Exploring Redundancy in Social Work Education

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Abstract: *: The issue of redundancy has not been well explored in the social work curriculum. The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (CSWE, 2001) requires redundancy in the form of integration of material across content areas and addresses redundancy vertically between levels of education and year of program. Furthermore, research and theory support the notion that various types of redundancy produce educational benefits. This paper uniquely uses MSW students to track instances of redundancy over their first year of study and distinguishes between helpful and unhelpful redundancy. It presents both the study results and a description of the study process so that other schools may use or adapt it.*

Keywords: Curriculum review, curriculum building, redundancy

Redundancy is a persistent concern in social work education. Faculty guard against it by trying to ensure that teaching materials (e.g., readings, films, case examples) are not used in more than one class and that course content is discrete. Though social work educators generally aim to purge redundancy from curricula, the concept of redundancy in social work education has not been fully explored, its positive functions have not been articulated, differentiation between useful and useless redundancy not defined, and differing perceptions of educators and students regarding redundancy not considered.

This paper addresses these concerns. It first explores the concept of redundancy as variously defined and studied, with particular attention given to social work education. It then describes a study in which the authors asked students to record and describe instances of redundancy that they experienced during their foundation year of the MSW program at a large state university. The authors hope the findings will increase faculty sensitivity to the issue of redundancy and help to support integrated, vital curriculum building.

This paper also describes a process that other schools may use to identify redundancy in their own curriculum. This process will be a valuable tool for informing the periodic self-study required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) of all accredited schools.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Redundancy in curriculum building often has negative connotations and has been viewed as something to be eliminated. In social work education, this is most clearly seen in relation to the BSW/MSW continuum. Anderson (1976) looked specifically at BSW/MSW education and identified advanced placement as a strategy for eliminating redundancy. Seipel (1986) surveyed policy sequence coordinators of 100 BSW and 91 MSW programs to analyze policy course content areas, focusing especially on knowledge and skills taught at different educational levels, including articulation between BSW and MSW content. Examining course outlines and questionnaire results, he concluded that students could experience extreme gaps or redundancy between BSW and MSW levels and recommended that educators generate models and principles that could be used to distinguish appropriate content on different levels to avoid these.

There is also reference to student perceptions of redundancy within one educational level. Tungate, Lazzari and Buchan (2001), reporting student responses to exit interviews from a BSW program, concluded that students wanted content that was integrated and could be applied but not redundant. This begins to get at the heart of the redundancy issue: Though students do not like what they view as repetition, they value other curriculum features, such as integration. In short, redundancy is not always a negative.

In fact, in contrast to these criticisms of redundancy, various fields offer examples of redundancy that enhance learning. For instance, an article from the field of mass communications that focused on television messages defined redundancy as "simultaneous presentation of the same or similar information through two or more channels" (Hanson, 1992, p. 7), that is, both auditory and visual. The assumption was that repetition in more than one channel reinforces messages already present in each so that the sum is greater than its parts. Useful redundancy is also addressed in relation to reading comprehension (Bensoussan, 1990). Prior knowledge of a topic is one form of redundancy, and Smith (1978) argues that one only comprehends text which has been previously encountered in the real world, and that written text, in order to be understood, must reflect information that is already present in the reader's mind.

A strong case for redundancy in curriculum design comes from the field of legal education. In an article describing a seminar that revisits the entire first year of law school education through a feminist lens, providing a "unifying and altering perspective" (p. 218), Bernstein (1996) states:

> Law school curricula in the United States are full of revisits...The educational benefits of such revisits...are indisputable...Common ground emerges when students hear the same concepts in different classrooms....

> Redundancy is integral to legal education, not least because it distinguishes what is central from what is marginal. (pp. 217-218)

From the field of psychology, Winstanley and Bjork (2002) discuss the effectiveness of repetition in terms of both spacing information and repeating key ideas

from various standpoints. Each of these strategies provides multiple opportunities to revisit the same content, thereby, encouraging various ways of encoding information and aiding retention.

