

# 3 Needs and Anxieties of Students and Field Instructors

## The Student

All students experience some degree of anxiety during the early weeks of field placement. Some exhibit behavior that clearly reveals their feelings: forgetfulness, lack of concentration, getting sick the day the first client is to be interviewed, overingratiating mannerisms, and the like. Others are quite skilled at concealing or denying any fears or anxieties: "Oh, I'm doing just fine. I was worried at first, but this field placement experience isn't nearly as bad as I had thought." It may take such a student months before he is finally able to mention casually that he was scared to death for the first three weeks of placement. There is a tendency for field instructors to assume that the older, supposedly more mature student experiences less anxiety than one with less life experience. In fact, quite the opposite is often the case. If someone has been working at a responsible job for a number of years, it is quite an adjustment to return to a dependent, low-status student role, and sometimes sharply reduced financial circumstances. A forty-five-year-old housewife who hasn't worked outside the home in twenty years also has an enormous adjustment to make when she returns to school. Additional life experience gives such students an advantage in access to techniques for concealing their anxiety, but the anxiety is present nonetheless.

The effective field instructor simply assumes that most students will have anxieties and accommodates them. What kinds of anxieties do students experience? The following paragraphs give some ideas. Notice that these behaviors and feelings are not peculiar to immature, maladjusted, or problematic students. These are typical needs experienced by most students, even though they are rarely verbalized directly.

## Personal Insecurities

A student wants to put his best foot forward at all times—to appear competent and composed even when he isn't. Thus, he may be afraid to reveal ignorance to his supervisor by asking questions. Likewise, he may fear honest performance evaluation feedback. It may be the first time he has been in a situation where his work is being examined closely, and there can be intense anxiety over how the critical feedback will be given.

The trainee often has certain expectations of himself yet does not know exactly what the school and his field instructor expect of him: "Will I be able to meet my own expectations as well as those of others?" He may also wonder if the expectations of the field instructor, the classroom faculty, and the school as a whole will be consistent. He may worry about work assignments: Will there be too much to do or not enough? The mature student knows he has invested considerable money and energy and often drastically altered his life-style in order to go to school. He may wonder whether he will really learn anything in placement: "Will the experience be worthwhile, and what can I do if it isn't?" The student quickly learns that field instruction involves a certain amount of personal risk and self-exposure. But, "How much of myself—my needs, anxieties, values, inadequacies—will I have to expose? How much risk is involved? How much do I dare expose?"

The student may feel insecure about whether his classroom experience has prepared him to actually "do" social work in the field and whether he will be able to apply what he's learned in class. He may feel quite guilty if he has taken shortcuts in classes, only to discover that he is handicapped in field because of his failure to learn what was

placement in the classroom. He may be extremely preoccupied with grades. Knowing he must pass field or risk not earning his degree, he may struggle desperately to do whatever he perceives his field instructor wants in order to earn a satisfactory or better grade. This anxiety may actually inhibit the student's full participation in learning experiences.

An overriding anxiety faced by many inexperienced students is that they may not know what social work is all about. They may be asking, "Am I really cut out for social work? Suppose I try it and don't like it? Suppose I can't back it?" Such students may resist verbalizing their anxiety for fear of making their fears come true. They may even become defensive if a supervisor tries to help them examine whether social work is indeed the best profession for them. On a more specific level is concern over the individual field placement. "Am I in the right placement? Is it a good one? What if I don't like it?"

The new student frequently feels lost at the beginning of placement. He doesn't know where the bathroom is, where to eat lunch, or how to find a certain office. He is totally in the dark as to what his role is or should be. Everyone else seems to have found his niche. "Do I introduce myself as a social worker? What if people find out I'm only a student?" The student knows he is low man on the organizational totem pole and may experience real feelings of powerlessness, especially if he was employed in a supervisory or administrative capacity before entering school.

There is also a fear of failure and rejection. The student may be wondering if criticism of any kind from a field instructor or other agency staff means that he is a total failure. There may also be anxiety over having to compete with other students placed in the same agency. "Will I do as well as they do? Can I keep up with them?" Or there may be a resolve that "I must be number one."

The more sophisticated student (especially in a second field placement) may fear being used as a workhorse instead of being treated as a student, especially if he is capable and somewhat productive. The bright student may express hope for an easy experience but inwardly fear that he will not be challenged sufficiently. At the same time, the thought of being challenged in accordance with his abilities may be very anxiety-provoking, because the student will be forced to confront his weaknesses as well as his strengths.

