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The Child Welfare Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley received a curriculum grant from the California Social Work Education Center, with additional support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, to develop empirically based teaching materials promoting competency-based social work practice in the provision of child welfare services.

This curriculum is designed to improve the quality of care provided to children in out-of-home care. More specifically, it highlights the importance of providing child welfare services that are more responsive to the voices of children in kin and non-kin foster care. As a teaching tool, the curriculum is intended for two primary audiences: students in graduate schools of social work/welfare and child welfare workers. Since these audiences may have different needs, the materials are designed to be sufficiently flexible for both purposes. Depending upon the audience and the training time available, child welfare faculty and agency trainers may use the curriculum in its entirety or in part. While most of the findings reported in this curriculum were generated from research conducted in California, all of the curriculum’s sections have a high level of applicability to child welfare practice in other states.

The sections of the curriculum are detailed as follows:

- **An Overview of the Child Welfare System in California: Today’s Challenges and Tomorrow’s Innovations.** This chapter provides an overview of California’s child welfare system, including its goals, policies, programs, and services. The evolving characteristics of children served by California’s system are also described. Finally, the chapter reviews innovations, both within California and nationally, that show promise in responding to some of the child welfare field’s major challenges. While most of the data reported in this chapter were generated from research conducted in California, the chapter’s broad overview has a high level of applicability to child welfare service delivery systems in other states. An instructional guide, transparencies for overhead projector use, and questions for discussion accompany this chapter.

- **Children’s Experiences in Out-of-Home Care: A Review of the Literature.** This chapter highlights literature exploring foster children’s experiences in out-of-home care. Findings from studies employing foster children as research informants are reviewed in relationship to four fundamental child welfare goals: 1) protecting children from harm; 2) supporting children’s families; 3) promoting permanence; and 4) fostering children’s well-being. Since one prominent theme in the literature is that the dearth of children’s voices in foster care research is paralleled by their inadequate inclusion in child welfare practice, this review also identifies opportunities when foster children should play a more active role in case planning and implementation. An instructional guide and questions for discussion accompany this chapter.

- **Kin and Non-Kin Foster Care in California: Children’s Experiences.** This chapter provides findings from an empirical study involving in-person, semi-structured interviews with 100 Bay Area children in kin and non-kin care. When appropriate, the study compares children’s experiences of safety, family, permanence, and well-being by kin/non-kin placement type. Also, for a smaller group of children, some comparisons are made between children’s experiences living with their current caregiver and their recalled experiences living with a
biological parent. An instructional guide, transparencies of study results for overhead projector use, and questions for discussion accompany this chapter.

- **Out-of-Home Care in California: Adolescents’ Perspectives.** This chapter provides findings from three focus groups conducted with adolescent foster youth in a cross-section of California counties. Each focus group addressed nine questions designed to assess participants’ perspectives on their experiences of safety, family, permanence, and well-being while in care. Here, youth recount some of their experiences and make recommendations for improving the delivery of child welfare services. An instructional guide and questions for discussion accompany this chapter.

- **Practice Tips for Child Welfare Workers.** A review of the literature, interviews with foster children, and focus groups with adolescent foster youth informed the development of practice tips for child welfare workers. These practice tips are designed to help child welfare workers improve the quality of care provided to children and their caregivers. Practice tips are presented, as well as children’s verbatim responses to open-ended questions asked during in-person interviews.

- **Case Vignettes.** Twelve vignettes were generated from actual child welfare cases. While the case information is incomplete, the vignettes are designed to prompt discussion about children’s experiences of safety, family, permanency, and well-being while in care. Accompanying each vignette are standardized questions for discussion, case-specific questions for discussion, and suggested role-playing exercises.

- **Bibliography.** Relevant child welfare texts and articles are cited.

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This curriculum was developed by Adair Fox, M.S.W., Karie Frasch, M.S.W., and Jill Duerr Berrick, M.S.W., Ph.D. As the Director of the Center for Social Services Research at U.C. Berkeley, Dr. Berrick was the Principal Investigator. Ms. Fox and Ms. Frasch are Research Associates at CWRC and doctoral students at U.C. Berkeley.

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Curriculum Competencies for Public Child Welfare Practice in California

Section 1 – Ethnic Sensitive & Multicultural Practice

1.1 Student understands and is sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences of clients.

1.2 Student considers the cultural norms, beliefs, values, language, race, ethnicity, customs, family structure, and community dynamics of major ethnic groups in the State of California in assessments and continues training to increase knowledge in this area.

1.3 Student is able to develop an ethnically sensitive assessment of a child and the child’s family and adapt casework plans to that assessment in the provision of child welfare services, while demonstrating an understanding of the continuum from traditional to acculturated values, norms, beliefs and behavior of major ethnic groups.

1.4 Students can develop relationships, obtain information, and communicate in a culturally sensitive way.

1.5 A student considers the influence of culture on behavior and is aware of the importance of utilizing this knowledge in helping families improve parenting and care of their children within their own cultural context.

1.6 Student has knowledge of the legal, socioeconomic and psychosocial issues facing immigrants/refugees.

1.7 Student is able to evaluate models of intervention such as family preservation, family centered services, family-centered crisis services for their application, possible modification and relevance to cultural and ethnic populations.

1.8 Students understand the importance of client’s individual language and its use in assessment and treatment of children and families in child welfare services.

1.9 Student understands and uses knowledge in the provision of child welfare services to cultural and ethnic populations.

1.10 Student can distinguish diagnostically between the traditional culturally based disciplining and child rearing practices of cultural and ethnic families and those of the dominant society and will be able to differentiate “culturally different” from “abusive” behavior.