From the field of social work education, the concept of useful redundancy has been long present. Towle (1954), drawing upon the work of Ralph Tyler, while warning against repetition that "deadens interest and engenders resistance" (p. 168), speaks eloquently about the value of repetition that progresses, or repetition with a difference. Towle's examples of useful repetition include (a) repetition of major ideas, principles, and methods in new situations; (b) repetition which provides the learner an "expectancy of success (p. 168)" or reassurance based upon past successes and upon finding old elements in the new; (c) repetition that involves different learning experiences focusing on the same outcome, thus giving the learner confidence in the methods being taught; and (d) repetition in which students are encouraged to find common and distinctive elements, thus assisting with transfer of learning and supporting the students' integration of learning.

A major difficulty in exploring the literature on redundancy, however, is that the concept is seldom addressed explicitly as "redundancy" or as "repetition." Rather, it is implied within discussions of various learning and teaching theories and strategies. Subsumption theory (Ausubel, Novak & Hanesian, 1978) addresses the need to integrate new material with previously presented material using comparisons and the cross-referencing of new and old material to enable differentiation and specificity. Elaboration theory (English & Reigeluth, 1996; Reigeluth & Stein, 1983) addresses the need for ongoing summary and synthesis to form a context for assimilation of new ideas, thus aiding retention and transfer. Closely related is the work of Bruner (1966) on spiral curriculum that describes various ways of connecting new material to old. Winstanley and Bjork (2002), discussing learning as an interpretive process, state that new information is stored by linking it to existing knowledge through associations and that recall is heavily cue dependent. In addition, they discuss the elaborative process which requires that information be thought of in different ways and practice in retrieval of previously presented information as aids to memory encoding and retention.

Implicit references to redundancy are also found in the social work literature. Aviles (2002) explored mastery learning, which involves multiple testings and feedback (repetition) to move students toward achievement. Both Sokolec (2001) and Walsh (1998) discuss the use of integrative assignments, designed to draw upon material from several courses, as a strategy for deepening learning. Haynes (1999), in an article on teaching professional social work values, suggests a framework that uses an "interconnected continuum of values dimensions that fosters the ongoing processes of reexamining and reanchoring student values within a professional social work context." (p. 44)

CSWE has addressed redundancy both explicitly and implicitly and its negative and positive uses. At the time of this writing, CSWE is in the process of implementing new Educational Policy (EP) and Accreditation Standards (AS) (collectively known as EPAS) (CSWE, 2001), with full implementation required by February 2004. Both EPAS and the outgoing Curriculum Policy Statement (CPS)

and Evaluation Standards for MSW Programs (EVS) address redundancy (CSWE, 1994). The outgoing standards address redundancy in EVS M5.8, stating "Duplication and redundancy of content mastered at the baccalaureate level must be avoided in master's programs." EPAS similarly permits course waivers, exemptions, advanced placement, and other allowances by stating "In those foundation curriculum areas where students demonstrate required knowledge and skills, the program describes how it ensures that students do no repeat that content." (AS 5.3) This avoids students retaking courses similar to those they have already taken. While this is important, the crux of the issue of redundancy as discussed in this paper is the avoidance of useless redundancy in the courses that students are required to take and the seeking of planful repetition.

EPAS (CSWE, 2001) addresses issues of redundancy in several ways, though the word redundancy is not used. EPAS addresses vertical integration in terms of (a) "curricula that build on a liberal arts perspective" (EP 1.2), (b) "baccalaureate and master's levels of educational preparation are differentiated according to …depth" (EP 2.0), and (c) "build an advanced curriculum from the foundation content" (EP 5, AS M2.0.1). These requirements ask for repetition in the form of vertical redundancy involving sequencing of material in which subsequent mentions of a concept or theory are dealt with at a deeper, more abstract, or more conceptual level. This allows for cumulative and continuous learning over time (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). EPAS addresses horizontal integration in terms of "baccalaureate and master's levels of educational preparation are differentiated according to…breadth, and specificity of knowledge and skills." (EP 2.0), and "integration" into the curriculum of content on values and ethics, diversity, populations-at-risk, and social and economic justice (EP 4.0, 4.1, 4.2). Designing curricula for horizontal integration means linking different topics and elements that students may experience simultaneously (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Both vertical and horizontal integration require overlap of content that allows repetition with progression or repetition in different contexts. EPAS requires consideration of different practice contexts (EP 2.0), thus it is appropriate to consider a theory or concept's application in different curricular areas, such as policy, micro practice, or macro practice.

