

SECTION I

BACKGROUND OF THE TITLE IV-E MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE TITLE IV-E PROGRAM

In 1989, the California Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) joined with the deans and directors of the then, ten graduate Schools of Social Work in California to form the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC). The mission of CalSWEC was to re-professionalize public social services by (1) providing financial support to MSW students enrolled in an MSW program designed for public child welfare practice competence, and (2) facilitating efforts that encourage the retention of professionals in public social service agencies.

In January 1993, the California Department of Social Services entered into a contract with CalSWEC (D.C. Regents) to provide Federal Title IV-E money for stipends for full-time child welfare MSW students and for staff to implement the program. Sixteen half-year stipends of \$6,250 were available in each of the ten graduate schools of Social Work. However, in the academic year beginning September 1993, provision was made for twenty additional two-year stipends of \$12,500 per year at each school.

To recruit more CWS employees into this program, in Fall 1994, the amount of the stipend for full-time students was increased to \$15,000, and a part-time option for county employees of departments of social services was added. In the Fall of 2000, the amount of the stipend for full-time students was increased to \$18,500. Further, the contract was expanded to include employees of the California Department of Social Services. Priority for these slots is given to CWS employees who are qualified for admission and to applicants who reflect the diverse client populations currently served by public child welfare in California.

The contracting and funding agencies, the California Department of Social Services, and the Federal Region IX Office of Health and Human Services, have firm project expectations. They anticipate that (1) the students will be selected according to the priorities agreed upon, (2) the educational competencies will be delivered, and (3) project money will be accounted for as it would be for any public social services program.

Collaborative efforts between the deans of schools of Social Work and the California Welfare Directors Association culminated in the development of the Title IV-E Goals and Competencies for Public Child Welfare. The Goals and Competencies guide the Title IV-E Integrative Field Seminars and Field Internship experiences.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

A. INTRODUCTION

Public child welfare programs have been subject to intense public scrutiny in recent years often in connection with deaths or injuries of children in placement or due to the disruption of families that might have been preserved. These incidents often reflect the pressure of caseloads that are rapidly increasing in numbers and acuity while resources are diminished. Not infrequently however, workers who have committed serious practice errors have been found to be poorly trained in the legal requirements and complex skills associated with child welfare practice. In several cases in other states, departments of social services have been found deficient in observing legal and professional practice standards. Course degrees have included requirements for upgrading child welfare staff, indicating hiring preferences for persons with human services bachelor's degrees or Master's of Social Work.

Historically, Social Work has been the predominant profession in child welfare practice. Several studies have demonstrated the relevance of social work training to child welfare practice (Booz, Allen, 1987). Yet, California Department of Social Services has experienced increasing difficulty in hiring MSW child welfare workers. In rural areas the problem is critical. Three counties in the central San Joaquin Valley (Kern, Kings, Tulare) show 74%, 67%, and 74% or below respectively, in rates of vacancy of positions requiring an MSW.

There is a significant unmet demand for Master's social workers in child welfare. In a 1987-1988 survey of California child welfare departments by the California Chapter of NASW, only 25% of California child welfare workers were found to have an MSW, while one-third of the counties had no MSWs at all. In 1989, California graduate schools of social work produced about 800 new MSWs. There were openings that year for 600 MSWs in county child welfare alone. Increasingly, social work professionals are leaving or avoiding public social services employment. Of the approximately 2000 Master's social workers in the state, only about 200 (or 10%) are employed in child welfare. About 500 of the Master's social workers in the state are employed to a significant degree (at least 25%) in private practice. The need for MSWs is particularly profound with respect to professionals who are members of ethnic and racial groups and immigrant and refugee populations currently under-represented on child welfare staffs (African-American, American Indians, Chicanos, Latinos, and Asian and Pacific Islanders). For example, the percentage of emergency response to abuse clients is 15.9% African American and 20.6% Hispanic. Professional staff ethnicity, however, is 9% African-American and 11 % Hispanic.

