DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

THE INTERFACE WITH ACADEMIC AND PRACTICING FIELD WORK SUPERVISORS

A PROGRAMME UNDER CONTINUING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION (CSE)

DATE: 19th November 2011
VENUE: COUNCIL ROOM, CHRIST UNIVERSITY, BANGALORE
Introduction

The Social Work Department of Christ University organized an “Interface with Academic and Practicing Field work Supervisors” under the banner of Continuing Social Work Education (CSE) on 19th November 2011. The programme commenced at 9.00 am with the registration of the participants. The theme of the programme was Field Work Training and Supervision, the Strengths, Challenges and Solutions in field work practice. A total of 85 participants took part in the programme. The programme was represented by various institutes such as St. Josephs College, Bangalore University, Acharya Institute of Management and Sciences, St. Johns Medical College, NIMHANS, St. Marthas Hospital, Nightingale trust etc.

Inaugural ceremony

The inaugural ceremony commenced with lighting of the lamp by dignitaries and prayer song by the choir. Dr. Bino Thomas, Coordinator Dept of Social Work welcomed all the dignitaries and invited guests to the interface. He stated that this programme is the part of the initiative which began with the Continuing Social Work Education at Christ University in the year.

He then introduced, Dr. D Muralidhar, Professor and former Head of Department of Psychiatric Social Work NIMHANS, Bangalore as the chief guest of the programme, Dr. Tony Sam George, Head of the Department of Psychology, Christ University and all the representatives from different Colleges and NGOs.
Dr. Hemalatha, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work introduced the theme to the audience by emphasizing that Social Work Educators have been pioneers in experimental learning. The focus of the programme is to bring together primary stake holders to discuss the various issues that arise in Field work practice. The Department of Social Work at Christ University has introduced two innovative aspects to Field Work which are,

1. Continuous Field Work Practice- enables the students to work five days a week in the field followed by one day supervision in college.
2. Learning Contract- developed by the students to set objectives, strategies and goals for the field work.
In the inaugural address given by Dr. D. Muralidhar, Department of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS, stated that no course other than Social Work has such immense learning and that field work nurtures and nourishes professional self. According to him the pulse of social work lies in field work.

He explained that the four dimensions of Social work such as activities conducted, process, application of theories and evaluation is important at field work. In order to make field work process effective the students must have the willingness to learn and be committed in the field. He also said that learning can happen at any time and through any one and so social work students should have an open mind and non judgmental attitude in the field.

This was followed by a message by Dr Tony Sam George, Head Department of Psychology, Christ University. He specified how the programmes implemented by the Department of Social Work in Christ University in terms of field work practice are very vital for the students of MSW. It leads to commitment and success through consistency. This consistency, he said would always bring change. He said since practitioners and academicians are apart, continuous field work practice is more of a remarriage for engaging both of them academically for a continuous period.

He threw light on how in today’s world the needs of the clients cannot be addressed completely through texts and research articles. During his speech he mentioned how field work practice serves this purpose. He specified how we are agents of the change and how we need to be reflected practitioners. “Initiative is a good counter culture for Indian Social Work today” he said.
Group Discussions

Followed by the inaugural ceremony, group discussions were held among four groups

1. Field work practitioners,
2. Academicians from various colleges,
3. Students from various colleges from Bangalore and

The group discussion was specifically organized to discuss the various strengths, challenges and opportunities that each of the group is facing in the field work practice and find possible solutions.

Student’s group discussion

Students from different colleges in Bangalore along with student representatives from the Department of Social Work, Christ University took part in the group discussion. The group of students discussed various strengths that field work practice stake holders and possess along with the challenges and solutions they have in terms of field work practice. The students were divided according to their specializations

The strengths that the students of the Human Resource specialization focused on in their group discussion were
• The benefit of having cooperative supervisors that comes to their aid whenever they face any problem and need support.
• Chances to relate easily to both theory and practice and that they could practice what they learnt in their class rooms to their experiences in the field
• Agency supervisors being very cooperative and approachable.
• Learning more through a better job experience before going out to a job.
• Importance and benefits of the learning contract and how it provided guidelines for their field work practice.

The various challenges they focused on were

• Constant misconception that the MSW students work only with welfare departments and they are given monotonous work like data entry, muster roll etc.
• Lack of time provided by the supervisors in guiding the students and therefore many times the supervision is not of good quality.

The students brought about many solutions for the problems they faced. They suggested that

• Orientation for the field work agency supervisors must be given before the students go to their field.
• Interface programmes like this should be organized more often.
• Timely feedback must be given to students from both the agency supervisor and the teacher in charge.
The Challenges faced by the students specializing in community development discussed were

- Lack of continuity in the fieldwork practice, most of the colleges has just two days of fieldwork in a week and therefore the interventions they plan lack in effectiveness if implemented.
- Most of the agency supervisors were not professional social workers and therefore lack quality in supervision.
- There is a huge clash between the goals set for the students by the organization, faculty supervisors and the students themselves leading to ineffective fulfilment of goals.