In summary, though the literature offers only limited explicit references to redundancy, tending rather to include it as a concept within the discussion of some more general theory or approach, we believe that it is important enough a concept for social work education to merit special consideration. It is a concept that is recognizable to both faculty and students, regardless of their familiarity with teaching or learning theory. In addition, the structure of social work education, with its emphasis on connections between BSW and MSW curricula, between foundation- and advanced-year curricula, and among concurrently taught courses, brightlines the issue of redundancy.

Thus, well-designed curricula require some repetition, while avoiding useless and "deadening" redundancy. We believe that it is important for faculty who are involved in curriculum design as well as faculty who want a better understanding of teaching integration and connectedness to closely examine the concept of redundancy. Faculty need to examine the usefulness of redundancy in the

curriculum and to differentiate between useful and useless, "deadening" redundancy.

We assume that faculty have some sense of techniques to help ensure that using repetition has the desired effect on students—promoting and facilitating lateral connectedness, application across contexts, and vertical knowledge building. Yet, we know little about how students experience our efforts. Both Hanson (1992) and Bensoussan (1990) address the subjectivity of interpretation and individual differences in perceptions that people bring to the learning situation. Certainly, we may expect differences between student and faculty perceptions of redundancy as well as differences among students. The methodology used in this study makes a unique contribution as it accesses student perceptions of redundancy in the social work curriculum.

METHODS

This is an exploratory, two-year longitudinal study of redundancy among courses in the MSW program at a large state university. Students were recruited to provide their perceptions regarding redundancy during their two years in the program. This report is for the first year of the study.

Sample

During orientation for the 1999/2000 school year in August 1999 the authors made a presentation to the incoming class of full-time MSW students. The authors explained that the purpose of the study was to improve the curriculum and that participation would require keeping a log, turning it in periodically, and attending three meetings to discuss material from the logs.

Initially, 27 students agreed to participate, though only 17 turned in logs for the fall semester. Of these, five were African-American, 12 were European-American, and four were male and 13 female. Further attrition resulted in only 12 students' completing logs in the spring semester. Of these, two were African-American and 10 were European-American, and three were male and nine were female. These students resemble the student body at large, which is mostly European-American and female. As this was a convenience sample, it was not expected that it would be truly representative due to both the sample size and self-selection effect. Though fewer students participated than we had hoped, those who did were dedicated to the project and provided much useful data.

Procedures

The participants attended a one-hour orientation meeting soon after recruitment. At this time (a) the study was further described, (b) educational concepts that related to redundancy were explained, (c) consent forms signed, and (d) the journal forms and data collection process reviewed. Three additional meetings were held. To encourage attendance we scheduled all meetings for the lunch hour on class days, with lunch being provided. The meetings' discussions were recorded and transcribed. The first meeting was held at the end of September to discuss how the data collection process was proceeding up to that point. Twenty students attended this meeting.

Two further meetings were conducted, one near the end of the fall semester and another near the end of the spring semester. Participants were asked to turn in their logs early so that the authors could present material from the logs (e.g., redundancies that were identified) at the meetings for general discussion. This allowed students to elaborate upon the material, especially the helpfulness or lack of helpfulness of the redundancies. Students were paid $40 for each semester of participation.

Analysis

A content analysis of the students' journal entries was performed to categorize identified redundancies according to course, content, and perception of usefulness. A considerable qualitative focus was also maintained, as the students went beyond merely identifying instances of redundancy and commented on many aspects of the curriculum, both in their logs and in the group meetings.

Results

Collecting data at two time periods allowed students to report redundancy both within and between semesters.

