abilities readily. Perhaps, this is because they are not routinely perceived or treated as leaders by themselves or other agency staff, or maybe it is because the field instructors do not see themselves as having power, a key concept in leadership. Regardless, field instructors have an opportunity to develop and enhance their leadership skills with students and other staff, and should take advantage of this opportunity. Social work practitioners, who are considering becoming field instructors, can assess their personal readiness for such responsibility by utilizing the characteristics and attributes identified in the study.

Finally, the study provides useful information for inclusion in the social work curriculum within accredited social work programs. Social work faculty can include issues such as gatekeeping and leadership in course content. This may help students recognize that becoming a social work professional, particularly during the field practicum, is not an entitlement and that students need to be able to demonstrate their competency in practice before they will be allowed to assume a position as a professional social worker. The study also supports the need to identify personal attributes and characteristics that are essential for social work practice, and include these things in the admission criteria for programs or as academic behavior. This will help to assure that the potential for inappropriate or unethical student behavior is addressed long before
the student arrives at the field practicum. Additionally, inclusion of leadership within the curriculum will address the lack of socialization and recognition of social workers as leaders, an area that historically has been absent from social work education.

Implications for Research

The area of social work field instruction supplies an abundance of research opportunities. This study is a beginning step in identifying leadership characteristics in field instructors. Differences in leadership style and leadership potential in positional and non-positional areas are things that need further exploration. Leadership literature maintains that leadership can occur at all levels of an organization. If this is true, then social work field instructors, particularly those in direct care positions, are uniquely qualified to explore professional leadership from an educational as well as occupational point of view. Since the sample used in this study was quite small, a larger sample incorporating field instructors from multiple schools of social work would be an area worth further exploration. Since field education has been identified as the signature pedagogy for the social work profession, the timeliness of this type of research couldn't be better. The profession is encouraging leadership institutes, and the National Association of Social Workers has issued an imperative to "train the leaders of tomorrow" (NASWNEWS, May, 2011).

In addition to leadership, gatekeeping is also an issue that has been evaluated in many ways. However, issues that need to be explored further include the manner in which field instructors are trained regarding gatekeeping, field instructor perceptions of gatekeeping as a professional responsibility, and the ethics involved in gatekeeping from the field instructors' points of view. The foundation of social work practice is honesty, integrity and competence. In order to support this foundation, schools of social work and field instructors need to work
together to assure that only competent and qualified people enter the profession. This study acknowledged that many field instructors, particularly those in direct care positions, do not routinely think about the gatekeeping responsibilities they have. Why? That is one of the questions for future research. Another question is the impact that state licensing has on professional gatekeeping? Are field instructors avoiding responsibility because they feel the licensing regulations will protect the profession from unethical or inappropriate practitioners? It appears that the voice of the field instructors is important in all of these questions, and has been one historically not heard.

There are several comparative and quantitative studies that can be explored. It may be interesting to see if there are differences in field instructor qualities in supervising undergraduate versus graduate students. Exploring leadership and gatekeeping issues among different practice areas such as criminal justice, behavioral health, child welfare or healthcare is another research possibility. Conducting focus groups with a combination of field directors, students, and field instructors that focus on issues of leadership and gatekeeping may yield interesting information, as well as provide an opportunity for the key players in field instruction to learn from one another directly. It may also be useful to compare student expectations before and after they complete field to see if their views of leadership and gatekeeping change, as well as assess their baseline expectations on these issues. Studying social work academicians’ views on the leadership and gatekeeping roles of field directors and field instructors could also be explored. This may help to address the unspoken bias in status between traditional academics and field directors/field instructors. Utilization of tools such as the Leadership Practice Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) to obtain quantitative data on leadership practices in all levels of field instruction, especially differences between those in positional versus non-positional occupational
positions, are needed to fill a gap in the literature. These studies can provide empirical evidence to support the qualitative studies on the issues of gatekeeping, and help provide standards or guidelines to schools of social work to assist in developing better admission criteria and tools to assess student competency in throughout the educational process, particularly field education. They can also help field directors determine which social work practitioners are best suited to become field instructors, and provide standards and tools to assess practitioner readiness and competence in that critical educational role.

Limitations

The biggest limitation in this study was the sample size. Although nineteen people is an acceptable number for a qualitative case study, the number is too small to be able to generalize the results to anyone other than the sample. In addition, there is no empirical, or otherwise effective, manner in which to judge the quality of the participants providing the data. Since every social work program has its own mechanism of determining who is and is not an appropriate field instructor, and since the Council on Social Work Education does not define specific criteria to be used in the selection of a field instructor, there is no way to know whether or not the participants in the study are providing the best information. The researcher can only ascertain, from her own experience previously working with the field instructors and students they supervise, that the quality of the field supervision provided was acceptable. It is assumed that because of the close connection to the university, their years of clinical experience and longevity in practice, and the length of time they have been participating as field instructors that they are qualified and competent in the area of field instruction. However, it is still an assumption without specific data to validate their quality.
Another limitation of this study regarding the sample and population is that only field instructors contracted with Midwestern University were used. The rationale for this was the stark contrast between how Midwestern University students completed their field practicum compared to other local universities. However, by limiting the sample to only those field instructors from one university, no comparison or other generalizations can be made regarding the findings.

