

Social Work and the Evolution of Consciousness

Priscilla R. Smith, Ph.D. and Nikki W. Wingerson, Ph.D.

The University of Akron  
School of Social Work  
Akron, Ohio 44303-8001  
[psmith@uakron.edu](mailto:psmith@uakron.edu)  
[nikki1@uakron.edu](mailto:nikki1@uakron.edu).

Presented at the First North American Conference on Spirituality and Social Work  
May 2006

## Social Work and the Evolution of Consciousness

### Abstract

Human consciousness has been evolving since human inception. At this point in time, this evolution is undergoing a paradigm shift from a third dimensional/physical perspective. Some see this shift to the new consciousness as a coming together of quantum physics and spirituality which acknowledges the interconnectedness of everything. This perspective is represented in the film, "What the Bleep Do We Know." Various writers such as Eckhart Tolle, David Hawkins, and Don Miguel Ruiz, have presented concepts to describe the new consciousness.

This paper begins to explore the role of social work in the current stage of the evolution of human consciousness. As a starting point, the authors illustrate concepts of the writers mentioned above by sharing their personal experiences which reflect changes in perspective, identity, attitude, emotional responses, and behaviors as a result of their own evolution of consciousness. These concepts also are explored in relationship to existing social work concepts. We then discuss application to the classroom and provide specifics in journal form of one of the author's classroom experiences. We conclude with some suggestions which support this shift of consciousness in our clients and students for those readers wishing to infuse their curriculums, rather than create a separate course.

### **Social Work and the Evolution of Consciousness**

What is the role of social work in the evolution of consciousness? Social work's purpose is to improve the quality of human life. A higher, more evolved consciousness brings with it a higher quality of life as the state of now or presence is one of love, joy, and peace. Thus social work's purpose is to help evolve consciousness. The role social work plays in the evolution of consciousness is located in traditional social work roles. We will help facilitate this evolution through all the various activities we engage in as social workers. However, in order to be able to do this, our consciousness as practitioners and teachers first must be evolved or enlightened. So in order to prepare social work for its role, we must become conscious.

Consciousness is awareness of the self – who we think we are. It is evolving from being viewed as a mind activity. We are becoming aware that we are more than our mind, our physical body, our emotions, our experiences, and our life situation. We are the field of these experiences; this awareness is the new consciousness. It is what David Hawkins in The Eye of the I calls the shift from the self with a small s to the self with a big S. Eckhart Tolle speaks of moving from an egoic state to the experience of Being or Presence or Awareness or Stillness or Spaciousness in The Power of Now. Don Miguel Ruiz talks of the realization of the space between the stars in The Four Agreements. The work of these writers is grounded in mythology and ancient wisdom, and incorporates traditional religious texts.

## **Our Evolutions**

The writers previously mentioned begin with their transformational experiences. And so do we here, at least those which really committed us to our journeys. We will share with you aspects of our journey to enlightenment and how we have been bringing this to our students and colleagues.

Nikki's story:

Within the 9 months or so after my husband's death, I was struggling with anger on behalf of him, anger that he had to die. His having to face death caused me to have great sorrow and anger for him. In some ways this was more difficult for me than my own loss of him. Somehow this got focused on my wanting to "understand." Now looking back on what I wanted to understand, I'm not sure I really know, but I was railing against reality. And in a moment of darkness, I realized in an ah-ha moment, that I would never understand, and with that acceptance I was at peace. With that peace, I wanted to move beyond the rational and agnostic to the mystical. At another moment during the same time period, I experienced the presence of my husband (after he had died) through my senses and knew without question that he was with me in spirit, and I was ready to accept that without doubt. That just told me I was on the road, and whether it was real or imagined it didn't matter.

Following this epiphany came a gradual awareness that the barrier to experiencing the light in others rests in our fears. I was able to witness my dying daughter as the translucent light of spirit. This has forever sustained me in moving forward without her form in this world of form.