All of us need to feel some sense of control over our environment. Yet the beginnings of most field placements provide scant opportunity for this. The student needs to feel that he is contributing something as well as just taking from placement, yet the early needs of placement provide little opportunity for giving. The adult learner thrust into placement needs to be seen as an individual human being, not as "just" a student, yet he and agency staff are strangers to one another, and he is often just "one of the new crop of students" until familiarity produces individualization.

### Concerns Regarding the Field Instructor

Most field instructors would be startled to learn just how scared of them many students are when they enter placement. "Who, me? I'm just me. I don't bite, I wouldn't hurt anyone. How can my student be scared of me? He certainly doesn't act scared." Yet students repeatedly express, sometimes weeks and months later, their real fear of their field instructor, because he is viewed as the supreme authority figure. It is he who will determine whether the student passes or fails, whether he gets his degree or not, and whether he is permitted to pursue social work. The student knows this and may react with fear and extreme respect for the field instructor. He may have great difficulty seeing him as a human being as well as an authority figure, teacher, and professional. Some students never achieve this awareness and relaxed comfort in relating to their supervisors.

Discomfort with authority figures is clearly associated with anxiety over the evaluation process. The student does not want to do anything that might bring negative feedback or decrease his evaluation rating. Thus, he may fear retaliation from the supervisor if he communicates honestly, reveals his less-than-perfect self, or—horrors!—disagrees with his supervisor on an issue or points out a simple error. Afraid to express his own opinions, he may sit in silence, appearing to agree with the supervisor rather than risk criticism by expressing his individuality. Students hesitate to confront supervisors with unmet needs. Such fear inhibits student growth and in most instances is unwarranted: Most field instructors will not downgrade a student simply for disagreeing with them. But that fact does not allay the student's fears, especially when the student grapevine carries tales of students who "got flunked out for just looking at their field instructor the wrong way."

Students hope for a good experience with the field instructor. "Will he be likable, friendly, and competent?" The more experienced student may wonder, "Will my supervisor know more than I do, and will I be able to respect him and learn from him? Will he become threatened if he discovers I have specialized knowledge in some areas that exceeds his own competency? Will I like him, and will he like me? What will the supervisor be like—as a professional, a person with a personality, and an authority figure?" The student may have talked to other students who have had placement in that agency or been supervised by his field instructor. Their experiences can heighten or alleviate his own anxieties. He may be wondering anxiously, "What if communication breaks down with my field instructor. What do I do then?" The supervisee wonders if the field instructor will be available when needed or will leave him to founder and embarrass himself when he tries to function as a social worker. He also hopes the field instructor will be able to meet his individual needs as an adult learner with a par-

ticular personality. There may be anxiety over the proper role of the field instructor: "How friendly should I be with him? Should I have lunch and coffee breaks with him?" On the other hand, he usually wants to maintain a professional distance and hopes he won't be "caseworked" by the supervisor. If he has talked with other students who feel they have experienced this, or if he is having some upheaval in his personal life concurrent with field placement, he may be afraid that the supervisor will try to probe inappropriately into his personal affairs.

The young, relatively inexperienced student often views his field instructor as *the* role model. He has none other to compare him with. Thus the supervisor's every word and movement are taken as perfection personified—the way it should be—and is copied blindly. A patterning process may occur similar to that experienced by chickens hatched and raised by a human being. Because they've known nothing else, they soon follow the person around as if he were literally a mother hen. Students must be gradually weaned from their field instructor, exposed to various viewpoints and approaches, and encouraged to flex their own professional muscles and assert themselves as individuals.

#### Client Concerns

The first contact with a "live client" should take place within a few days after the beginning of placement; the longer it is postponed, the higher the anxiety level becomes. It is not unusual for students to procrastinate, become suddenly ill, or find something else to do instead when the dreaded hour arrives. However, with support, virtually everyone survives the first interview intact and experiences enormous relief that it wasn't as bad as had been imagined. Once this hurdle has been cleared, the student begins to build a sense of confidence and security from seeing his own accomplishments, and anxieties decrease markedly.

Many students worry that they might do harm to clients through inexperience. A frank discussion regarding the kinds of behaviors that are damaging to clients versus those that are relatively harmless, including the information that most clients are actually quite tough, is helpful.

