

Plenary III
***Challenging Assumptions About Clinical Education: Who We Were, Who We Are,
Who We Will Be***

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Part 1: Homework!

To be Done in Advance of the Presentation

In preparation for Plenary III, we ask that you take some time to reflect and complete the following short assignment.¹

Think back over the past year. Think of an event occurring during that time that made you as a clinician feel either a real “high” of excitement, satisfaction and fulfillment or a “low” of frustration, discouragement and failure. Write a brief description of the event. Make sure you include details of when and where it happened, who was involved, and what is it about the event that made you feel so good or bad. Write these details by yourself, keeping your description to under one page.

Part 2: Unearthing Assumptions

It might be helpful to think of assumptions as general beliefs and commonsense ideas that underlie and inform our actions. While an awareness of our assumptions can be reached through self-reflection, it is often easier to unearth assumptions by having someone *else* attempt to identify the assumptions they see in our descriptions and models, and then using their observations as a starting point for reflection.

In this presentation, you will observe three different clinics from three different perspectives. Each perspective is intended to illustrate an opportunity, commonly presented in clinical work, to examine assumptions. One such opportunity may occur at a “macro” level, as when a clinic is in the design phase or when a school is reevaluating its program. The opportunity to examine assumptions also frequently happens at a “micro” level, when a particular experience, recognized as a “learning moment,” is deconstructed and analyzed. A third opportunity for unearthing assumptions arises from conscious attention to the passing images that appear in daily activities and that reflect distinct values and choices.

¹ Drawn liberally from Stephen Brookfield’s *Using Critical Incidents to Explore Assumptions in FOSTERING CRITICAL REFLECTION IN ADULTHOOD: A GUIDE TO TRANSFORMATIVE AND EMANCIPATORY LEARNING*, J. Mezirow, ed., Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Instructions for Observing Plenary

As you observe the three sample situations, we ask you to begin the process of unearthing assumptions by taking note of what “general beliefs and commonsense ideas” about clinical legal education that underlie or inform the actions and opinions and attitudes of the participants in each situation. You may use this space to write them down as you are watching:

After the sample clinics have been viewed, you will be instructed to gather in groups of two or three. In your dyads or triads, discuss the following:

What assumptions did people in your group identify as being illustrated in each situation?

- Are there any points of disagreement within your group as to what assumptions are foundational to each clinic situation presented?
- If more information is needed to understand the event, what do the requests for information say about the questioner’s perception of value or significance?

To what extent are your own assumptions about clinical legal education similar to or different from those identified in the presentations?

- If shared, do they pass as conventional wisdom within the clinical world?
- If not shared, do the differences reflect divergent views within the clinical world or are they merely contextual?

Part 3: Application and Self-Assessment

Looking back at your clinical experience you chose to write about, what assumptions about clinical legal education informed your choice of events to write about? What assumptions underlie the specific action you took in the event you described?

In answering these questions, think about the following:

Were you were surprised by others’ analysis of the situations presented in the plenary?

Did the assumptions they identified challenge or confirm your own conception of clinical teaching?