Priscilla's story:

In August 2004, I was in a car accident where my car was hit and totaled. While I was spinning at 65 miles per hour, I thought, "I wonder if I'm going to live or die." I was not anxious or feeling anything unpleasant, but was very alert. Time did not seem to slow down, but rather not exist. A voice in my head replied to my wondering, "Either way, you are safe." I knew my task was to "follow the car" rather than steer it. I was not controlling it, but had my part to do. I also knew I was not to brake. I felt like a puppet in terms of my body and persona. Later I came to know it was the real me who was making the decisions and in control – the Consciousness. I became aware when it was time to brake. Over the next few weeks, what the voice had said stayed with me. But more than that, I was released of fears, and was aware for the first time that it is possible to feel joy and peace at the same time. I awoke each day excited and joyful; not about anything at all. When I heard music on the radio, I would dance uninhibited and with joy. Activities flowed from one into the other. This began to wane and in a few months, I wanted to find out how to return to that state and always live there.

My mother died in June 2005. It was one of the most beautiful experiences I have ever had. My mother had been in a nursing home for a couple of months, fell and broke her clavicle, and was in the hospital for a week before going to the nursing home of her choice where she was in the skilled nursing unit. My brother had been attending to all her affairs as her POA, as they both lived in the same city in Indiana. When he pulled out of her affairs, I came in. After she had been there for about a month and a half, I had come for the second time to visit her and to pack up her house as it had sold. She was planning on moving into independent living. But that weekend, I could see that was not

going to happen. She was sleeping more and more and getting weaker and weaker. I saw her move from ambivalence about living to acceptance of death. By Monday morning she had accepted it and became pure love. When she entered that state, I went there with her. Again, I knew my role and followed the tasks I was to do over the next 4 days until she died. Although my mom had not entertained any after-death beliefs, she was moving there. I was able to cry and she comforted me. I told her on her last day what was coming, but said she probably already knew that. She told me she loved me her last morning. She and I had had a somewhat difficult relationship, but none of that mattered any longer. It all melted away. This was the most intense love experience I had ever experienced. I felt her presence every morning after she died for about a month, then missing her, learned that I could initiate contact with her. She is always there when I want contact. We have a beautiful relationship now.

How amazing and exciting it was for us to discover after working together 10 years with occasional socializing that we were on similar evolutionary journeys towards consciousness. After finding out our everyday experiences were taking on a different reality, we then discovered that we had both been reading recent writings in the area of metaphysics and epistemology. We then had a shared desire to bring this awareness and related joy to social work in the forms of teaching, writing, and presenting,

### **Linkages to Social Work Concepts and Principles**

Social work is concerned with resolving problems. In the new consciousness, “Now, the present moment [is] where problems do not exist.” (Tolle, 1999, inside front jacket). Now is all there is. The past and future are mental constructs. We only live in the now. It is in now that one finds Peace, Love, and Joy. They cannot be experienced

outside of the now. “If you abide in this state of acceptance, you create no more negativity, no more suffering, no more unhappiness. You then live in a state of non-resistance, a state of grace and lightness, free of struggle” (Tolle, 1999, p.184).

Similarly, Hawkins writes of those “who had traveled many miles to ask questions suddenly knew in the presence of [an energy field] the answers which came about through an inner understanding that made the original question irrelevant. This occurred because the Presence recontextualized the illusion of a ‘problem’ and thus caused it to disappear” (2001, p.7). Social work practitioners can use this new consciousness perspective to help center themselves and their clients in the present with the peace that it provides.

Several social work principles share the same meaning as some concepts from the new consciousness literature. For example, the social work value of self-determination is one of these. From a new consciousness perspective, one is always free to come from an egoic self or Consciousness. As Hawkins states, “The nature of creation, which is beyond time, space, and causality, is self-revealing and presents itself to the consciousness of Awareness as a gift of the Presence” (2001, p. 9).

Respect for the uniqueness of each individual implies that no two humans are alike, yet we all share something in common, our humanity. The new consciousness says we are all the same consciousness, but unique manifestations of that consciousness.