If the client is physically ill, the student may be afraid of contracting his disease yet often cannot verbalize the fear directly. Field instructors in hospitals and other settings serving physically ill consumers can alleviate this anxiety by explaining prior to the first client contact that fear of contagion is normal and providing reassurance and instructions regarding any necessary special precautions. Students are sometimes afraid of psychiatric clients or persons exhibiting bizarre behavior. A drooling, mumbling, cross-eyed, mentally retarded adult can be an unnerving sight for the uninitiated student, as can an infant hooked up to artifi-

cial life-support equipment. When students come into direct contact with death, disability, retardation, and other such phenomena for the first time in a professional capacity, there is often much soul-searching and outright fear that "one day I could be like that." Students may suffer the famous third-year medical student's disease, where they begin to identify symptoms in themselves that tell them for certain that they have the same ailments as their clients. Students should be warned in advance that such experiences are normal and can be brought to the field instructor for discussion.

Each of us has unique aspects of our own personal background that make us especially capable of handling certain kinds of problems and especially fearful or uneasy in dealing with others. A student with a parent who is dying of cancer may not mention this to his field instructor and may be placed in a medical setting. When he encounters a sixty-year-old man with terminal cancer, the student's anxiety level can become immobilizing. The inexperienced student may naively believe that because he has lived with a schizophrenic or alcoholic mother, for example, he can handle such problems in others with no difficulty. The more experienced student often, but not always, can identify presenting problems or diagnoses that make him uncomfortable but may experience anxiety over what to do if he is assigned one of these cases; he may worry that his field instructor will think him incompetent if he isn't sufficiently tough and professional to stick with it and work it through. Some frank remarks from the field instructor at the beginning of placement recognizing that these situations could occur, indicating how students typically respond and pointing out what to bring to the field instructor's attention, can be most helpful. Advising the student that not being able to deal with some situations does not mean one is incompetent can help a great deal in relieving anxiety.

#### Anxieties Regarding the Agency or the System

Students usually wonder if the system and its staff will accept them. A trainee can also become anxious as he tries to analyze the underground politics of the work environment: "Who is it safe to talk to around here? What kind of behavior is accepted or criticized in this setting?" The student may hear gossip through the agency grapevine that can increase his anxiety or perhaps reassure him that some of his fears are not apt to materialize.

The inexperienced student often harbors unrealistic expectations of professional social workers and members of other disciplines. Years of watching "medical programs" on TV may have given him a deeply ingrained impression that all doctors are warm, giving, caring, perfect human beings 100 percent of the time. Such professionals never get

angry at their clients, never have insecurities in their own lives, and always interact with everyone with patience and total involvement. Many a student has suffered a rude awakening and considerable anxiety upon encountering a medical student, physician, resident psychiatrist, or social work staff member who reveals his less-than-perfect nature. The student's professional idealism is shattered, and he may even question what he is doing in social work. He may experience some anger before he is able to accept the reality that people come in all shapes and sizes, possess all kinds of personalities and life-styles, and show all degrees of competence and incompetence. It usually takes even longer for the student to accept and use consciously the human side of himself in his own professional practice.

### Techniques for Alleviating Student Anxiety

A few basic approaches with the student just beginning a field placement experience have proved helpful in decreasing student anxiety.

The student's innate fear of or excessive respect for the field instructor because of his or her authority position takes time to overcome, and some never succeed. However, many other anxieties regarding the supervisor can be alleviated (but not completely erased) through frank discussion. Experienced field instructors have probably acquired some awareness of their own instructional style, their expectations, what they are like to work for, things they have little tolerance for, what are the positives about their approach to supervision, and so on. This awareness comes through feedback from supervisees as well as school and agency colleagues and from self-assessment.\* Why not share it with the student at the very beginning of placement? "Look, this is what I'm like to work with. This is what you can and cannot expect from me: . . . I want you to be honest with me about . . ." and so on. The student should be encouraged to share his expectations of the field instructor as well.