The purpose of the Child Welfare Social Work Curriculum Development Project of the California Social Work Education Center was to establish new educational objectives for social workers who aid poor and minority families, and publicly supported public child welfare services. Curriculum development in Social Work Education is needed because the field of child welfare is changing rapidly. For example, P.L. 96-272 (1980) established a focus on keeping children in their homes and on permanency planning, in an effort to break the cycle of multiple foster homes for dependent children.

In addition, as noted above, members of ethnic, racial, and cultural minority groups constitute an increasing portion of the clientele of the child welfare system. This change necessitates increased recruitment of minority workers and the mastery by all workers of skills of culturally competent practice. The child welfare curriculum in most schools of social work has not fully adapted to these changes in the practitioner role and service populations.

In addition to mastering new intervention modes, students who enter public social welfare practice in the next few years must have the leadership and organizational skills to play significant roles improving the structure and design of agencies and service programs.

The following report documents the child welfare curriculum development process. It contains two sections. The first describes the development of a curriculum process aimed at the improvement of professional competency in child welfare services. The methodology and results will be described, including selection of the diverse advisory group of child welfare experts. Similarities and differences between practitioners' and teachers' views about what is essential for inclusion in a graduate child welfare social work program are also discussed and possible reasons for the differences are proposed. Then, the resulting competency based curriculum is discussed emphasizing what is new about this curriculum. Finally, the next steps are suggested for continuance of the curriculum development project. The second section contains the complete competency statement.

B. THE ROLE OF THE CALIFORNIA SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION CENTER

The California Social Work Education Center was created by the California Deans and Directors of Graduate Schools of Social Work and The California Welfare Directors Association to encourage Master's level social work graduates in the state to prepare for careers in the publicly supported social services. Center operations are supported by a three-year grant from the Ford Foundation supplemented by the Haas, Walter S. Johnson, Lurie, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Stuart, Van Loben Seks, and Zellerbach funds. The Center's initial objective involved the creation of a program of financial aid for students with employment requirements to be met upon graduation linked to a competency-based curriculum developed jointly by educators and professionals in the public agencies and, in addition, the Center facilitates joint agency-school evaluations of service delivery innovations. The California Social Work Education Center emerged from four years of local and regional collaborations.

One of the key functions of the Center is to assist the ten schools and the county social services departments in collaboratively developing curriculum for the education and training of MSW child welfare workers. It is recognized that the design and structure of graduate curriculum is the province of each faculty and that a variety of models may be effective. By delineating a basic set of educational knowledge and skill competencies and basic values which the various schools can adopt as curriculum objectives, the Center hopes to assure an appropriate level of consistency in MSW training for child welfare throughout the state of California.

Curricula must be sensitive to changes in public policy, the distribution of client populations, available resources, and existing knowledge about what works to alleviate social problems, hence the education for professional social work practice by necessity involves collaboration between practitioners in the field and faculty from schools of social work. The method chosen for the development of child welfare curriculum was designed to take into account the fact that people already have ways of doing things that work for them, but that new ways of educating child welfare workers must also be developed.

C. A COMPETENCY BASED CHILD WELFARE CURRICULUM

Competent means being "properly or well qualified; capable; adequate for the purposes defined," (Berube, 1985). Competency further implies expertise, proficiency, and mastery of a particular skill or a body of knowledge. Without further specification, the idea of training students to "know" or "do" child welfare social work is an ambiguous and overwhelming goal. The idea of competence-based social work education is not new and is gaining momentum.

(Gambrills, 1983; Institute for Human Services, 1987; Tabbert and Sullivan, 1999; Pecora, et. al. 1990; Cheung et. al. 1991; Maine Child Welfare Training Institute, 1991). A competency- based curriculum must provide clear descriptions of what skills or knowledge are to be measured and how, including the selection of distinct outcomes chosen before the interventions begin, the ability to follow progress during the intervention process, the use of empirical literature, and the application of critical thinking skills (Gambrill, 1983).

Questions regarding how specific the social work curriculum should be, the level (graduate or undergraduate) at which should specialization begin, and the relationship between continuing education and the graduate school curriculum continue to be debated. Although important to the general issue of social work curriculum development, this project did not address these questions. There has been concern for some time among professionals that what social workers are learning in school does not "fit the problems families most frequently encounter in child welfare," (Wiltse, 1981). This project specifically addressed the two issues of educating graduate social work students for relevant child welfare practice, and of building ongoing collaboration among public agencies and schools of social work in California.