In social work we start where the client is. We accept the client where they are. The parallel in the client experience is that they know and accept themselves. Awareness and acceptance are closely related. Acceptance is contingent on awareness. This is not an intellectual experience. Inner knowing is a phenomenon akin to the “ah-ha”

experience. In the new consciousness, one focuses on the now with awareness and acceptance of whatever feelings and sensations one is experiencing. For example, Hawkins describes in the first paragraph of his book, The Eye of the I, that out of complete desperation, he had cried out for help from a place deep within. This then took him into a transcendental state. “The mind and all sense of a personal self disappeared. In a stunning moment, it had been replaced by an infinite, all encompassing awareness which was radiant, complete, total, silent and still as the promised essence of All That Is” (Hawkins, 2001, p. 3). Hawkins transcended after hitting bottom. How we transcend differs from culture to culture and their varying religions. While this pathway is common in the Western world as more of a Judeo-Christian phenomena, it is not common with cultures where people are imbued with an everyday reality of Oneness.

We do not need to change the activities we are engaged in as social workers and educators. What is different is doing them with consciousness. It doesn't matter so much what you do as much as doing it from consciousness. Teaching about transformation and consciousness is as important in developing practitioners as teaching about strengths and diversity.

### **Application to the Classroom**

Our first foray into this enterprise was through the teaching experiences of one of the authors, as only one of us was teaching courses that semester. While our undergraduate program had offered an elective course in spirituality several years ago, taught by a former colleague, our focus was 1) on conscious evolution which is considered to be in the realm of spirituality and 2) infusing this material throughout the curriculum rather than creating a separate course. So, for the remainder of this paper, we



describe these classroom experiences with specifics in journal form. We conclude with some suggestions for those wishing to infuse their curriculums, rather than create a separate course. Much of this is applicable to those interested in a broader incorporation of spirituality in the curriculum.

It was with this intention of infusion that the author approached incorporating material into her three classes: Introduction to Social Welfare, Human Behavior and the Social Environment – Large Systems, and Social Work Practice with Families. Initially the author didn't know how much material would be infused throughout her courses, but it ended up being fairly limited. She set the stage of possibilities with an exercise, described later in this paper, early in the semester. There were two discussions following the exercise in one class and one discussion in each of the other two classes. A second teaching approach was to introduce a quotation almost every week which related to evolution of consciousness concepts from the literature. Thirdly, about once a week she passed out handouts for students to read on their own. These were introduced as not directly related to the course content, but to social work as a whole. Topics of some of these handouts were "Finding the Gift in Bad Days," "The Root of Joy," "How to Be Compassionate with Yourself," "Permission to Feel," "Feeding Your Spirit," "You are Who You Are, Not What You Do," "Signs of Positive and Negative Energy," and "Laugh Three Times and Call Me in the Morning." Finally, openings for integration and discussion of content via classroom comments and text material were sought and utilized in each course.

Journaling of one of the author's teaching experiences, in a quasi-form of process recording/qualitative field notes, is provided here for the reader's experiential

understanding. The notes demonstrate both the students' process and the teacher's growth. These journaled notes were shared with the co-author.

### **The Journal**

#### Weeks 1 & 2

In all three of my classes, I gave them the following existential exercise within the first two weeks of class. I introduced it by talking about how meaning of life issues arise with our clients which relates to spiritual questions, how social work now includes this area in assessment and working with all aspects of a person (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual), and how we need to be aware of what we bring personally in this area. I also talked about how social workers don't go into social work for the money, so there is some type of "meaning in life" calling.

#### 5 Existential Questions:

1. What year were you born in?
2. What year do you think you will pass?
3. What do you feel is your purpose for being on earth?
- 4a. What is your profession/job – what do you do most of the day?
- 4b. What is the relationship between what you do most of the day and your purpose for being on earth?
- 5a. When you physically pass, do you feel that is the end of your life or do feel there is more?
- 5b. If you feel life extends, what do you take from this state of existence to the next one?

They were to write down the questions, but not turn in their answers. I gave it to them to take home, not do in class. I did not ask for their answers, but the following class, asked for comments about the exercise. I got responses like, “Profound stuff,” “Makes you think.”