The field instructor must be very supportive. Many students require a great deal of hand-holding, spoon-feeding and individual attention during the first few days of placement. Avoid pointing out all the student's faults and areas where growth is needed. Instead, spot the positives and give concrete, specific assignments enabling the trainee to achieve measurable and fairly prompt success. For example, let a student help a client apply for financial assistance or food stamps; have him assist an elderly person with grocery shopping or locate a hospital bed for someone to use at home. Vague, complex assignments where the rewards of effective service delivery are subtle or slow in coming increase anxiety at the beginning of placement. Educational

\* See Appendix A on increasing one's self-awareness as a field instructor.

experiences and instructional feedback must be designed to increase student self-esteem and self-confidence. Of course feedback must be realistic—students should not receive praise when it is unwarranted. But if assignments are kept simple until the student's capacities are explored more fully, he won't be tested to the limits of his ability right away and can experience some success.

A student needs to know that his field instructor is aware of his anxieties and that they are normal. It is not necessary to run through the entire list presented in this chapter. Simply show a little empathy and understanding that he probably is anxious about a number of things.

Treat the student as an adult learner. Let him know that he is expected to ask questions and that a sign of growth will be increasing ability to form his own opinions. Similarly recognize with him that he may need to copy the field instructor blindly at first and express hope that he will soon begin to take bits and pieces from others' styles and put them together with his personality and skills to develop his own professional approach. Let him know that this process does not happen overnight.

Much initial student anxiety occurs because expectations are unclear. The development of a formal educational contract alleviates much of this anxiety (see Chapter 6). The student's expectations of the field placement experience and the supervisor, as well as the field instructor's expectations of the student, must be continually reviewed, revised, and shared throughout the placement experience. The field instructor who feels comfortable in sharing a description of his own personal supervisory style will go a long way in helping his student reduce unknowns regarding expectations in the supervisor-student relationship.

Explain the performance evaluation process exactly and show the student copies of the form or outline that will be completed at various points during the placement. Do not assume that most students are familiar with this material. Explain that the written evaluation will contain nothing that the student will not already know: Performance evaluation is an ongoing process throughout placement through frequent verbal feedback. Clearly list and illustrate some of the things that can cause a student to fail field (see pp. 198-203) and what a student must accomplish to earn satisfactory or outstanding ratings in his particular setting (e.g., see pp. 61-66). This discussion is less threatening if presented to a group of students rather than individually. It could also be included in a seminar on "Being Consumers of Supervision."

Tell the student that one way he can have some sense of control over his learning experience is through sharing his expectations with the supervisor and giving honest feedback when he feels his needs are not being met. Recognize that he probably will not feel free to do this at first, but express hope that it will come eventually when he feels more comfortable in placement. Allow the student to make as many concrete choices as possible regarding his beginning place-

ment experience, and structure learning exercises so that he can experience some control over them.

Directly express your feelings that clients are "pretty tough and aren't easily damaged by students." All students make mistakes and sometimes aren't as effective as they might be, but they need to know that the field instructor is aware of this and considers it normal. Explain the use of direct observational methods of assessing student interactions with clients, which enable the field instructor to keep informed of what the student is doing and move in with guidance before irreversible problems develop for the student.

Let the student observe an interview or follow the field instructor around for a few days until he gets a feel for the role of the social worker. Bear in mind that the very inexperienced student will not know enough to appreciate fully or to critique what he is observing; observation soon becomes meaningless unless it is mixed with direct contacts and activity.

Field-instructor feedback should be frequent—almost daily—in the beginning of placement. Long periods of time between completion of an assignment and receipt of supervisory feedback increase anxiety and fears of failing to meet expectations.

Finally, learning should be partialized—broken down into small, manageable parts. The assignment may be to arrange a discharge plan for John Jones, who has been hospitalized. This involves a number of activities. The student can be directed first to interview the patient, then to talk with the doctor regarding physical diagnoses and prognosis and consult with the nurse regarding limitations in activities of daily living. Structure is essential—the student cannot be left on his own for several days to complete a rather vague or highly complex assignment. The student's work schedule should allow him to use field placement time for reading, self-reflection, ventilation of his anxieties, and informal discussions with other students and staff.

Not all students will experience all the anxieties mentioned here. A few exceptionally secure and competent students with considerable life or work experience may have already worked through many of these fears and anxieties. However, they may still feel some discomfort simply because the placement experience offers new people and new expectations to relate to. The mature student often becomes an unofficial leader to whom other students turn as they ventilate their anxieties and seek peer confirmation of feelings. The student who has worked his anxiety through often plays a very significant behind-the-scenes role in offering support, guidance, and interpretation to his peers.

