

Ethical Issues Analysis Paper:
Structures that Prevent Promoting the Social Well-Being of Clients
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The purpose of this paper is to discuss the structures that prevent me from promoting the social well-being of my clients. These structures and the type of well-being of my clients are as specific to my field placement, a high school. Therefore, the structures include policies that I must follow: those of the school, the district and the program. The aspect of a student's social well-being that I focus on is as within the school environment and on the academic basis, following the standards for social work practice in the school setting: equal educational opportunity, social justice, and the removal of barriers to learning ("NASWCulturalStandards2003.Q4.11," n.d.). This paper has allowed for me to recognize the complexities of ethical challenges and provided an opportunity to put into practice a systematic guideline for resolving ethical dilemmas, namely, using the general decision-making model. I had to understand and delineate the influence of professional roles, personal values and motivations and their status of importance on the resolution of the ethical dilemma.

A Description of the Ethical Issue

There are structures and policies at Columbia High School (CHS) and provided by Communities In Schools (CIS) that prevent me from being able to promote the social well-being of clients to the best of my ability. The policies that the students have to follow are the typical dress code, behavior, and attendance policies that you will find in any school. However, I find that at CHS, the policies are especially punitive. A dress code is supposed to ensure that the students are not wearing revealing or excessively tight clothes. Yet, a girl cannot wear high waisted pants with a cropped top, where none of her midsection is showing. She cannot expose her shoulders, though the staff can. When I went to a grade level meeting about the fights that

were breaking out in the school, the principal dismissed the students row by row. These are just a couple of examples of a theme that I observed at the school, the way they are controlling of the students and punishing in nature, where the structures in place withdraw the autonomy of the students.

Their lunch time is a mere twenty minutes long and they have a Captive class equally long. A student has explained to me that the short duration of lunch prevented her from getting to the following class on time. Standing in the line to get her lunch takes most of the lunch period and then she still has to walk to her next class. Tardiness can lead to In School Suspension (ISS) and being in ISS makes students miss instructional time, class work, and racks up absences.

The physical building of CHS is one building, not many, like the high school that I went to. There are no windows in any of the classes, much less the hallways. The only sunlight anyone in the building can get is from the windows that encompass the four stairways that the building has and from the ones in the cafeteria. Unlike my former high school, there is neither a courtyard nor a garden on the campus. The only opportunity for the students to exit the building and stay on the premises is during lunch, but even then, there are only three tables outside the cafeteria. There are also lots of nooks at the end of hallways and areas where students can be out of sight. I think that these areas allow students a place to hang out when skipping classes and potentially engage in activities that they should not be doing on campus.

CIS has a new policy stating that none of the work done by the staff on sites can be in the evenings or on the weekends. This includes any previous *back-to-school family dinner for all new students* or *“coffee hour” to train parents to support kids on math homework*. This policy limits my use of implementing the multitier model.

CIS also has a policy that states that each site coordinator is required to have ten percent of the school under his/her case management. I find that this policy makes site coordinators take on students that are not particularly vulnerable just to meet the quota. Site coordinators that are new feel that they should take on students who have been in the program in previous years just because they need to meet the numbers and those students are easy to admit. Those students may not necessarily need services. Also, the *Needs Assessment* will be taken but there is no measure for what constitutes the inclusion of a student based on the data gathered in the *Needs Assessment*. I have taken *Needs Assessment* for students that resulted in no risk factors and plenty of student assets. These students were admitted, and a couple are in my caseload.

My Feelings and Personal Values About the Dilemma

I feel that I cannot address the problems of my clients when there is not even the time designated for that purpose. I attend field from nine to three, but I cannot spend most of that time with students. Together with students, I plan and make goals, but I cannot be there with the students when it is time to execute the plans and accomplish the goals.

I dislike that the policies at CHS are so punitive and CIS's policies are so restricting. At CHS, the dress code policies along with the way that the students had to follow orders to exit the grade level meeting was degrading. There are about one-hundred and fifty students in every grade. The auditorium was small. I felt that they could have exited orderly without being handled with such measures. It is true that my individual interactions with clients positively contribute to the way that students view service laden professions, but the interactions that they have with other staff often negates any progress that I make with students.

The physical building of CHS is one thing that really bothers me. It reminds me of prison and I have not even been to a prison before. I cannot be sure as to why the building is designed the way it is. I could not help but wonder if it was intentional.

CIS's restricting policy prevents home visits from being done when the student is actually at home. CIS site coordinators may be able to go on home visits during the school day, but at that time, the student should presumably be in school. Basically, all of the Tier I, school wide, interventions that included parents, can no longer be implemented. It would not be feasible to gather parents during the school day.

I feel that the staff at the school, as well as the students, have been there for so long that they overlook the negative conditions that they uphold and live in. There has been no positive change for so long that they forget or miss the fact that things could be better. I feel that the students would not advocate for change because they think that they are just passing through and that their voices will not be heard. I think the teachers believe that it is not their place to speak up and instead choose to make the best of what they have. Being fresh to the environment, comparing it to my high school experience, and having the advocacy mindset, I think that I am more likely than anyone else at the school to advocate for a better learning environment from the building to the policies.