Concerning the exercise, one student, in the Introduction to Social Welfare class said she spoke with a Sunday school teacher at her church about it, as she felt they were very personal questions, and in particular, she felt question #2 was something disturbing to think about. I spoke about how in social work classes we do ask you to examine personal parts of yourself and I gave examples from the Ethics class paper on identifying your values and Social Work Practice with Families of assessing your own family. I explained this was not therapy, but preparing yourself professionally as to examine what “baggage” you bring with you. I then spoke more directly to the relevance of examining your feelings about death (working with hospice, or AIDS patients, etc.). Two students who had taken a course on death and dying spoke of things they had to do in their class such as writing their own obituaries. The same student who spoke with the Sunday school teacher wanted to know if spiritual concerns were ethically okay to discuss with our clients or was this out of our territory. This was another excellent segway into the legitimacy and even necessity of such discussions, how to discuss without imposing our values, and when to refer.

In two of the classes regarding the same exercise, a student in each wanted to know the significance of #2. I spoke of how none of us know when we will pass, even people who have been given so long to live. I gave my mom as an example. I explained how this was tied to #3 and #4b. (Re: purpose in life, if not now, when)? One student

interpreted #2 with a somewhat fearful perspective that we never know how much time we have left, so get going today. That is when I spoke of not needing to come from a fear place to live your life's purpose now.

We then had quite an interesting discussion about the usefulness/uselessness of fear as a motivator. As no one disagreed that fear is an effective motivator, this led to a discussion of outcome vs. process, and tied into the text material on ecosystems perspective which focuses on process rather than outcome. I was able to share my personal experience of how the absence of fear was most useful in my car accident, along with the absence of thought, but with acute consciousness. Another student spoke of how they had discussed this in their crisis intervention class, how fear drops, time slows down, and when you feel least in control, the most control is operating. (Of course this relates to who we really are, but I felt this was too far out there to introduce in a big way. However, I did speak of one perspective which is that we are spiritual beings having a human experience, so I'm gently introducing this idea where it fits).

This also led to a discussion of the relativity of time and space as per Einstein, and the new physics on this topic as in "What the Bleep Do We Know!?" One student had seen this film. So this led to the interrelatedness of everything, which again tied into the day's course material on systems theory. The text stated with regards to this theory, that everything is connected.

(At this point, I have only done this in two of my three classes, as the one that meets once a week I will do this coming Saturday). Both classes were extremely interested in the discussions which lasted about 20 minutes each. I was also able to tie in concepts to the class material for the first lectures. For example, in HBSE II, in the first

chapter on theories/perspectives, the text states with regards to systems theory: “It assumes an underlying order to everything in the world.” I pointed out that that is quite a profound/remarkable statement. This again, was a good take off point for discussion of what that order is about (nature, God, Universe) and how systems theory is the most widely used theory in social work. So as they naturally arise in the course material, I’m introducing an integration of looking at spiritual/meaning/consciousness issues as part of practice.

On Wednesday and Saturday of Week 2, I put the following quote on the board: “How much of your life do you spend looking forward to being somewhere else?” -- Matthew Flickstein, Journey to the Center. I made a few brief comments about it. (A sampling of the quotes used during the rest of the semester were: “Death ends a life, but not a relationship.” –Jack Lemmon; “Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy.” –Anne Frank; “Every snowflake falls in its appropriate place” –Zen Buddhist saying. A complete list of the quotations and how they were used can be found in the appendix at the end of this article).

1/30 (Monday of Week 3)

This is getting interesting and interestinger --- and a lot more fun. I’m aware of feeling more connected to the students than ever before, after the HBSE class tonight, on a more genuine level. Barriers from roles and role expectations seem less dense. Tonight, I put the following quote on the board: “The realm of reality is as vast as cosmic space; it is the knowing mind of sentient beings that is small.” --Pao-chih-- I drew attention to the concept of mind knowing and raised the possibility of other ways of knowing. Then one male student, who I had wondered about what his expressions had