## The Field Instructor

Field instructors are human beings first and social work supervisors second. Their individual personalities, needs,

and supervisory styles will surface from time to time and may result in a less-than-perfect approach to the student. Few trainees fully appreciate the private agonies and soul-searching that the conscientious field instructor undergoes both prior to supervising a student (especially the very first one) and during the relationship. Rarely does (or should) a field instructor express his own inner needs, anxieties, and insecurities directly to his student, though he might share them quite openly with the school, with other supervisors, or in training sessions with his peers. If the learner is studying supervision and administration, the secure supervisor will often discuss and share some of his inner feelings with his student, who may be experiencing the same feelings himself as he prepares for supervisory responsibilities.

Even the most experienced field instructor undergoes some self-examination and anxiety when faced with a problematic situation. As with student fears and anxieties, the ones presented here for field instructors are quite common and normal. In fact, there is cause for concern when a supervisor is so self-confident that he fails to experience these feelings from time to time. Sometimes the anxieties seem overwhelming, especially for the brand new field instructor. However, most deal with them effectively through ventilation and consultation with peers, and with support from their own supervisors. Learning that the student does not bite and really isn't as difficult to supervise as he had imagined also helps the supervisor to relax. In a few rare instances, the worst fears and anxieties are confirmed: The student is a problem from the first day of placement, and the supervisor may lack the experience necessary to deal with him effectively and comfortably. However, strong guidance and support from an experienced supervisor as well as from the school can often get him through the situation and result in a meaningful learning experience for the field instructor and an appropriate outcome for the student.

## Personal Insecurities

Perhaps the most basic anxiety, especially for the new field instructor, is simply: "Do I have something to offer? Should I really be doing this? Do I know what I'm doing?" Along with these questions comes an internalized recognition that the supervisor is responsible for molding another person's personal and professional growth, and the weight of this responsibility is felt heavily. Field instructors who have never supervised a student before may be keenly aware of their own inadequacies and of the fact that field instruction places heavy emphasis on the instructional component in supervision. While he may feel that he has good practice skills, he may wonder if he can conceptualize them so as to teach them to others. If he is aware of practice areas in which he does not specialize that are not his strongest points, he may wonder how he is going to teach what he himself doesn't know how to do well. These anxieties cause many a

conscious field instructor to head for the nearest library to review basic concepts. Texts by Compton and Galloway, Kadushin, Pincus and others are devoured eagerly in a frantic effort to ascertain ahead of the student and to make certain that what the supervisor is teaching is not in conflict with what the student is learning in the classroom. The supervisor who responds to his anxieties in this manner and takes the time to do this extra reading (often at home) usually experiences substantial and lasting professional growth.

As the field instructor thinks about the responsibilities involved in student supervision, he may ask himself: "What's in it for me? Why am I doing this?"—followed by: "I should be getting paid for this!" Most schools offer field instructors free use of the library and certain other college facilities, a title that proclaims them (unpaid) faculty members, and perhaps a discount at the university bookstore. The instructor attends special seminars and workshops conducted by the school and often has the opportunity to participate in school planning committees and to lecture or observe in the classroom. In some schools the field instructor is entitled to a given number of tuition-free credit hours in courses of his choosing. Agency-employed field instructors do not get paid for their role; indeed, most agencies do not even reduce their normal work loads to compensate for the extra work involved in student supervision. Thus, the school's benefits alone might not seem enough to entice the average practitioner to become a field instructor. Obviously, field instructors do receive other intangibles and meaningful rewards that often satisfy their question, "What's in it for me?"

Perhaps the biggest reward is seeing the student grow as a professional diamond-in-the-rough is shaped into an approximate facsimile of a functional social worker. In a few instances students do not grow as expected and problems exist. However, if the field instructor is able to take decisive action and is supported by the school, he may derive a feeling of satisfaction from helping a student overcome seemingly insurmountable problems or choose a more appropriate career.

The field instructor himself often experiences significant personal or professional growth through working with students, and many practitioners assume this role primarily because it helps them keep abreast of the latest trends in social work practice. They may also enjoy the challenge of helping to train a practitioner and perhaps a leader of tomorrow. Many field instructors rate their effectiveness low if they do not learn nearly as much as the student during the field instruction process.