Results from Fall 1999

Seventeen students attended the end-of-semester meeting and turned in completed logs. As part of their first semester, the students take four classroom courses and field placement. The courses are human behavior in the social environment I (HBSE I), which covers culture, community, and organizational theories; introductory courses in micro practice and macro practice; and policy.

Fall 1999 Content

The first stage of data analysis consisted of reading the journals and counting the number of times materials (e.g., readings, videos, and class activities) and content (e.g., ideas, information) were noted as having been covered in more than one course. There were 28 separate types of content redundancy noted in the journals and a total of 161 entries. While some content topics took considerable class time and were cited by more than half of the participants, others were minor topics in the class and were cited by only one person. For the sake of brevity, only the most commonly cited topics will be discussed. Table 1 lists the more common content topics cited, the classes the content was identified in, the number of students placing the content in a particular class, and the number of students who stated whether the redundancy was helpful.

According to participant logs, social work history was the most commonly identified content redundancy, appearing in all four classes (Table 1). It was gratifying to see that so many participants believed the redundancy was helpful. When horizontal redundancy works, it works as shown in this comment made by a student who identified social work history in both the policy and micro practice class: "Both classes showed historical significance for different areas, e.g., how settlement houses affected policies." This student had an experience in which similar content was made relevant to different curricular areas. Other students made comments indicating that this topic was important to stress in the different curriculum areas for the purpose of socializing into the profession, such as "helps to

Table 1: *Content Redundancies Identified in the Fall 1999 Semester*					
Content	**Classes cited in**	**Number of citings**	**Was the redundancy helpful?**		
			Yes	**No**	**Unsure**
Social work history	Micro Macro Policy HBSE I	6 7 8 3	6	3	
Feminist theory	Micro Policy HBSE I	8 1 8	5	1	2
Ecosystems theory	Micro Macro Policy HBSE I	7 3 1 8	5	1	2
Values and ethics	Micro Macro Policy HBSE I	5 6 4 1	3	2	2
The various U.S. cultures, cultural differences, and race	Micro Policy HBSE I	3 2 5	5	1	
Community structures and dynamics	Macro HBSE I	4 4	1	1	2

reinforce what social work is all about" and "This was very helpful to me coming from a psychology background." It also seems that students have different reactions to hearing content for the second time, with some appreciating it and others not. One student who thought the redundancy useful commented that it "helped reinforce the material," while another who thought it was not useful commented, "I have had social work history in every class."

Social work history was further discussed at the fall end-of-semester meeting. The oral comments made at the meeting were more negative than the written comments from the logs, with no one speaking positively about redundancy in this area. The first three comments in the meeting about history were as follows: "It was overdone," "It was dealt with the same way," and "It was just thrown out and then left." The moderator of the meeting asked specifically whether the topic of social work history was dealt with differently in the different classes and gave the example of how the policy course might focus on how social workers have had an impact on public policies. One participant said, "I think they tried to bring it out later, but it didn't work very well." Another participant said that two classes had very similar articles on social work history and that all classes had some type of reading on the subject. The reason for the difference in tone between the written comments in the logs and the comments made at the meeting is unclear, but the consensus at the meeting was that redundancy in this area was not helpful.

Eight participants cited the topic of feminist theory as being present in both the micro practice class and the HBSE I class (Table 1). Five students believed that this repetition was helpful and wrote comments such as: "wasn't clear the first

time," "difficult to understand, but repetition helped to clarify it," and "refresher." It seems that the difficulty of the topic and the ability of the instructor may have influenced whether the students appreciated the repetition. In the end-of-semester meeting, several students spoke to this while discussing feminist theory, saying, "Well, some of the instructors are better at teaching, too, so you may have heard it in one class and not fully grasped it, and then the same information is presented similarly but maybe in a little more in detail or something, and... its plainer." Another added that students like to hear and recognize information for the second time as "...it is a reaffirmation for myself that I did understand it..."