In the last decade, a national study (Lauderdale, et. al. 1980) was done to determine what social workers in undergraduate and graduate social work students learned relevant to child welfare. Classroom instructors were asked about child welfare course content, using course titles as the substitute for the "academic definition" of the content covered (Ibid, p. 534). Then they asked how much the instructors feel students know about the topics. Graduate classroom instructors felt most confident about their students' knowledge regarding "Policy," "Supportive Services," and "Legislation." The classroom looked to the field and field instruction to educate the student about "Treatment Skills." Instructors noted "Specific Problems of Children" was the most frequently not taught but most desired graduate course. While this study gave some idea as to whether or not child welfare instruction exists in schools of social welfare and what is taught, it did not address the issue of the level of knowledge and skill competency required for this complex profession.

Collaboration among schools and field is a key component of a successful graduate social work program. As a result of its study on the state of collaboration between field and schools in child welfare, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (1991) encouraged the development of competency-based assessment of practice. The goal was to develop a curriculum that met the needs of both professional graduate social work education and professional child welfare services. The focus of the effort was the specification of competencies that would define the objectives of education in child welfare for graduate social workers.

In order to promote collaboration, the first task is to be sure participants in the process are able to understand how the others divide the topic, in this case, child welfare, into categories. The major accrediting body for social work education, the Council on Social Work Education, bases social work curricula on five professional foundation content areas (CSWE, 1982). The professional foundation includes Human Behavior and the Social Environment, Social Welfare Policy and Services, Social Work Practice, Research, and the Field Practicum. CSWE further states:

"Social Worker at both the graduate and undergraduate levels must demonstrate, according to their respective levels of entry, proficiency and competence in the five professional foundation areas," (ibid, p. 126). The competence however, does not imply that discrete courses must be developed to address specialty programs. Once again, the categories do not necessarily specify what is to be learned in the way of knowledge and skills.

Child Welfare Services in public agencies in California are categorically organized in a different way from the way the schools categorize child welfare services. California child welfare services are based on policy specifications for the delivery of categorical child welfare services (see, for example, P.L. 96-272, 1980). The categories are: Adoptions, Emergency Response, Family Reunification, Family Maintenance, and Permanency Planning. As it happens, very few classroom courses co-exist with the service categories, i.e., contain information about child welfare or have titles such as "Child Abuse and Neglect" or "Child Protective Services," (Kravitz, 1991). Further, there has not been good documentation of how learning in the field is integrated into the classroom setting.

D. SELECTION OF THE ADVISORY GROUP

The Curriculum, Sub-Committee of the Board of California Social Work Education Center consists of four members and two staff. In order to build collaboration into the methodology of the project, the Sub-Committee formed a twenty-six member advisory group, by nominating ten practitioners from public social services, ten faculty who teach child welfare, five practitioners from non-profit social services agencies who contract for services with their local public social services departments, and one person to represent social work in elementary and secondary schools. Efforts to insure cultural diversity resulted in the addition of three persons; one additional public social service manager, one additional faculty member, and a representative of the Latino Social Work Network. One committee member also filled out the questionnaire bringing the total number of participants on the advisory group to thirty. However, one public social services nominee and one representative from the non-profit sector did not complete the questionnaire.

E. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS The competency list used for the original questionnaire was derived from three main sources: (a) "Individual Training Needs Assessment for Child Welfare Caseworkers" (Institute for Human Services, 1987), a document developed by the Institute for Human Services and obtained from the Child Welfare League of America, (b) a list of fieldwork competencies developed at Cal State Long Beach under the direction of Professor Janet Black, and c) a list of in-service training competencies developed for the State of California Emergency Response Training Project by Professors Wynn Tabbert, Peggy Sullivan, and Robert Whittaker at Cal State Fresno. These were modified, supplemented and categorized by the Center Curriculum Sub-Committee and staff.