Most students will not tell their field instructor directly, "I think you're great. You're doing a great job." If this does happen, it is usually toward the end of placement rather than at the beginning, when the anxious or insecure supervisor could really use the positive feedback. If such compliments come too early in the placement, they must be

evaluated carefully. How can the student feel you are doing a good job when he hardly knows you? Perhaps he is so new you haven't yet zeroed in on areas where he needs to improve. Will he still feel the same way after he's received critical as well as positive feedback? The student's own anxiety and extreme desire to please may be causing premature, overingratiating behavior. If it continues to the point that it becomes obviously inappropriate, the pattern should be called to the student's attention and discussed fully. At any rate, most field instructors do not get direct feedback regarding their effectiveness; instead, the feedback comes through more subtle channels. Obviously, student growth indicates supervisory effectiveness in many instances. Students may compare you favorably with other supervisors. Remarks such as, "Boy, I'm glad I don't have so-and-so for a field instructor" or "I was shocked to learn that in ZYA agency they do [or don't do] such-and-such" are actually indirect compliments. Both agencies and individual field instructors within them eventually develop specific reputations among students. It is most rewarding to have students seek out your agency or perhaps you personally because of a positive reputation. Schools may give feedback supporting a supervisor's competence and effectiveness with students, and an effective setting may be told quite directly that "yours is one of the best placements we have."

There are other benefits as well. Students who are placed with an agency may wish to work there after graduation, giving the agency a pool of specially trained candidates to choose from. In addition, if an entire agency or department has an outstanding reputation for the quality of its field instruction program, it will attract post-degree applicants who seek employment there because of the agency's reputation in the community and their desire to be a part of it.

Becoming a field instructor carries a certain status in many agencies, especially those with a reputation for having a good program and high standards in the selection of field instructors. The experience may help prepare a practitioner for assuming supervisory responsibilities later on and give him an advantage over other candidates for promotion who have never supervised anyone. Thus, there may be some tangible long-term rewards.

### Anxieties Regarding the Student

Anxieties about students are legion. Perhaps most basic is a fear of failing to meet the student's needs and expectations. There can be very specific anxieties regarding effectiveness as a field instructor: "Will I be able to keep my student sufficiently busy? Will I have enough time for him? Will having a student keep me from getting my other work done? Can I communicate my expectations effectively? How deeply should I dig into my student's personal life and value system? How much should I shelter my student from

the realities of social work practice in my agency? Will I be able to be objective with my supervisee? Can I find the right assignments to give him in the beginning? How will I know if my expectations are too high or too low? Will I be able to cope with all my student's needs and anxieties? What if my student asks me questions I can't answer?" And so on.

Field instructors may feel threatened by certain kinds of students and can become quite anxious, imagining the worst possible outcome. They may fear that the student will know more than they do in some areas. With today's specialized approach to social work education and the increasing number of students with extensive life and work experience, some supervisees actually do know more or are more skilled than their field instructors in certain areas. However, no student knows more than the supervisor in all areas of practice, and the supervisor certainly knows more than his student about the specifics of his own agency and its client group. Furthermore, a teacher does not necessarily need to know more than his student to be effective. His primary role is to facilitate learning, which can come directly from the field instructor or from a host of other sources and experiences. A frank, "That's not one of my areas of specialty [e.g. research], but if you'd like to pursue it further, I'll see if I can find someone you can work with on that project"—usually earns the student's respect. There may also be anxieties associated with supervising a student who is older or has more work or life experience than the supervisor. "Will he respect me in spite of my youth? Will he really feel someone as young as I can have something to offer him?" Many field instructors experience genuine relief when they discover an area in which their student's knowledge or skill is less than perfect: "Aha, there is something I can help him with after all! I *am* needed!"

Field instructors also hope their students will like them. It is difficult for two people to work together when they do not like each other. The student must respect the supervisor if real learning is to occur. If a personal liking for him also exists, this is an added plus. If a supervisor's own need to be liked by his supervisees is too strong, he will have great difficulty giving honest evaluatory feedback or taking any action that he feels might cause his student to dislike him. This can seriously hamper the student's learning experience. Field instructors want to have a good reputation among other students placed in the same agency and with the school and may be quite curious about what their students are saying about them to others. The instructor may worry that his reputation will be tarnished if he has to make evaluatory decisions that are unpopular or disciplinary in nature. Similarly, he hopes his student will do well so he can be proud of him and won't be ashamed to say, "That's my student."