The college's curriculum committee had been intentional when placing content on feminist theory in both courses. The curriculum was constructed so that feminist theory would be explained in the HBSE I course, and the micro practice course would focus on implications of feminist theory for the practice relationship and treatment. Participants in the end-of-semester meeting disagreed as to whether this separation worked as planned. One participant said, "In my HBSE course, it was just one of the theories. It was kind of a quick overview, and then in micro, it was more practice, how to put it into practice. I didn't see it as a redundancy." However, another participant said, "It was never reviewed that way in micro."

A further issue is temporal coordination between courses. It would be best if the components of the theory were discussed in HBSE I before the implications and applications of the theory were discussed in micro practice. As individual instructors are in charge of their own course calendars, the sequencing of material may not occur this way. One participant said that feminist theory was covered in the micro practice class before it was covered in the HBSE I class.

Ecosystem is the organizing theory that undergirds the curriculum at the college. It would be disappointing if it did not appear in each class, though it would be expected that different use of the theory would be made, depending on the system level or curriculum area. Indeed, the logs showed a high level of redundancy of ecosystems content (Table 1). At the end-of-semester meeting the participants were able to understand why this repetition was important, and one participant recognized that different applications were made in the different courses, saying, "One applies it to... behavior in humans, one applies is to institutions and organizations and how they operate, and then one, I think, in practice..." Others were not as sure whether such good use was made of the theory in their various courses, but this seemed to be a matter of their having unclear memories of how it was dealt with in each course rather than having any clear impression that the repetition was not handled well. Thus, the discussion around ecosystems indicated that students could identify and understand the importance of repeating material in different ways across courses.

The topic of values and ethics is also one that should appear across the curriculum and, in fact, the participants did identify it in every course (Table 1). The only written comment on this topic noted from the logs was that the micro and macro practice courses discussed different ethical responsibilities. In the end-of-the semester meeting, it was stated that the topic was dealt with in policy and

macro practice and it was also covered in field placement and orientation. The students felt that this was an important topic and valued the times it was applied to particular material in the micro practice and policy courses. The students did not value it when the facts of social work values and ethics were all that was presented, as in HBSE and orientation.

Redundancies of information on U.S. cultures, cultural differences, and race were largely seen as helpful (Table 1). One person made the log entry "Micro focused more on counseling, HBSE focused on behaviors and values in general." Another noted that "HBSE focused on differences, and micro practice on the 'inclusive cultural model of practice.'" It thus seems that the topic was covered appropriately, yet differently, in each class. The one student who believed that redundancy was not helpful commented, "should be in HBSE only," offering no explanation. At the end-of-semester meeting several students commented that they believed this redundancy was often not helpful and cited cultural preferences for the degree of eye contact and physical proximity as examples that were presented identically in both HBSE I and micro practice. Another student thought that the level of discussion was too shallow and that the information was often presented as a generalization about a culture. The background of the students was a factor for how this topic was viewed, as shown by the following excerpt from the transcript.

Student One: I don't think it's that difficult a concept to grasp.

Student Two: It's not if you've already done a lot of stuff…I mean, you're talking to someone who was a music major.

Student Three: I was in hotel administration.

Redundancies regarding information on community structures and dynamics were identified by four participants in the macro practice and HBSE I classes (Table 1). Only one participant judged the redundancy as helpful, and this was not because a different use or application was made for the material but rather because it was "more detailed second time, reinforced." This sentence fragment seems to indicate that if the material had been presented in a more complete fashion the first time, it may not have been seen as helpful the second time.

Fall 1999 Materials

It is frustrating and embarrassing to a teacher when introducing a video to have one or more students brightly say, "Oh, we saw that last semester in Smith's class." These participants identified many such instances of identical materials, usually videos, being used in different courses. The college maintains a list of videos that are reserved for particular courses. In no case have videos been reserved for two courses with the intent of making different use of them. Six participants identified five videos as being used in two different courses. In three instances, this was cited as being helpful, in one instance it was not, and in one instance the participant was unsure. There was one case of missing data. In addition to the videos, there were two in-class exercises and two similar articles identified in two different courses. The five students who identified these judged them as being helpful on two occasions and not helpful on three.

Overall, though findings were mixed, there was limited support for redundancy of materials and students perceived that when materials were repeated, there was little attempt to highlight different uses or learning anticipated from the repetition.