I feel that the students have lost respect for the teachers and staff and vice versa. I think it is something unfortunate and I think that some of the staff forget that they are there for the students. I do not think that all hope is lost because of the teachers who have not forgotten.

The Reason I Chose Structures That Prevent Promoting the Social Well-Being of Clients

I chose the policies of both CHS and CIS because I am working directly under both and they greatly affect the work I am allowed to do and the client system I serve. I feel that I have the

views I do on the building because of my personal experience. Working in a building like that is depressing for me. I cannot begin to imagine how it is for the students, who are there from seven to three, five times a week, and for four years. It is far from the ideal learning environment. As for CIS's policies, I simply do not understand. It is my understanding that the policies that I addressed are new. Thereby, it would make sense that something has happened for them to implement these changes. I still believe that the benefits of being able to do work after school and on weekends outweighs whatever liability that put them to a stop.

Reviewing the NASW Code of Ethics and the Standards for Practice

The social work values include service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. I find that the ethical principles that are in conflict are for a social worker to respect the dignity and worth of the person and service to people in need, addressing their social problems. Most of the other staff at the school do not respect the students. They do not respect their worth and they do not allow room for growth. Students that have a bad reputation hold that reputation because those around them do not let them change their perceptions of themselves, though most seniors try to get their act together as they prepare for college.

The principles that guide practice in the school setting are education/school reform, social justice, and multitier interventions. Social work in the school setting includes actively helping school systems meet expectations of federal, state, and local mandates. "School social work practice is consistent with these mandates and promotes the academic mission of schools by fostering educational environments that are safe; have supportive, fair, and responsive policies; and emphasize early intervention and positive behavioral interventions" ("NASWCulturalStandards2003.Q4.11," n.d.). Lastly, school social work practice is based on

the multitier model, a model based on three tiers of prevention and intervention

(“NASWCulturalStandards2003.Q4.11,” n.d.).

Not giving the students the respect and autonomy that they value is not just a personal misdeed. When students get sent to ISS because of the way they are dressed, they are not being given the equal educational opportunity. The dress code is a barrier to learning; it is a policy with the preference of the one who put it into place, rather than an unbiased policy aimed at achieving appropriate attire for school.

The same is true for when parents are not given access to resources that they used to be. All the resources that CIS used to provide on the weekends and in the evenings were measures taken and needed. To simply remove them would be to regress and take away resources that once achieved the goal of CIS and social work practice in schools.

Applying the Issue to the General Decision-Making Model

The persons involved are the students and staff at Columbia High, any partners that the school has, and the district. The staff include the school social worker, the principal, the teachers, and the administrators. The students and their families are the clients, but students are the primary clients. The staff at the school are the professionals, along with any partnering resources that work with the school, including CIS and the resources that CIS brings in. CIS along with its partners are support systems of the school.

The staff at the school should be involved in the decision making, as it is part of their job description. Administrators can advocate for changes, but most often, they just follow the rules that are in place. The principal approves of proposals, including the bell schedule. All of the staff at the school are there to serve the students, from the teachers to the administrators. Staff meetings are held weekly, on Tuesday mornings, allowing any staff member to give input on

changes that should be made and issues that need to be addressed. The principal, Ms. Coles, is the one who has ultimate authority to either pass or deny a proposal. If the proposal is given with the students' best interests at its core, Ms. Coles will most likely understand and pass it.

The students value independence, freedom of expression, and self-autonomy. The staff value being able to do their jobs, free of disruptions and being able to do so in a friendly environment. For teachers, that is to teach the students their respective subjects with students being respectful to them and engaged. The values that I hold are those of the social work profession. Here, I find the one that is most relevant to be dignity and worth of people.

I believe that changing the structures that are in place will help the staff of the school achieve their goals and objectives that aim at serving the students, in whatever form that may be and in whatever role they play. I believe it will help the students to learn. At the end of the day, everyone has the same goal, to lead the students to graduation. Everyone just has to play their parts.

Instead of getting the whole building remodeled, I could advocate to get the rooms repainted and do research on what people find inviting and most importantly, conducive to learning. Instead of trying to get the whole bell schedule changed because of the short lunch period, I could find alternative ways for students to get lunch.

Because of how strongly I feel about the prison-like building, I would love for it to be remodeled. However, if my proposal fails, I will try the alternative strategy. As for the bell schedule, I think that the best course of action would be to advocate to change the actual schedule. Finding an alternative food source for so many students will prove difficult. At a staff meeting I hope to address the punitive nature of some of the policies regarding dress code and how easily students can get sent to ISS. I will explain how missing class time has consequences

that are not best for the student and that we all have the same interests; we just need to find the best way to go about achieving them.

Concluding Thoughts

The opening line of the preamble of the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) states, “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty.” My client population fits that description in every aspect of the matter and yet, I would not have described them that way.

I think that this paper has helped me to realize that people cannot always advocate for themselves. Sometimes vulnerable populations may look different than the stereotypical idea. As social workers, it is our job to identify those and advocate for things that they may not be aware they are lacking. It is our job to advocate for things that they have lost hope with.

References

NASWCulturalStandards2003.Q4.11. (n.d.). *Social Work*, 28.

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington, DC: Author.