Since the methodology for this curriculum development process was an iterative one that is the results of each phase directed the method of collecting data for the next phase, methods and results are reported here together. A modified Delphi method (Delbeg, 1975; Lauffer, 1984) was used to gather input about the proposed list, whereby the members of the advisory group were polled by mail to elicit their opinions about a proposed set of a 126 competencies.

A mail poll was chosen, rather than a committee process, because respondents came from all areas of California and because with a mailed poll, rather than a face-to-face meeting, equal weight was given to all respondents' opinions. The questionnaires were mailed in May 1991. The Curriculum Sub-Committee received the initial report of the results in August 1991 and met in September 1991 to further refine the list. Staff made the revisions in September and polled the Curriculum Sub-Committee in October before editing the Basic Child Welfare Graduate Social Work Curriculum for further review for a statewide conference held in December 1991.

From the original questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt an item was essential, desirable, or unnecessary for graduate education. If the respondent indicated an item desirable or unnecessary for graduate education, then she or she was asked to rank the item's level of desirability for post-graduate education, using the same three choices. A second mailed questionnaire was originally contemplated, but the level of agreement on core items reported here suggested that this step could be eliminated in the interest of time.

One respondent sent a values statement that was developed for child protective services training given throughout the state. Since several respondents indicated they wished to have a broad statement about our approach to children and families, staff developed a statement of values, which has been incorporated into the final competency-based curriculum (see Section II).

Some wording changes from the original questionnaire were made after the initial results for the sake of clarity. The word Student was substituted for the work Worker in all items and verb tense was changed to the present.

The section on Child Welfare Management posed a particularly difficult problem for respondents because most students do not have a chance to develop competency in management skills. Yet, respondents indicated the opportunities for manager development were not necessarily available on the job either. Thus, in the final draft, these competencies were changed to knowledge competencies rather than skill competencies.

When a 93% response rate was achieved, staff summarized the data by compiling simple frequencies to determine the essential competencies in each section. Using a two-thirds rate of respondent approval of essential as a cut-off point, items rated essential by at least 66% of the respondents were automatically placed in an "essential for graduate education" grouping in the initial draft. A second category of items ranked essential by at least 40% of the respondents were listed next. The desirable percentage was also given for these items.

The essential and desirable responses tended to show an inverse relationship. That is, an item high on the essential rating for graduate school education usually had a much lower desirable rating. Usually, desirable and essential constituted the entire range of responses about an item. In one or two cases, a respondent felt an item was unnecessary.

It is important to understand how respondents used the terms essential, desirable and unnecessary. From the written and verbal comments of respondents, it appears that items marked essential were those items, which respondents felt were both **necessary and possible** to teach or provide experience for competency in graduate school. Respondents felt some items required learning experiences not generally available to graduate students or that it was possible to develop familiarity but not competency about the same Items.

When responses of faculty and practitioners were separated, significant convergence occurred on 26 items (see Appendix C). Except for three items, faculty and practitioners agreed that these items were essential for the basic curriculum and all of these were included in the final list. On three items, faculty and practitioners agreed that the items were desirable but not essential for graduate competency and these will be considered for post-graduate competency at a later date.

On 27 items, faculty tended more strongly toward essential, while practitioners were more likely to say desirable (see Appendix D). From the comments, practitioners as a group listed particular items as desirable when they did not quite see how competency on the item could be achieved in graduate school. These differences in viewpoint should be seen as points of departure for the implementation discussion and for post-graduate competencies.

In September 1991, the Sub-Committee worked with a draft document consisting of seven sections. Each section contained a basic definition and three sets of competencies. Staff also raised some questions that were considered important for the Sub-Committee to weigh in terms of topic areas that were omitted or to address the question of duplication. The first set of competencies consisted of those items, which passed the two-third cut-off for essential. The second set consisted of those items that were rated essential by at least 40% of the respondents. On some items, the response rate of essential and desirable together approach 100%. When this is not the case, it means that one or two respondents rated the item as unnecessary for graduate education. However, the item may still be seen as desirable or essential for post-graduate training. The third set consisted of all additional items proposed by respondents. The Sub-Committee reviewed and promoted these, as they felt appropriate. After the September meeting, staff further refined the report. Then the Sub-Committee was contacted by staff for more input in October, and the final proposed curriculum competencies were compiled and re-numbered.

