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SOCW 413
Professional Development & Identification Paper
10/16/07

In the course of my studies, I have often referred to the six ethical principles of the NASW Code of Ethics, to guide me through the academic process and to remind me of what is expected of the social work profession. As a generalist social worker, I am expected to have a broad knowledge of human behavior and theoretical perspectives, as well as evidence-based practices in an agency setting. In my field placement with Hamilton County Schools (HCDE), generalist knowledge is very important as I am dealing with students of all ages (Piaget's Theory is extremely helpful) and various administrators who all have their own agendas. In addition to these challenges, the school social workers in Hamilton County are in a transition phase, having recently gotten a permanent director after four years of being rudderless. For this reason, Section 2.0 of the NASW Code of Ethics is of utmost importance to this group; however, several of the principles spelled out in Section 2.0 (respect, disputes involving colleagues) are not being adhered to during this "storm" phase of the transition period. Observing this process as a student is very enlightening and allows me to experience firsthand how important the six ethical principles are and how hard it is to adhere to them in every situation in dealing with co-workers. As a student, I am mainly in observation mode, trying to find the balance between the NASW Code of Ethics and the culture of the school system. Meaning that I must follow HCDE board policies that may conflict with the NASW Code and I am also duty bound to follow the NASW Standards of School Social Work Services adopted in 2002 which do not always coincide with current school social work job descriptions. Unfortunately, HCDE is not bound by NASW codes and standards and this does cause challenges to the school social work profession.

In my opinion, the three specific ethical principles most important to the school social work setting are: social justice, dignity and worth of a person, and integrity. The reasons for choosing these three over service, importance of human relationships, and competence are apparent in the role of the social worker in the school setting. The unique challenges facing the school social worker require acting with integrity in interactions with HCDE (individual school personnel, the Board, administrators) and the clients (students, parents, guardians); recognizing the dual relationship of duty to HCDE and duty to clients; and to promote social justice when seeking equal treatment of all clients within the school system. Upholding these three ethical principles is especially hard when the school social worker is confronted with the compulsory attendance law and a family living in poverty. School Board policies, NCLB achievement standards, and current attendance laws can be discriminatory toward poor clients, ethnically diverse clients, and disabled clients. Reconciling the client's needs with those of the local school district that employs you requires finesse, integrity, a desire for equal opportunities, and respect for the dignity of all the individuals involved in the process.

To reach such lofty goals, I must immerse myself in the "culture" of the school district through attendance at countywide school social work meetings, observations of other school social workers in the field, in conferences with parents, in juvenile court proceedings, and by becoming familiar with Board policy, the Tennessee compulsory attendance laws, juvenile court proceedings, and available community based resources. In addition, I must be willing to interject myself into these proceedings and accept feedback on my performance in order to learn and grow personally and professionally. Becoming a part of the team and not just an observer is my main goal and learning how to be assertive when advocating for my clients rights is an area I must strengthen to become an effective school social worker. One way to better understand the

role of the school social worker in Hamilton County is to go to the top. I recently spent six hours with Mrs. Sheryl Randolph, Director of Student Services, who is also the new supervisor to the school social workers. During this encounter, we discussed the cultural makeup of the department and ways to enhance my field placement for maximum experience. The discussion also included how to stay focused on the HCDE goal of attendance and serve the needs of individual families, the need to document the interventions by the school social workers to underscore the need for the service when funding issues manifest, and how to engage community based organizations to support school social workers in their endeavors to serve the families in the school district. Another strategy for clarification of the role of the school social worker will be my Applied Research Project “The Perceived Role of the School Social Worker” and the subsequent survey results.

Since beginning my field placement, I have come to realize that school social workers are much more than “attendance police”. They are also educators. They must educate their employer (HCDE) in becoming sensitive to the needs of the students and families when creating policy; they must educate the families about those policies; and they must educate the community about how to provide the services and support the schools need to cultivate a successful learning environment. And they are advocates. They must advocate for and on behalf of the students they come into contact with; they must advocate for changes to policy, laws, and standardized tests that may be viewed as discriminatory towards their clients; and they must advocate for the school social work profession in order to do their jobs in accordance with the NASW Code of Ethics which emphasizes service to clients.

As a student I have been offered numerous opportunities to interact with the policy makers and to question the need for such policies. I have attended workshops, professional

development seminars, and meetings such as IEP'S (Individualized Education Plans) where I am gaining valuable experience that will enhance my chances of being hired in this field. I am also pursuing the necessary requirements for school social work licensure in the state of Tennessee by taking two education courses, one of which is a master level course, and the elective School Social Work and the Law. I have also registered with the UTC Licensure office and will be required to take the Praxis test to obtain my Apprentice Special Group License. The 400 hours of field placement service will fulfill the one year of internship hours necessary for this initial license. After a three year period in the school system, I will be eligible to advance to a Professional School Service Personnel License, which is issued for a ten year period and may be renewed by meeting the same guidelines as the Professional License (teacher) renewal. This acknowledgement of the school social worker as a recognized member of the education profession further validates the important experience I am receiving in my field placement.

By embracing all aspects of field placement both good and bad, creating working relationships with school personnel, and conducting research about the unique issues facing school social workers, I believe the transition from student to professional generalist social worker will be smooth sailing. The one major concept that I have gotten from the field experience is that school social workers do not operate in a vacuum but are part of a vital team securing equal opportunities for all students and families in the community. I am eager and excited to join the team and to help shape the future of the school social worker's role.