meant spoke. I had thought when he had a slight smile, could be characterized as a smirk, or sort of a “I-know-more-than-you” look, that he was finding some of what I was saying as quite off-the-wall. However, his question was, “You seem to have done a lot of thinking about this at this point in your life. What are some of your thoughts about this?” I spoke a little bit about intuitive knowing, or thinking of someone and then they call shortly after, and one or two more examples of non-thinking knowing. I saw a couple of nods, and asked if anyone had had any experiences like that. Three people spoke. One spoke of how she had a close friend who had died this summer and how at the casket, she said some words to the mother and sister that she didn’t know where they came from. Someone later said to her that she said just the right things and asked her how she knew just what to say. Another student spoke of going into her apartment and having the sense of someone else being there. So she left and called her father, then the police on his advice. It turns out that her home had been broken into and that the burglars were there when she had been. There was no “third dimensional” information, just an uncomfortable sense she had had. A third student spoke of a car wreck she had been in. She said she must have passed out, but at some point an African American male came over to her and asked her how she was. She said she was fine (and it did turn out that she was). Later, when she shared this with others at the scene, they said no one who looked like that had been there. During the class, I referred back to these three examples in talking about this kind of knowing that wasn’t third dimensional mind-knowledge and a couple of other concepts. I feel this is just working out so well.

However, I have been challenged to grow too. At one point the male student asked me if I were a fatalist. I said it depended on who “I” was and went on to explain that I didn’t see the “little me” in control, but the Oneness who is my true identity is running the show. I talked about the relationship between suffering and the potential for growth and things happening for a reason (in terms of soul development rather than human experience). I used the example of child abuse as many wonder how any positive can be seen in that phenomena. Then I was guided to share about myself and how when I realized this had happened to me, and I had just recently come to believe in some sort of Higher Power, I asked how this could happen as I thought I was being protected. I told them of the voice which said, “You said you wanted to learn about love,” my reply which was, “But wasn’t there a less painful way to learn this?” and the answer, “You said you *really* wanted to learn about love.” I talked about the level of suffering corresponding to the depth of the capacity to love and how forgiveness was the deepest form of love. I quickly added that we should never force forgiveness on ourselves or others, that it just happens. I talked about how 99.9% of those who abuse were abused themselves and are doing what they are taught. I stated that this didn’t happen overnight with me, and that I had art therapy, etc.

The same male student then, appearing a bit agitated/annoyed, had about five comments to share (all connected together) which began with saying he had been through a lot that [sic] I had. He referred to the cognitive-behavioral approach and that all we have is the now, and included the assumption that I had had regressive therapy to uncover my memories, and going back into the past. He said we have done an injustice in the social service field with everyone being seen as victims and not blaming anyone and

holding them responsible. He said that I was all over the place with ideas and what I said sounded like mental masturbation (something about delving into the past). I observed myself not taking this personally, but really listening to him. Note: this reflects Ruiz's second agreement: "Don't take anything personally. Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering" (Ruiz, 1997, inside front jacket). I responded saying that he had said quite a few things there and that he too had obviously done a lot of thinking about these things. I told him I agreed that all we have is the now, and that part of that now is feelings we experience which if we allow ourselves to feel, can be a way to access the now, according to Tolle. (Tolle had come up previously as I had mentioned him and a student asked if I had read his book. She said she had read it a while back and felt it was time to reread him. She said it had made a big difference in her son's problem with anxiety). I commented that he assumed I had had regressive therapy, but I hadn't. And I also said that not blaming was very different than holding people accountable, which I felt they should be. I think I had one or two other short comments. This was very near the end of class.

The student with the comments at the end came up and sort of apologized or tried to explain his comment about mental masturbation, but went on to say that he thinks I don't have focus, that I'm talking about all these different theories and ideas. I replied that I see them as all interconnected, but I may not be doing the best job of talking about that. He said that of course some of these students will never get the more abstract philosophical ideas. I talked with him a bit about the evolution of consciousness. He



then asked me to complete a reference form for him to be accepted into the BSW program.