Results from Spring 2000

During the second semester of the foundation year students again take field and four classroom courses—practice with groups, research I (research methods), research II (single subject design [SSD] and descriptive statistics), and human behavior in the social environment (HBSE II), which covers theories of family and individual development. The types of redundancy that may emerge during this semester include redundancies between semesters and those among current courses.

Spring 2000 Content

There were 33 separate content areas of redundancy noted in participant logs and a total of 129 entries. There were slightly more types of redundancy noted than in the fall semester (5) but fewer actual entries (32). Since the course work is different and there were fewer respondents (reduced from 17 to 12), any direct comparison of fall-semester and spring-semester findings is not possible. Table 2 shows the content areas that were most often noted in the spring semester.

The degree of overlap between the two research courses was not surprising. Level of measurement is a basic research concept relevant to both research methods and statistics. Whether the students believed the redundancy was helpful depended in part on how it was presented each time (as was seen in the fall semester). For example, a student who said that the redundancy was not helpful commented in the log, "In both classes it was explained and defined in the same way." A student who said that the redundancy was helpful commented that the second time, "There was more information and there were relevant examples that helped me understand the terms." The same was true for the threats to internal validity item. A student who thought the topic was helpful when repeated in Research I commented, "We went over it so quickly in Research II." A student who did not think the redundancy was helpful commented, "It just repeated the same

Table 2: *Content Redundancies Identified in the Spring 2000 Semester*					
Content	**Classes cited in**	**Number of citings**	**Was the redundancy helpful?**		
			Yes	**No**	**Unsure**
Level of measurement	Research I Research II	6 6	4	2	
Reliability, validity	Research I Research II	5 5	3	1	1
Threats to internal validity	Research I Research II	5 5	2	3	
Ecosystems theory	HBSE I HBSE II Groups "Fall"	6 6 3 2	5	3	

threats to research studies like history, maturation, etc." For the reliability/validity item the only comments were from students who thought the redundancy was helpful.

Ecosystems was a topic taught in both the fall and spring semesters. Whether or not students perceived redundancy around this topic as helpful related to how the material was presented. A student who believed the redundancy was helpful commented that the repetition demonstrated a "new way of using theory in group setting" in the group class. Another stated that the repetition "expanded upon previous base." Ideally, vertical redundancy would demonstrate increased depth of analysis and application of ecosystems theory. Students recognized and appreciated when this occurred. This was not always the case, however, and two students who thought this redundancy was not helpful commented, "Recap, but was too long" and "Re-presented in a confusing way." It seems the ability of the instructor plays a crucial role in whether redundancy is helpful, regardless of whether it is planned redundancy or not. At the spring end-of-semester group meeting a student noted that in two of the spring classes the professor asked whether everyone was clear on ecosystems theory from the fall semester before applying the theory in class. Time was thus saved by the professor allowing the students to ask clarifying questions they might have had rather than re-presenting the entire theory.

Spring 2000 Materials

Four videos were identified as having been shown in the spring semester of HBSE II and in the previous semester of HBSE I. The six students who reported this were unanimous in believing that this redundancy was not helpful. A group activity that had been done in micro practice during the fall semester was repeated in the groups course in the spring semester. The student who identified this commented, "Enjoyed activity, but 1st time was enough." An article that was used in both HBSE I and HBSE II was also identified. This student did not think the repetition was helpful.

Process Evaluation

A surprising aspect of this study was the high attrition rate. The researchers believed that the food and monetary compensation would be adequate to keep the students involved considering the minimal amount of time and effort requested from them. While we may have correctly estimated the relative value of the compensation to the time and effort requested, we may have underestimated the competing demands for time and effort made upon the students by school, family, and employment. One student who did not participate in the spring semester said he was overwhelmed by planning his wedding, to which 600 guests were invited.

The quality and quantity of comments made by the students varied considerably. Some students were very thorough in their recording and highly verbal during discussions, while others made minimal written and oral contributions. Some were highly organized and analytical in their comments, while others made more concrete comments. One had difficulty grasping the full definition of redundancy, persisting in thinking that if he benefited from or enjoyed the repetition, it was

not redundancy. Other students provided very insightful comments aimed at the overall organization of the curriculum.

