

Infusing Fairness and Equity into Curricula for New Worker Training

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CalSWEC F & E Symposium, 4/4/05

Presentation Summary

Introduction

Phyllis Jeroslow, Irene Becker, Donna Pence and Elizabeth Quinnett addressed practical methods for integrating fairness and equity concerns into curriculum. Highlights include:

- How research and data are being incorporated into the common core curricula for new child welfare workers;
- Using community outreach as a strategy to concretize fairness and equity issues in the training room; and
- The organizational impact of successfully addressing fairness and equity issues.

Overview of Fairness and Equity in the Common Core Curricula

Ms. Jeroslow provided an orientation to the Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC) and its Content Development Oversight Group (CDOG) with respect to the collaborative statewide effort to develop a common core curriculum for new child welfare workers. CDOG identified fairness and equity as one of the central themes of the common core that is reflected in the competencies and learning objectives of each curriculum.

Fairness and Equity in the Assessment of Safety, Risk, and Protective Capacity

Ms. Becker detailed how fairness and equity awareness has been integrated in the common core curriculum regarding the assessment of safety, risk and protective capacity. This was accomplished in part by use of research and data to deepen understanding of the issues as well as to improve practice. As a complement to presenting research data, Ms. Becker advised curriculum writers to include affective training strategies that are suited to the concerns of social workers. Additionally, Ms. Becker recommended that trainers engage trainees in discussions of the definition of fairness and equity, since understanding of the issues evolves over time.

As a training tool in the curriculum, Ms. Becker used a template that highlights fairness and equity issues and cultural and language considerations at successive decision-making points in the life of a case. She acknowledged that, regardless of the strength of one's curriculum, finding ways to reinforce fairness and equity training in the field presents a systemic challenge when fair and equitable practice has not traditionally been rewarded. Consequently, Ms. Becker believes that fairness and equity concerns need to be priorities for managers, supervisors, and line workers alike.

Fairness and Equity in Child Maltreatment Identification

Ms. Pence described how fairness and equity concerns were incorporated into the curriculum regarding child maltreatment identification. She stressed the importance of reaching out to the community in the curriculum development process and encouraged trainers to share community stories to bring fairness and equity issues to life. Doing so also strengthens the exploration of cultural issues and increases the likelihood of practical applications by trainees. Ms Pence also recommends that trainers become familiar with current research about matters at the national,

state and local levels, and to transmit their valuing of these information sources to trainees. Such a framework can help staff to develop community contacts and to build cultural bridges between the community and the child welfare agency.

Ms. Pence promotes media articles as a rich source for case examples. When using vignettes in curriculum, Ms. Pence cautions trainers to be attentive as to how scenario characters may be interpreted by persons from different cultures and ethnic groups. Armed with greater awareness of fairness and equity issues, workers can make better decisions for children and families.

Transfer of Learning and Organizational Change

Ms. Quinnett discussed organizational factors related to fair and equitable practice and how fairness and equity can be promoted in the workplace. Her suggestions include using multiple management strategies and promoting change from the top-down, bottom-up and middle-out. According to this model, managers need to take the lead in raising the consciousness of staff about fairness and equity issues. Supervisors need to take a primary role in modeling respect, inclusiveness and plain speaking about issues of race, cultural ethnicity, and diversity, and workers need to apply their training in the field. In order for fairness and equity concerns to be addressed routinely in assessment and case management, there needs to be a full system commitment to implementation at all levels.