Of course the most interesting and important part about this is my reactions. I thought about him after class and initially felt a bit defensive and considered things to say to him or the class next time, but then, as I walked to the car, I just asked the Consciousness what was going on. It said that I was doing great! It said that this student had been scared. I asked, "Of what?" and It said, "Of you." I was surprised, but it went on to say that it was about his ego. He needed to be more right than the teacher. This made sense with the facial expressions I had noticed in the classes thus far. (He is one of three students that I have in two classes). I then felt compassion for him and allowed myself to see his light (Namaste or The Good in Me Sees the Good in You). I went over a few more possibilities of things to say to the class on the order of, "If there is anything not making sense to you or you want clarification, let me know." But then I realized this was not necessary. I'm not getting these signals from others, and as I said earlier, I feel much more connected than ever. Plus with hearing that with this student it is about ego (which is of course not personal, as the ego is the human condition ego), then it does not call for a response. I also realized the next morning that much of his response had to do with his personal issues of suffering from abuse. He has not allowed his feelings to be experienced and is in this other way coming from his ego. I believe Spirit knew this and guided me through my responses. There was much to address but I knew to limit my response. For example, I agree with what he said about victims, but he was coming from an emotional place when he said it and added on the bit about the error in not blaming and not holding others responsible. We are in some very meaningful territory, but I feel

guided and safe. I sense that the students feel safe, but also very interested as the whole class stayed past time on their own. This student is clearly one of my best teachers.

2/1 (Wednesday of Week 3)

One student had two interesting comments in the HBSE class tonight. The first was after I handed out an outline of the chapter we were discussing tonight with the headings and terms the chapter defined. She asked me if I had read the chapter. About three students looked rather alarmed that she would ask this question. I was surprised and asked her what prompted it/where that question came from. She said she just wondered. I said, “Well students have a right to expect that their instructor has read the chapter.” I said I had. I said it would have been hard to do the outline without reading the chapter. She said, “Well you could just type the headings and words that were in italics.” I said that was true, but I had read it. I also talked about how my reasons for reading the chapters over my teaching career had changed though. She interrupted and said I didn’t need to explain. And I said, “No, it was an interesting question.” I said I had never been asked it. I’m not sure this was a useful comment for me to say, but it was honest. Also it was reflective of Ruiz’s first agreement: “Be impeccable with your word. Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love” (Ruiz, 1997, inside front jacket). I said in the beginning, I think my reason for being prepared was largely fear of not looking stupid if a student asked me a question, but I don’t tend to do things out of fear now. I said now I do it now for the quality of the class and that it makes the class much more interesting for me as well. As I reflect on this incident now, after class, I realize I didn’t feel defensive, however, when I reflect on

her behavior, I believe she was challenging me. I think she wondered because the outline would not have required one to read. However, if I hadn't read, did she think I would have said this? And what would have been the payoff to her ego if I hadn't and said so? (That she made me look bad)? I think she has some kind of issue going on here, but I'm not sure what.

Later when we were discussing politics and nationalism, again the same student asked me a question about me. She asked me if I were competitive. I think the wise thing would be to ask her why that would be important. I didn't think of it then, but again sought to answer it honestly. I saw it as an opportunity to teach about this. First I said it was broad and asked if she could narrow it. She said she just wondered in general. I thought and talked about how if I were, it was with myself rather than with others, in terms of challenging myself. I talked about my values of seeing competition as divisive. I talked about product/outcome vs. process, winners and losers, etc. About six students had comments about this. In addition to the student with the question, another shared this view of valuing competition as a motivator for a better product. This was the student with the comments on Monday night. I was not making any assumptions about the student's comment which was reflective of Ruiz's third agreement: "Don't make assumptions. Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness, and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life" (Ruiz, 1997, inside front jacket). The other four students with comments were older women, two of whom had had "successful" careers in the business world, but saw there was more in life and decided to change what they did based on this for the second half of their lives.

One of these women began by saying she thinks as one gets older, what is meaningful in one's life changes. One student had spoken of the ill-effects of competitive sports on her brothers and she does not allow her children to participate in them. She too spoke of how she had given up competitiveness. I talked about this being a learning process as we are taught to be very competitive in this society and again related it back to our economic system and that this prepares us to participate in free-market competition. I also added that historically I was probably most competitive in needing to be right. I'm wondering if the student with the two questions is disturbed by some of the perspectives I have shared thus far relating to the whole consciousness perspective, if this is underlying her "challenging" questions. She seemed to project an edge when she asked them. I felt good about not feeling defensive, but I think I would like to connect with where she is at more when she asks these types of questions.