In December 1991, CalSWEC held a two-day child welfare conference in Southern California. Eight-five agency professionals and school faculty attended. The purpose of the conference was to present the proposed competency list to a large statewide forum in order to further refine the competencies and to encourage regional collaboration. Participants first met as a large group and were given the list of competencies. Then they were asked to note on their lists those important competencies they felt were not currently adequately acquired by graduate social work students in their region. At that time, the large group had a chance to give input to staff and several areas were highlighted that participants felt needed more attention in the proposed curriculum. After a break, participants reconvened in small groups that reflected three regions of California. This was done to connect agency professionals with faculty from their area graduate schools and to begin the collaboration process. Through a nominal group process, discussion and voting, groups chose their priority competencies for curriculum development. The top three for each region have been included here (see appendix E). Similarity among regions is striking: Developing "cultural competency," dealing with hostile and non-voluntary clients, conducting interviews under less ideal conditions, and working with interdisciplinary systems (such as the legal system) are common themes which participants felt were needed but currently lacking in the graduate social work curriculum.

The next informational input came from a panel consisting of one classroom faculty member, one fieldwork director, and two child welfare professionals based in a large public agency, who discussed opportunities for and barriers to implementation of the curriculum in their milieus. After the panel presentation, participants began to discuss what should be done about strengthening the curriculum in their regional groups based on identified opportunities and barriers.

The final small group session organized participants according to their "role" in the process. There was a dean's group, a faculty group, a child welfare manager's group, a fieldwork director's group, and a department director's group. Their task was to identify barriers in the particular regions to teaching the important competencies and to recommend solutions. A final party plenary session and report back on small group accomplishments and next steps ended the curriculum development section of the conference, although an afternoon session on child welfare research and development section met afterwards. Following the conference, the competencies were circulated by mail among the Curriculum Sub-Committee members again for final approval.

F. THE RESULTING COMPETENCY BASED CHILD WELFARE CURRICULUM

Staff organized the competencies into six categories according to the task required and the topic under consideration. The categories are: Ethnic Sensitive Practice, Core Child Welfare Skills, Social Work Skills and Methods, Human Development and Behavior, Workplace Management, and Child Welfare Management. The final competency list is contained in Section II of this chapter. This list constitutes the proposed basic core curriculum. It should be noted that the competencies change over time as at-risk groups comprising the service population change, as we develop more knowledge into what works, and as policy changes.

One of the criticisms of a competency-based approach to knowledge and skill building is that it is normatively generated. In other words; it is largely defined by the limitation of existing policies and procedures. For this reason, a statement of guiding principles was included in the list of competencies.

The National Association of Public Child Welfare administrator's survey found that, "The greatest barrier to collaboration between child welfare agencies and schools of social work is the absence of a common philosophy and a shared agenda between these two institutions." (NAPCWA, 1991, p.3). Some important factors in the guiding statement for the competency-based curriculum should be stressed. This statement philosophically supports a wide diversity of lifestyles, including many definitions of "family." It recognizes the state's right to intervene to protect children, while encouraging workers to make reasonable efforts to keep families together. It also supports the importance of delivering effective service based on empirically based procedures and literature. Critical thinking is encouraged. Finally, it acknowledges, above and beyond the professional definition of each individual competency section, the family's contribution to the definition of the child welfare situation.

"Ethnic Sensitive Practice" items received the most agreement from respondents at the essential level. For this reason, and to denote the importance of ethno-cultural considerations to other competencies throughout the document, these items were included in a new separate section at the beginning of the initial draft of the report to the Curriculum Sub-Committee. This section goes beyond understanding of cultural differences. It expects the competent worker to apply social work techniques and knowledge to find out the values of the client or family and contrast them with "dominant" values, and to effectively use that knowledge to foster culturally sensitive treatment plans. An example of this is the concept of kinship care as it applies to foster care situations. It was felt by all concerned that ethnically sensitive practice skills should be emphasized throughout the competency document as well as included as a separate section.