A third limitation of the study is related to the students placed with the field instructors. At Midwestern University, the majority of students are traditional-aged undergraduates. They are generally between the ages of 22-25, and have been raised in suburban areas. Most come from white, middle-class families. Although there are students who represent other age, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences, they tend to be fewer in number. The type of student poses specific challenges to field instructors, but this aspect was not explored in this study.

A final limitation of the study is the use of the researcher as participant-observer (Creswell, 2007). The researcher in this study is a social worker with 29 years clinical experience, and 17 years experience as a field instructor. Currently, in her role as a social work program field director, she has frequent contact with all of the participants in the study. While this role gives her the credibility of understanding and recognizing quality field instruction with students, it also provides inherent bias in her interpretation of the skills and qualities needed by an effective field instructor.

Conclusion

Field education has been identified as the signature pedagogy for the social work profession, and field instructors provide a pivotal role in that process. Their voice in articulating the attributes and characteristics needed to provide competent field instruction has been long
overdue, and their expertise in determining these things has been an untapped resource. This study is an attempt to assist field instructors in finding a voice in the literature.

Field instructors recognize that they are not only teachers, but learners. They share their knowledge and experience with students and, in return, students keep them abreast of current research and practice trends which ultimately make them better practitioners. Field instructors acknowledge a strong commitment to the future of the profession, and provide students with relationships and experiences that they will long remember. They are visionary, and strive to make the future better for clients, students, and the profession as a whole.

But, field instructors’ contributions do not end there. Field instructors are also leaders. As professional gatekeepers and despite their own discomfort, they display a degree of leadership in making difficult decisions regarding student suitability for professional practice. Their behavior as role models for students and agency staff demonstrates the essence of professional leadership every day. They recognize the importance of honest, open communication and inspire students to perform to the best of their ability. This study recognized that field instructors do not see themselves as leaders, although, according to leadership models like those of Kouzes and Posner and Hersey and Blanchard, field instructors demonstrate leadership behavior on a daily basis. As a critical component of the signature pedagogy, field instructors maintain a unique position of leadership in the social work profession. If, as the literature emphasizes, leadership occurs at all levels of an organization then field instructors occupy a crucial leadership role in professional social work practice; one that needs to be recognized, validated, and explored further in the future.
REFERENCES

*Mentoring and Tutoring, 11*(2), 177-182.


Larabee, R. (2002). The risk of 'going observationalist': Negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer. *Qualitative Research, 2*(1), 97-122.


Ohio Revised Code. 4757. Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist statute.


Rothman, J. (2000). *Stepping out into the field: A field work manual for social work students.*


   Brooks/Cole Publishing.

Sahgal, P. & Pathak, A. (2007). Transformational leaders: Their socialization, self-concept, and

Segal, E., Gerdes,K. & Steiner, S. (2010). *An introduction to the profession of social work:*


   Communications Research, 3*(2), 1-7.


Strom-Gottfried, K. (2000). Ethical vulnerability in social work education: An analysis of

Tam, D. (2005). Gatekeeping in baccalaureate of social work (BSW) field education (Doctoral
   4723.


www.bls.gov/oco/ocos060.htm#outlook.


www.cswe.org/Accreditation.aspx.

www.factfinder.census.gov.


HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

The project titled “Social Work Field Instructors’ Perceptions of Core Attributes: Implications for Leadership and Gatekeeping” received the approval of the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board on November, 19, 2010. The expiration of the project’s approval is November 9, 2011. The project number is H11D085GE7.
1. How many years have you been a social work practitioner? 
2. How many years have you been a social work field instructor? 
3. How long have you worked in your current agency? 
4. How many students have you supervised in internships? 
5. What type of degree do you hold? 
   - BSW 
   - MSW 
   - PhD 
   - Other Bachelor 
   - Other Master 
6. In what type of agency do you work? 
   - Private, non-profit 
   - Private, for-profit 
   - Public 
7. What field of practice represents your current place of employment? 
   - Behavioral Health (mental health/substance abuse) 
   - Child Welfare (child protection/foster care) 
   - Medical (hospital/clinics) 
   - School 
   - Corrections 
   - Family Violence (domestic violence/victim services) 
   - Elderly (outpatient services/nursing homes) 
   - Poverty (homelessness/income assistance) 
   - Other (specify)
8. What type of position do you currently hold at your place of employment?

____ Direct care/line staff  
______ Supervisor/Middle Manager  
______ Supervisor/Administrator

9. How much supervisory responsibility (other than students) does your current position involve?

____ None  
____ Minimal amount  
____ Moderate Amount  
____ A Lot

10. How much training have you received in being a supervisor?

11. How would you define leadership?

12. What leadership skills do you use in your current position?

13. What leadership skills do you feel are important in being a field instructor?