We also had some discussion about material in the text from Cloward and Piven regarding poor people being excluded from the political system and that they had little more options than demonstrations and sit-ins. Since I had made some comments previously about no longer being an activist, I spoke to how it was okay to participate in these activities, but it is *how*, you do so. If you are bringing to it a lot of angst and negative emotions, it serves to continue the dynamic (like resisting a 4-year old). This again was meant to introduce the concept of Consciousness/Awareness.

I like what a friend of mine/spiritual advisor said about viewing my teaching as my spiritual practice. With that, I will think about the student tonight --- her true identity and highest self --- as I did with the student Monday night. This is all very interesting.

2 hours after class ended:

More thoughts. I have been thinking of the two students in the HBSE class who have behaved in what some might call disrespectful ways to me. First I thought about whether I had treated them disrespectfully or made them appear wrong. And I had to answer “No.” However, some of what I have said I believe has challenged some dearly held assumptions and beliefs they have which support the ego. I recalled that the student who asked me if I had read the chapter was the same one who about four classes ago was very persistent in her beliefs about the usefulness of fear. I also noticed that she no longer sits close to me, but in the back of the circle. I had thought about making some general comments about using their classes and instructors to practice effective communication skills with co-workers and supervisors, which includes being respectful and coming from a place of calm when you confront. Then about if they feel they have been treated disrespectfully how it is useful for both me and them to come to me with this. But I think this is too obtuse/general, and doesn’t really get beyond the ego defensiveness of where they are coming from. I remembered that this egoic thinking is not personal (about them) but just the general ego which is part of humankind, as per Tolle (1999). I think the best way to deal with this is to really connect with them and go beneath the surface when they make such comments or ask such questions. If they feel they have really been heard, that is all I can do. This thought was reflective of Ruiz’s fourth agreement: “Always do your best. Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are different as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret” (Ruiz, 1997, inside front jacket). Apparently this is supposed to be happening the

way it is. Their egos may need to suffer a bit at this point in time. As I see the enthusiasm of the majority of students and the interest, and that they are participating from a very open and vulnerable and sincere place, I think I'm on the right track. They seem to connect with many things I'm saying and feel excited about discussing such concepts and experiences in class and relating them to social work. Most of all, spirit/heart tells me this is right.

### **Conclusions**

We would like to emphasize that we have just taken small steps in integrating into social work classes the evolution of consciousness under the rubric of spirituality

From our limited experience, we offer the following suggestions. Write quotations such as those listed in the appendix on the board at the beginning of class to engender intense discussion. Provide handouts related to spiritual/consciousness concepts at the beginning of class for students to read as they desire on their own time. Seek connections between consciousness/spiritual concepts and text materials in the subject area you are teaching (e.g. HBSE, Practice, Policy, Research, and Field). (Note the example in the journal section regarding HBSE theories). Give students an opportunity to share about their experiences of experiential knowing. Give students experiential exercises to do in or away from the classroom and hold discussions about their reactions. For example, Eckhart Tolle does one where he asks the listener to close their eyes, hold their arm away from their body, not touching anything, then he asks, "How do you know your hand is still there?" This is meant to engender the experience of Awareness/Presence. He suggests this exercise as a portal into the Now through the body's energy field. Another exercise is to ask the listener to point to themselves.

Invariably people point to their heart, not their head, and this is noted afterwards. The thrust here is that we associate our identity not with our minds or heads, but with our hearts. The existential exercise detailed in the journal section is another example of an experiential exercise that can be done with students.

Our fledgling effort to integrate the evolution of consciousness into our social work curriculum indicates this is a feasible and worthwhile endeavor. Faculty must be prepared for personal growth as well as stimulating student involvement during in process.

## **References**

Arntz, W., Chasse, B., & Vicente, M. (Filmmakers). (2004). *What the bleep do we*

*know!?* [Motion picture]. United States: Lord of the Wind Films.

Flickstein, M. (1998). *Journey to the center: A meditation workbook*. Nocona, TX:

Wisdom Publishing.