"Core Child Welfare Skills" includes the assessment categories and specialized topics included in child welfare. Highlighted in this session are the various kinds of violence that child welfare workers must confront on the job; spouse, alcohol and institutional abuse in addition to the different kinds of child abuse. Competencies emphasizing the child welfare worker's role with the court system are included. This section also identifies the important target populations that constitute the majority of child welfare cases in California at the present time. Assessment and reassessment of an agency's target population is a key part of its child welfare program. Finally, the child welfare worker's dual responsibility to the family as well as the child, and the collaboration required to provide effective services are mentioned.

The third section, "Social Work Skills and Methods," features interviewing skills and combines these skills with specialized knowledge about adolescents and very young children. Interviewing the hostile and non-voluntary client is acknowledged as a qualitative, different skill than the usual casework methods of interviewing voluntary clients. Adapting, as is interviewing skills and treatment plans to settings such as home visiting and working in non-traditional environments (for example, interviewing family members outside courtrooms and interviewing teenagers at bus stops) is discussed.

The section on "Human Development and Behavior" takes into account the effect of societal structural, environmental factors on the phenomenon of child abuse and neglect, adoption and placement. The effects of developmental disabilities and special medical needs of children from substance abusing environments and those who have HIV are acknowledged here.

The section on "Workplace Management" recognizes that the organizational influences of the agency and the way the agency interprets policy influences practice. In most social work programs, students either specialize in direct or indirect skills. Direct skills are seen to be those, which work with the client/family directly, and indirect work is defined as planning, management, and administration. One consequence of this dichotomy is that direct service social workers often do not comprehend the full range of influence an organization can have on the individual practitioner and his or her client and most importantly, do not understand what options they have for dealing with organizations in order to get things done for their clients. As child welfare workers in the field encounter inter-organizational relationship problems with court systems, hospitals, and other large traditional bureaucracies on a regular basis, they must be able to demonstrate their expertise in order to enhance their credibility and to accomplish their goals. Workplace management includes the achievement of competence in recognizing the contribution and involving the community in child welfare concerns.

The last category, "Child Welfare Management", was included as part of the graduate social work curriculum for all students, even though it is recognized that not all students are able to have a management experience in field evaluation. The competencies in this section employ the field instructor and the social work manager as a role model for the students; the exercises are more observational than experiential. As in the section above, teamwork is emphasized but from the manager's perspective.

The effect of policy on practice is also addressed in this section as well as the issue of including organizational behavior and the effects of organizational structure in a direct practice specialization.

G. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

In discussing implementation, it is important to remember that this list of competencies represents a basic model of child welfare graduate social work practice. These competencies represent the minimum skill and knowledge expectations for the newly graduated MSW specializing in child welfare. The document is intended to take into account what our two panels of experts and conference participants felt was necessary and generally possible. If schools of social work have resources to provide courses in more specialized training or if department of social services have model innovative training projects, all the better.

It is also important that this list be seen as a "work in progress", not a rigid ad eternal set of standards. Through the years, as goals, services and populations shift, we will need to revisit, revise and upgrade our understanding of what MSWs should know and be able to do. In the next few months, we will have the opportunity to complete work on a post-graduate list, which may give us a more complete picture of our extended goals for the MSW child welfare practitioner in California through the two-year post-graduate level. An example of desired next steps would be the creation of ongoing regional meetings among schools of social work and public child welfare agencies. The Center is conducting an assessment and evaluation process to determine the effects of the competency based curriculum in California over the next few years.

Finally, it should also be noted that curriculum development is only one component of the entire child welfare project and can only work in conjunction with other components, including the availability of financial assistance for students and resource support for schools and agencies. The NAPCWA survey found that Title IV-E funds were an important component in the collaboration among schools and agencies. Last, but not least, we gratefully acknowledge the ongoing interest and cooperation of the foundations that support the project, the Regional Office of the Administration for Children, Youth and Family, the Children's Bureau, the State Department of Social Services, County Public Social Services Department, NASW, CWDA, agencies and Schools of Social Work in California.