The conscientious field instructor may worry about his ability to handle student mistakes that could be embarrassing for both student and supervisor. If the student does poorly, the field instructor may fear that others will think it

is because he isn't a good supervisor and didn't do a good job. He hopes that all his students will be mature, bright, motivated, eager, responsive, self-directed learners rather than persons with special needs or problems that might test the limits of supervisory skill. On the other hand, the field instructor is often keenly aware of his own limitations and may wonder if areas where he is not strongly competent will be obvious to the student.

"Will the student trust me and communicate openly and honestly? Will he see me as effective in my role?" Many of the field instructor's past experiences with students and other supervisees and his own relationship with authority figures, both as a student and as an employee, will surface and be reviewed consciously as he performs his field instruction role.

A delicate problem may worry the field instructor. As in a good marriage, it is not beneficial for student and field instructor to be together constantly. Both need periodic breaks from one another. "How can I tell my student to get lost for a while when I need a break from him?" may be of concern.

Field instructors can have nearly as many anxieties over the evaluation process as students do (see Chapters 11 and 12). Most new supervisors imagine the worst: "Suppose I get a student I have to fail or counsel out of social work? What if I get a student who doesn't do well?" And then: "If my student does poorly, how will I know if it's the student's fault or because I'm not doing a good job as a field instructor?" This last question keeps experienced supervisors awake at night when serious problems are encountered. Thus, the supervisory role leads to much self-examination and produces new areas of self-awareness as field instructors agonize over these various concerns. The student may feel that field instruction is 100 percent assessment of the student's performance. However, the wise field instructor knows that it is also a process whereby his own competence and effectiveness are tested. If a supervisor feels that he is not meeting his supervisee's needs, there can be real guilt: "Maybe the student would be better off if he had someone else as a supervisor." Finally, there may be concern over the student's written evaluation of his field placement experience, which is submitted to the school. Many supervisors take this process very seriously and react quite strongly (though usually silently) to critical comments from students who rate them less than positively in their evaluative feedback.

#### Concerns Regarding the School or Agency

All field instructors hope that the school and its faculty will support them in any recommendations or actions they take. If a school fails to support a field instructor, the community grapevine usually informs student supervisors, resulting in increased anxiety: "Could the same thing happen

The field instructor also needs to feel that his own supervisor and other agency staff will support his assessments and actions regarding his student. A department or agency that has clearly defined its approach to field instruction and that provides training for new supervisors and opportunities for all student supervisors to meet periodically to share concerns and hammer out expectations and philosophies usually offers strong, unified support to individual staff who must deal with problematic situations. The support from intra-agency colleagues can give the field instructor the self-confidence and strength needed to take decisive action. The isolated field instructor functioning in a setting that does not offer this kind of support is usually at a distinct disadvantage if faced with having to counsel a student out of placement or assign him a failing grade. He may simply lack the guts to do it, even though professionally he may realize it's what needs to be done.

New field instructors can experience acute anxiety if tossed into the field instruction role without advance training and specific guidance from the school. The role requires new skills for many agency-based practitioners, and they may rightly feel: "I'm being thrown to the wolves and being given no tools or weapons for dealing with the situation." Of course, some staff take on students without fully realizing what they are getting into. Those who are aware of some of the issues discussed throughout this book usually feel a need for specialized training and preparation. How can a school of social work expect quality education if agency staff used as field instructors receive little or no help to carry out their role effectively? If agency-based personnel would refuse to take students unless they first received appropriate

training for their new role, this could have a significant impact on the quality of social work education. Likewise schools could refuse to accept anyone as a field instructor who has not undergone specialized training.

Finally, the field instructor wants his students to have good experience. He knows he will do his best to be an effective role model and a good teacher/supervisor. But what about others whom the field instructor cannot control? "Will other staff be good role models for my student, or will they corrupt him?" A little overprotection may occur. Actually, the student will eventually encounter staff and members of other disciplines who are less than perfect examples of their profession; he can be helped to accept this reality and can learn skills for dealing with his feelings and the other persons involved as part of his educational experience.

The foregoing discussion may give the false impression that all field instructors and students are a seething pool of insecurities and incapacitating anxieties. Such is not the case. The fact that supervisors consciously think about these issues results eventually in a definite stand or approach that comes across as decisive and educational for the student who is usually unaware of the private problem-solving process that goes on behind the outcome he experiences. Likewise, the field instructor may see little of the student's hidden fears and anxieties. What is important is that both realize that such feelings are a normal, natural part of the field instruction process and that they will surface periodically and can be discussed openly and channeled in a constructive manner.