Just as faculty may advocate for the inclusion of particular content of interest to them, students also bring their personal agendas to the educational process. At the spring end-of-semester meeting, while discussing the balance of content among gays, lesbians, and minorities compared to some other groups, such as the disabled and the elderly, some students reacted on a personal and very emotional level. As several students persisted in their contention that there was too much content on gays and lesbians, the conversation grew more animated with a louder tone and fewer pauses, indicating a higher emotional content. A student who several times stated that there was too little content on the elderly mentioned that after graduation she planned to work with the elderly.

DISCUSSION

Usefulness of the Methods

This methodology adds a valuable new source of information to the curriculum-building process. Students have not been used previously to inform the curriculum about redundancy. They identified teaching methods and areas in the curriculum that needed more attention, planning, and conceptualization. These methods ranged from being more careful not to repeat videos to the planned application of similar theories to different content areas.

What Participants Told Us

As noted by Hanson (1992) and Bensoussan (1990), participants vary in their perceptions of redundancy. Discussions during group meetings showed that students brought to the educational experience different attitudes toward content (e.g., views on feminism), different educational backgrounds and preparedness (e.g., BSW, other social sciences, non-related), and different levels of attention and analytical abilities. These differences contributed to variation in awareness of redundancies as well as to lack of unanimity regarding its helpfulness or unhelpfulness.

In addition, student perceptions of redundancy were influenced by what instructors brought to the classes, regardless of the formal requirements of the curriculum. In accordance with the findings of Shavelson (1986), students noted that in different sections with different professors they can get very different content, depending upon the professor's interests and personal life experiences. They described some professors as having "soap boxes" and talking about their interests regardless of the course. Thus, students generally thought that choosing different professors would reduce redundancy. An exception was noted in relation to the two concurrently taught research courses in which having one instructor contributed to greater discretion of content.

Students related the usefulness of redundancy to the skill of the instructors. For instance, if an instructor presented a concept ineffectively, a repetition of that content in another course was seen as helpful redundancy. Likewise, students noted that some instructors were better than others at deepening and expanding material.

Students not only were aware of redundancies but also for the most part could differentiate between helpful and unhelpful redundancy. Though individual students had different perceptions based on their own characteristics and experiences or on sections/professors, they generally agreed on certain factors that contributed to helpfulness or unhelpfulness.

Generally, students found redundancy not useful when it was merely repetition, dealing with the same material in the same way, and they were able to recognize "repetition with a difference" (Towle, 1954). They did, however, note that sometimes simple repetition can be reinforcing and thus feel good, as also noted by Towle (1954). Students could discern different levels of coverage of material—e.g., readings without discussion, description of theory, depth of discussion, or application. Students were generous in allowing that faculty might have attempted to handle repeated concepts differently, though they might have missed the mark.

Other comments and observations from students included that:

- sequencing of some material was off, resulting in a lack of the intended progression (e.g., theory to application);
- there was more redundancy at the beginning of courses than later, when each course took a more distinct form; and
- the shorter the time between the initial presentation of content and the repetition, the less helpful, with greater time lapses adding to the perception of helpfulness.

Students perceived some differences between first and second semesters. They reported that teaching styles changed, as the first semester focused on giving information through lectures, while the second semester used more application and discussion, thus enhancing the usefulness of redundancies. In addition, some students reported that their attitudes had changed by second semester, when they were more able to accept the positive uses of redundancy.

In terms of redundancy in materials, overall, students reported less redundancy than we had anticipated and generally saw it as not helpful. Students reported that when materials were repeated, instructors made little attempt to highlight different uses or different learning anticipated from the repetition.

