

## Media Review

**Becoming a Social Worker: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth** (DVD), directed by Judy Smith. New York, NY: Developing Images LLC, 2008, \$149.

**Becoming a Social Worker With Older Adults: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth** (DVD), directed by Judy Smith. New York, NY: Developing Images LLC, 2008, \$149.

Smith produced this set of films as learning tools for use in social work foundation practice courses, gerontology courses, and fieldwork. Each film presents content in seven stand-alone vignettes, and these include first-year graduate students meeting with clients and discussing their clients and development of practice skills with their field instructors and the filmmaker. The vignettes can be useful teaching tools when used individually or collectively in classes, fieldwork instruction, and in-service training sessions.

The film *Becoming a Social Worker: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth* focuses on students' experiences at the beginning of their first year of fieldwork, and is especially appropriate for beginning undergraduate and graduate students and agency in-service training and supervision. Students discuss their concerns and emotional responses as they begin fieldwork. The titles of vignettes in this DVD are: (a) Why did you choose to become a social worker? (b) First experiences seeing a client, (c) Establishing a professional relationship, (d) What is my role: Contracting and goals, (e) Supervision: Making it work, (f) Using supervision to learn about yourself, and (7) Working through termination with clients.

In the second film, *Becoming a Social Worker With Older Adults: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth*, the focus is on several students who appeared in the earlier film, and now the viewer sees their progress in developing practice skills in individual and group interventions with older adults. This film provides insight into challenges and benefits of practice with older adults as the viewer sees and hears students at work, in supervisory discussions, and reflecting on their fieldwork. The vignettes in this film are: (a) Running a support group in a community center, (b) Home visiting seniors and boundary confusion, (c) The challenges in helping older adults accept services, (d) Helping family caregivers to get services, (e) Confronting

ageism in ourselves: Using supervision, (f) Outreach to the very old, and (g) Student growth over time.

*Becoming a Social Worker: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth* begins with students discussing their motivation for becoming a social worker and their satisfaction with this decision after beginning graduate school. They discuss how their decisions resulted from assessment of their interests and personal experiences that contributed to interest in pursuing a social work career. The second vignette shows students candidly sharing their concerns about initial client interviews: feeling overwhelmed, confused, nervous, exhausted, vulnerable, and concerned about their ability to be self-aware and to listen, in addition to expressing concern about older clients' potential reactions to their youth.

Students' concerns about establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries are addressed in several vignettes, including those in which students make home visits. There were occasions during filming when students were uncertain about how to respond to clients' questions, especially when clients asked about students' personal lives, and these issues were addressed during filmed supervisory meetings. Reflecting on another side of this issue, students described initial discomfort with entering clients' personal space during home visits. Some were uncomfortable with actions required of them that they considered invasive of clients' space, such as checking for food in a client's refrigerator when assessing an applicant's need for food stamps. Students discuss the importance of respecting other people's space and realizing that a person receiving a visit may not perceive the student's actions in the way that students fear they will. It was pointed out that clients may accept the assessment process as necessary to achieve their goals.

Two of the vignettes in this DVD emphasize supervisory processes: "Supervision: making it work" and "Using supervision to learn about yourself." Students were interviewed regarding their experiences with supervision, and their discussions with field instructors are also included. Field instructors demonstrate reflection, positive feedback, empathy, and ability to work with students to increase self-awareness. Supervisors' effective use of process recordings to identify patterns in students' work and address these in supervision were filmed and discussed. Students discuss their experiences with field instructors challenging them regarding their interventions and recordings, and one student discusses the process that she went through in developing awareness that she needed to advocate for herself with her field instructor so that she could receive more adequate supervision.

"Working through termination with clients" includes students' discussions with clients about termination and with an interviewer and supervisors. Students reflect on their work and their feelings about termination, as well as plans for agency follow up with students' clients after termination.

The work of students in *Becoming a Social Worker: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth* is with older adults, but their experiences, thoughts, and feelings are also relevant to beginning one's social work education and fieldwork with other populations. In contrast, although it also has broader applicability, *Becoming a Social Worker with Older Adults: Real Students, Real Clients, Real Growth* provides deeper understanding of difficulties experienced by many older adults, needed interventions, and use of social work skills in work with older adults. Although the second vignette (home visiting older adults and boundary confusion) is also included in the first DVD, all others are new vignettes not included in the first film.

As an experienced gerontological social worker, supervisor, and instructor, the vignettes in this DVD resonate strongly with me, and I believe that they will be useful teaching and supervisory tools for many social workers in these roles. They address difficulties that are frequently experienced by older adults and their relatives and friends that can present challenges for workers trying to help. Although most of the vignettes address work with individuals, this DVD begins with a student who facilitates a support group for older adults in a community center. The student describes the planning process and was filmed while facilitating a group session.

The vignettes entitled "The challenge of helping older adults to accept services," "Helping family members to get services," and "Confronting ageism in ourselves: Using supervision" address and illustrate essential topics for learning competent gerontological practice and can be very useful in teaching and learning. The first vignette addresses students' roles, client self-determination, challenges of increased dependency for older adults, importance of timing in acceptance of services, need to provide support to the client during the transition to having assistance, challenges of contracting when the client does not believe services are needed, decision-making regarding referral to Adult Protective Services, and learning when to act as advocate. The vignette about helping family members focuses on a student's work with the caregiving sister of a woman with dementia in which the student and caregiver address the caregiver's concerns while this individual's self-determination is supported. The vignette about confronting ageism in oneself offers very important insights into addressing this challenging issue through a skillful supervisory discussion between an experienced field instructor and a student who finds this subject difficult but is willing to listen and examine the issues.

In the final vignettes, students reflect on their growth over time. A student who is shown interviewing her 98-year-old client describes her process of learning to be comfortable with silences and not needing to control every step of the process, as well as learning about professional boundaries and addressing her feelings about termination. Several students describe learning from their clients.

Produced by a social work professor at the university where she teaches, and drawing upon her previous filmmaking experience, these documentary films are a unique, valuable contribution to the resources available for teaching practice, gerontology, and fieldwork content to students and staff in colleges and social service agencies. The films were developed as a longitudinal study of students' development of practice skills and understanding of older adults during their first year of graduate work. Their uniqueness results from students' and field instructors' candid portrayals of their experiences and the glimpses of older adults' lives as they describe their own experiences. Comprehensive discussion guides are available at the Developing Images LLC Website and can be downloaded without charge.

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