Hawkins, D. R. (2001). *The eye of the I: From which nothing is hidden*. W.

Sedona, AZ: Veritas Publishing.

Ruiz, D. M. (1997). *The four agreements: A practical guide to personal freedom*.

San Rafael, CA: Allen-Amber Publishing.

Tolle, E. (1999). *The power of now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment*. Novato,

CA: New World Library.



## Appendix

### Quotations Written on Board at Start of BSW Classes

#### Introduction to Social Welfare and Human Behavior and the Social Environment II (13

quotes over 26 classes – 1 per class):

“How much of your life do you spend looking forward to being somewhere else?”

--Matthew Flickstein, *Journey to the Center* (Read aloud)

“The realm of reality is as vast as cosmic space; it is the knowing mind of sentient beings that is small.” --Pao-chih (Read aloud)

“If you keep thinking ‘That man has abused me,’ holding it as a much-cherished grievance, your anger will never be allayed. If you can put down that fury-inducing thought, your anger will lessen. Fury will never end fury, it will just ricochet on and on. Only putting it down will end such an abysmal state.” --Sunnata Vagga (Read aloud)

“Death ends a life, but not a relationship.” --Jack Lemmon (Discussed – asked for interpretation – “What does this mean?”)

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” --Mahatmas Gandhi (Asked who said before writing author’s name).

“To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate

our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right." --  
Confucius (Read aloud)

"It is not by the amount that giving is productive of reward but rather by the generous impulse behind it. Therefore even so little as a handful of rice flour given with a pure heart becomes something that will bring great reward." --Vimana Vatthu (Read aloud)

"The first step towards change is acceptance. Once you accept yourself, you open the door to change. That's all you have to do. Change is not something you do. It's something you allow."

--Will Garcia (Read aloud)

"If you concentrate on finding what is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul." --Harold Kushner (Read aloud)

3 quotes: 1) "I am thankful that thorns have roses." --Alphonse Karr 2) "If you catch yourself whining, stop." --Vince Lisi 3) "No whining" --sign on the desk of Marvin Feit, Former Director of The University of Akron, School of Social Work. (Read aloud)

"Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy." --Anne Frank (Read aloud)

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” --Eleanor Roosevelt, *This Is My Story*, 1937. (Read aloud and asked who said before writing author’s name).

“To thine own self be true.” --William Shakespeare (Asked who said before writing author’s name. Circled “self” and stated, “The issue is to determine who is ‘self’”).

Social Work Practice with Families (10 quotes over 15 classes – 1 per class):

3<sup>rd</sup> week

“The greatest support we can have is mindfulness, which means being totally present in each moment. If the mind remains centered, it cannot make up stories about the injustice of the world or one's friends, or about one's desires or sorrows. All these stories could fill many volumes, but when we are mindful such verbalizations stop. Being mindful means being fully absorbed in the moment, leaving no room for anything else. We are filled with the momentary happening, whatever it is--standing or sitting or lying down, feeling pleasure or pain--and we maintain a nonjudgmental awareness, a ‘just knowing.’” --

Ayya Khema, *Be an Island*

5<sup>th</sup> week

“Every snowflake falls in its appropriate place.” --Zen Buddhist saying

7<sup>th</sup> week

“It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” -- Eleanor Roosevelt

9<sup>th</sup> week

“The whole of humanity is...one human family. This planet is our only home.”

--His Holiness the Dalai Lama

12<sup>th</sup> week

“All beings tremble before violence.

All fear death.

All love life.

See yourself in others.

Then whom can you hurt?

What harm can you do?”

--Dhammapada 129-130

14<sup>th</sup> week

“A monk can be very gentle, very peaceful, while there are no hard words to assail him.

But when hard words are directed at him, it is then that he must be really gentle and

peaceful.”

--Majjhima Nikaya

15<sup>th</sup> week

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is.” --Albert Einstein

16<sup>th</sup> week

“Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. . . Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.” --Carl Jung.

(Only used the same quote twice that was used for Introduction to Social Welfare and Human Behavior and the Social Environment II in the Family Practice class as there were three students who were in both the Family Practice class and the HBSE class).