Findings as Related to the College's Curriculum

The college's 1999 Self-Study for Reaffirmation of Accreditation identified several major themes that were infused throughout the curriculum. These included (a) social work values and ethics as the base for practice; (b) an ecosystems perspective to provide conceptual and theoretical integration; (c) a commitment to social and economic justice, with a focus on the needs of the poor, oppressed, and populations at risk; and (d) awareness of and appreciation for diversity. One of the benefits of redundancy is reinforcing themes, helping students "distinguish what is central from what is marginal." (Bernstein, 1996, p. 218)

The curriculum aims to support horizontal and vertical integration. Student comments provided some support for horizontal integration (e.g., repeating material during the first semester in different contexts) and some for vertical integration

(e.g., focusing on depth of understanding or application during the second semester). Further examination of vertical integration particularly will occur during the second year of this study.

Findings as Related to CSWE Requirements

Findings suggest that students experience the college's curriculum in a manner consistent with CSWE requirements. Whether or not they experience horizontal and vertical coherence, students at least recognized and valued that repetition of content and themes both horizontally and vertically was reinforcing and knowledge-building.

The EPAS (CSWE, 2001) requires that "Frameworks and perspectives for concentration include…practice contexts" and students recognized redundancy of theories applied to different settings, groups, and problem areas and saw it as helpful. They commented particularly on the importance of infusion of values and ethics throughout the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

What has been described is a new process of gathering student feedback on the curriculum. This first year of the study has suggested that students are aware of redundancies in the curriculum and, though their perceptions vary, can differentiate between helpful and unhelpful redundancies and can state reasons for each. It is likely that any educator reading these results will be spurred to think about redundancy in his or her own program in new and different ways. We offer as an aid Table 3, which summarizes the types of redundancy discussed explicitly or implicitly in the literature or by students and the benefits suggested.

Faculty may want to consciously emphasize these positive uses of redundancy in curriculum design and implementation. They may want to check to ensure that their uses of redundancy clearly are those which can produce a range of learning benefits for students and ensure that teaching does not lapse into "boring repetition."

The authors present this study as a process other schools may choose to replicate or adapt in their own ongoing curriculum planning, as it would constitute a new feedback loop, systematically entering student perceptions into the curriculum revision process. Though the ultimate responsibility for the curriculum design rests with faculty, understanding how students experience the curriculum is vital information.

We have only begun the empirical study of redundancy in the social work curriculum. How, where, and when to place purposeful redundancies into the curriculum remains based largely upon opinion and theory, and research into the effect of redundancy upon educational outcomes is lacking. Future challenges involve becoming better informed and more intentional in our use of redundancy and to empirically assess the relationship between educational outcomes and redundancy. To make the process of including purposeful redundancy overt and empirically guided will both streamline the curriculum and make it more effective.

Table 3: *Types of and Benefits from Redundancy*

Types	Benefits
Present material through several channels	Synergistic reinforcement
Connect old material to new	Can comprehend only in relation to what already know
Repetition with progression	Reinforce and build
Vertical integration, building over time on previous material	Deepening, cumulative, progressive understanding
Present same concept in different classes and from different perspectives	Distinguish what is central from what is marginal
Presenting material from different standpoints	Opportunity for various ways of encoding information
Horizontal integration, linking concepts that are experienced at the same time in different courses	Aids transfer of learning, applying material across contexts and in new situations
Spacing presentation of material, return to same material later	Opportunity for various ways of encoding information, aids retention
Presenting old material in new situation	Aids with transfer
Finding new elements in old material	Build confidence, feelings of success
Using different methods to arrive at same outcomes	Build confidence
Exploring common and distinct elements	Aids transfer of learning, integration, and discrimination
Interpreting new material in relation to old, with comparisons and cross-references	Aids with differentiation, specificity, while reinforcing
Using periodic summaries and syntheses text for new ideas	Aids with transfer and retention as con-
Elaborating, interpreting in different ways	Builds multiple cues which aid with recall
Practicing retrieval of information	Supports memory encoding and transfer
Offering multiple opportunities for testing and feedback in relation to same material	Supports mastery
Making integrative assignments that use material from several courses or content areas	Deepens learning
Conducting ongoing reexamination of concepts	Fuller understanding and integration
Repeating material previously inadequately presented	Opportunity to learn what was missed on the initial presentation

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