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SWK499: Integrative Seminar (NA)

February 1, 2023

"Seminar Paper #2 – Competency #2"

Reflective Assessment on Competency #2

1. **In what ways have I accomplished this competency/practice behaviors?**

Competency #2 relates to engaging with the diversity and differences of the client(s) in the practice setting to better understand and facilitate the proper delivery service(s) to their needs. I believe that I have accomplished this competency in my practicum by demonstrating sensitivity towards my students who are from minority backgrounds. There was a particular student, Candy (alias name) who was having problems completing her internship and submitting her assignments on time to her professors for grading. I engaged her in conversation about herself and her home life and she opened up about some of the situations that she was facing at home trying to help financially support her family. Her family was Dominican immigrants and learning about her culture's values regarding responsibilities to their families helped me understand some of the struggles she was facing having to balance her necessity to work, her desire to go to college, and support her single parent mom. She did not qualify for financial aid so she had to put in extra hours at work to pay for her classes, which took time away from her studies. I appreciated and admired her efforts because I knew that she was trying twice as hard because as a minority she did not have the same resources available to her to accomplish her goals.

2. **How has my thinking changed over time?**

I believe that my thinking has changed over time to extend my understanding and appreciation of other minority and ethnic groups who have to navigate through the social, governmental, and institutional systems to achieve their goals. I come from the same kind of background as most students that I encounter in my internship. Once being an illegal immigrant myself and not being able to pursue higher education earlier on in life, and also because of my race and status I had to settle for less or what was available to me. I think that I see the differences and diversity in people not so much as a "handicap" as before, but instead, as a vehicle of extraordinary strengths to overcome the hardships of life's experiences.

3. What are the practice behaviors that indicate my competency in this area?

The practice behaviors that may indicate my competency in this area are viewing and listening to each client from their unique sense of their identity. Using interviewing skills of attending, active listening, and open-ended questioning to gain information and the client's perspective about their lives and how they differently respond to the same situations based on their cultural values and norms proved valuable to help guide them to resolutions to their issues.

4. What curriculum content areas (social policy, practice, etc.) relate to successfully completing this competency?

One of the classes I took was Social Justice and the course content exposed me to the importance of having cultural competence within the practice setting because we will be encountering people of many different and diverse backgrounds. The curriculum touched on the importance of being self-aware of your own cultural values and beliefs, and developing knowledge, skills, and understanding about other cultures, their history, values, and traditions. As social workers, we are responsible to educate ourselves, attending training, apply appropriate evidence-based theories and frameworks that both empower and advocate for diverse clients and

the broader society to deliver services in an ethical and professional manner that is in consideration of our client(s) cultural influences.

5. What learning experiences helped me to accomplish this competency?

I had one Latinx student who seemed to be very ambitious in her pursuit to get her degree in Human Services. By all accounts, she was very smart and a good student, however, whenever she would be faced with negative feedback from professors she tended to fall apart very easily. When I engaged her to share about her life and experiences outside of the school environment, I learned that the expectations that she put on herself to succeed stemmed from the expectations of her family. She was the first person in her family that was able to afford to attend college and the thought of disappointing them placed an added emotional pressure on her that made her struggle coping with failure and rejection. Together with my Field Instructor and her professors, we were able to create a space for her to talk about her issues and experiences that helped shaped her ambitions and fear of failure. The secessions are ongoing.

6. What "gaps" can I identify in my learning experience? What will I do about these "gaps"? In your Professional Growth Plan, identify goals for continued personal and professional growth and discuss how you plan to reach these goals).

I think that one of the gaps that I can identify in my learning experience regarding competency #2 is that I am limited in my knowledge and information about the different and diverse minority groups. Much of what I know comes from my direct encounter and personal experiences with these populations. I will need to do more personal evidence-based research to increase my understanding to apply appropriate skills to engage diverse clients. For example, what are the dos and don'ts of different cultures?

Integration

1. **Select a case from your field experience (any system size). The case must reflect clients or client issues involving an at-risk or oppressed population.**

I had a student named Candy (alias name), she and her family were from the Dominican Republic and immigrants to this country. For a number of years, they were undocumented and are in the process of trying to gain legal status in this country. Candy is 22 years old and lives with her mom and younger sibling, she works full-time to financially help support the family and is trying to complete her associate's degree in Human Services. Candy has time management issues and struggles to complete her internship and assignments on time while juggling her work schedule. She must work to pay for classes as she does not qualify for financial aid. From her verbiage, she displays some connotations of cognitive disabilities and there is no indication that she has been screened for diagnosis.

2. **Demonstrate the capacity to apply and communicate the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences.**

To gain a better understanding of Candy, who she is and what motivates her, it was important for me to recognize how her cultural influences have shaped her life and decisions. Knowing some of the inherent roles or positions ("ascribed status") that she has and the ones she is in pursuit of ("achieved status") helped me to be more aware of how she identifies herself. When I communicated with her, I used language that would validate her as a person of a minority group and reasons for some of the decisions that she has made. For instance, her expressed need to want to help people and work as a social worker stems from her own experiences of being a recipient of those same needs as an undocumented student. I encouraged

her that she was not alone in this respect and that we can work together to find alternative resources that are available to persons in her situation.

3. Demonstrate the capacity to engage clients as experts of their own experiences.

During our weekly zoom meeting sessions, I would engage Candy to talk about other aspects of her life besides school. This would bring about the topics of her family and home life, and what she did during her downtime/self-care. She shared about how she likes to cook her traditional home food with her mom and use her bilingual abilities to communicate with her clients in her internship. This gives her a sense of worth that she is giving back something to her community.

4. Demonstrate how personal biases and values were identified and managed through self-awareness and self-regulation.

I was also an undocumented immigrant to this country, so a lot of the experiences that Candy shared with me I felt that I could relate to. I did not experience a language barrier like her since my first language is English, and I sometimes have to check myself that there are other immigrants who have difficulty assimilating and adapting into the mainstream culture because of this barrier. I had to understand that I have to be a little more patient and thoughtful with these clients in finding resources, information, and solutions. I would also have to use the applicable social work theories and perspectives that would take into consideration the cultural aspects and influences of my clients.

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