They provided solutions like

- Implementing learning contracts by all the colleges where it would serve its purpose well
- Providing opportunities to students for working independently in open community.
- Inclusion of more Indian approaches/ models of practice to field work practice as well as discussion in Classes.

According to the Students of Clinical Social work the Fieldwork is the backbone of social work practice. Fieldwork helps the students to be committed to the profession. It helps students to identify and realize their potentials. It gives them distinctiveness to the profession.
They have identified the **challenges** such as

- Lack literature on the topic of field work supervision.
- Certain agency supervisors do not allow interaction with clients in spite of their able supervision.
- There is a gap between field work practices of urban students and rural students.
- Due to differences in teaching methodologies and syllabus it is difficult for the agency supervisors to relate to students.

**Suggestions** for improvement made by the students were improved research needs to be undertaken in the field work supervision and emphasis on the Learning Contract.

**Discussions of the international students**

- The main focus of the discussion was to share and understand the strengths, weaknesses and difficulties faced by the students of International social work students in fieldwork training and supervision. They mentioned that through fieldwork they were able to visit various NGO’s and slums. This helped them in meeting people belonging to different target groups. They felt that their Observations have been useful. Through interaction they were able to understand Culture differences and were also able to learn Non verbal communication which became a vital tool of communication. Fieldwork has also helped
them in Adapting to the differences in culture, norms, rules and practises. Their ability to plan and carry out field work tasks in time was indeed beneficial for them.

**The Major Challenges these students face**

- The language barriers create difficulty in long term placement of the students in their respective agencies. But all of them put forward that language problem was never felt an issue as they had different ways of interacting with the client population.
- The difference in approaches and methods used in India too make it slightly difficult for the students during their fieldwork practice.
- They tend to gather the attention of the people which makes it difficult to execute their work.
- The Continuous change of supervisors affects the learning process. Supervisors in the field had less clarity in their roles.
- The students also faced difficulties in fulfilling their individual responsibilities and the organization’s responsibilities.
- Lack of understanding of the culture act as a major impediment to professionalism.

As solutions to their problems they felt that

- Long term placement is better than short term placement if the organization know English.
• By creating innovative ways of interaction the barriers of communication can be tackled.
• The goals of the student must be clearly and carefully deciphered by the agency supervisors since most often they are treated as volunteers.

**Group Discussion by the Practitioners**

The practitioners that arrived from various institutions provided valuable feedback and suggestions, they voiced that there must be similar forums for the three parties to interact and discuss issues like these. A suggestion they provided was that,

• Students must be more punctual while working at the agency and
• Must attend fieldwork on a continuous basis, as supervising based on the previous week’s performance would be a lot more difficult.
• The students to be well verse with theoretical background as they wish to teach only the practical aspects.
• Effective communication and accountability from the teachers regularly
• The students coming to the agencies must be accompanied by a partner who knows the local language.
• They also stated that the students should be able to provide reports of good quality of what they have practiced to the agency.

They also felt that some students were excessively enthusiastic about aspects in their interest and more often want to shift their focus areas, irrespective of the schedule planned for them.
**Group Discussion by the Academicians**

The group discussion amongst the Academicians were basically to discuss the strengths, challenges and solutions that fieldwork practice holds, they stated that the major challenge as lecturers was

- To place the students in appropriate organizations as a huge number of organizations choose not to respond apart from fieldwork placements as a huge challenge, giving the students adequate and necessary training and orientation before they step into the fields is becoming difficult.
- They also stated that many of their students are asked to perform tasks that are either outside the boundaries of their syllabus or one which is not taught to them.
- Supervising too many students by just one person not only becomes a huge challenge, but also constitutes to lack of quality supervision for each student.
- They also stated that the high fees rates that certain institution entitles the students with leave the students with no choice but to drop out of such good quality institutions.

- Some agencies do not provide any learning for the students, in institutions like these the students are forced to continue with their report writing using data from files the institution holds.

The various *solutions* they provided that

- Field work guidelines and modules can be modified to suit the organizations needs and the student’s interests and skills.
• Creative methods can be initiated like environmental campaigns etc.
• Not just depend on NGO’s for learning. New platforms must be looked at and students must be encouraged join open communities for better learning experiences.
• Agency should be provided with timely evaluation and feedback and how they are guiding the students.
• A very important solution that the academicians provided was to initiate pilot projects of putting students directly on the field and analyze the outcome. They suggested that the students would become more analytical if this procedure was implemented in colleges.
• They also suggested that stakeholders must be widened, the college management must also be informed of social work and fieldwork activities and the department must also involve the management while making decisions about fieldwork.

**Group Presentations and Concluding Session**

The group discussions were followed by a presentation by the representatives of each group, after which the floor was open for discussion. The issues and concerns were discussed by the participants and feedback was given by the representatives. This session was moderated by Dr. Bino Thomas

It was felt by all participants that such interface required to be conducted in short intervals to discuss the issues in a common platform and they all appreciated the initiatives of the Department of Social Work Christ University in this regard. The conference was concluded with the vote of thanks by Ms. Bharathi, Asst.Professor, Department of Social Work.