1.11 Student is able to advocate for equity in availability of resources and services.

1.12 Student has knowledge of and applies the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

1.13 Student participates in community outreach activities and develops and maintains collaborative relationships with individuals and groups in community agencies and organizations.

1.14 Student has knowledge of and applies the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and related federal and state child welfare legislation.

Section 2 -- Core Child Welfare Skills

2.1 Student understands that child abuse and neglect are presenting symptoms of social and family dysfunction.

2.2 Student is able to assess the interaction of individual, family, and environmental factors that contribute to abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse, and identifies strengths which will preserve the family and protect the child.

2.3 Student recognizes and accurately identifies physical, emotional and behavioral indicators of child abuse, child neglect, and
child sexual abuse in child victims and their families.

2.4  Student gathers, evaluates, and presents pertinent information from informants, case records, and other collateral sources to support or refute abuse of neglect allegation.

2.5  Student has knowledge of the special characteristics and situations of the low-income family and the single parent family.

2.6  Student understands the dual responsibility of the child welfare caseworkers to protect children and to provide services and support to enable families to care for their child.

2.7  Student recognizes signs and symptoms of drug and alcohol abuse in children and adults and assesses the impact on families and children: understands individual and family and cultural dynamics in substance abuse.

2.8  Student understands the dynamics of family violence, including spouse abuse, and can develop appropriate culturally sensitive case plans for families and family members to address these problems.

2.9  Student accurately assesses the initial and continuing level of risk for the abused or neglected child within the family while ensuring the safety of the child.

2.10  Student understands policy issues and legal requirements affecting child welfare practice, including confidentiality, worker liability, reasonable effort requirements, minimum sufficient level of care, least restrictive environment, permanency planning, establishment of paternity, and knows how to implement these requirements in practice.

2.11  The student understands the mission and goals of public departments of social services and the network of community child welfare services. Student understands the process of the court system and the role of social workers in relation to the courts.

2.12  Student understands the potentially traumatic effects of the separation and placement experience for the child and the child’s family and the negative effects on the child’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

2.13  Student recognizes the signs of institutional abuse in foster care, residential care, and other institutions in which children are placed and can report evidence to appropriate child welfare personnel.

2.14  Student understands the principles of permanency planning and the negative effects that inconsistent and impermanent living arrangements have on children.

2.15  Student understands the importance of the biological parent maintaining contact with the child in placement, of encouraging parents when appropriate to participate in planning, and of regular parent-child visitations.

2.16  Student understands the medical, legal, and social management needs of children with special medical needs such as HIV disease, drug dependency, and the medically fragile child. The student helps foster and birth families in meeting those needs, and in coping with the stresses of such care.

2.17  Student works collaboratively with foster families and kin networks, involving them in assessment and planning and supporting them in coping with special stresses and difficulties.

Section 3 – Social Work Skills & Methods

3.1  Student demonstrates social work values and principles; this includes self-determination, respect for human dignity
and worth, and respect for individual differences.

3.2 Student conducts effective ongoing case assessment and planning.

3.3 Student demonstrates the ability to evaluate and incorporate information from others, including family members and professionals in assessment, treatment planning, and service delivery.

3.4 Student conducts effective casework interview.

3.5 Student understands the importance of and demonstrates the ability to work with the client in the community including home, school, etc.

3.6 Student is aware of his or her own emotional responses to clients in areas where the student’s values are challenged, and is able to utilize the awareness to effectively manage the client-worker relationship.

3.7 Student assesses family dynamics, including interaction and relationships, roles, power, communications patterns, functional and dysfunctional behaviors, and other family processes.

3.8 Student understands crisis dynamics, identifies crises, and conducts crisis intervention activities.

3.9 Student uses a variety of methods and strategies to interview and elicit information from children and adolescents that are age appropriate and consistent with social work values and ethics.

3.10 Student has knowledge of how clients are non-voluntarily referred to public child welfare.

3.11 Student can engage clients, especially non-voluntary and angry clients.

3.12 Student engages families in problem solving strategies and assists them with incorporating these strategies.

3.13 Student has knowledge of and understands how to work collaboratively with other disciplines that are routinely involved in child welfare cases.

3.14 Student can produce concise, required documentation.

3.15 Student understands group process theory and can develop and implement small groups.

3.16 Student knows and demonstrates appropriate parenting strategies.

3.17 Student assesses the family from a person-in-environment (PIE) perspective.

3.18 Student develops and implements the case plan based on the assessment.

3.19 Student understands and utilizes the case manager role in creating and sustaining a helping system for clients.

3.20 Student understands and knows how to plan for and implement home-based services whenever possible to prevent removal of child from their homes.

3.21 Student effectively and appropriately uses authority, while continuing to use supportive casework methods to protect children and engage families.

3.22 Student is able to evaluate the need for removal and placement of a child by weighing the risk to the child of continuing to remain in the home against the potential trauma of separation and placement.

3.23 Student understands and conducts an ongoing process of reassessment and makes appropriate modifications to the case plan.
3.24 Student understands the strengths and concerns of diverse community groups and is able to work with community members to enhance services for families and children.

3.25 Student understands how to plan and conduct appropriate placement activities for children, using the concepts of concurrent planning.

Section 4 - Human Development & the Social Environment (HBSE)

4.1 Student understands children’s developmental needs and how developmental levels affect a child’s perception of events, coping strategies, and physical and psychological responses to stress and trauma.

4.2 Student has a thorough knowledge of the stages, processes and milestones of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of children.

4.3 Student understands the process of human sexual development and behavior.

4.4 Student understands the potential effects of child abuse and neglect on child/adult development and behavior.

4.5 Student can recognize when human development is delayed or follows abnormal patterns and can identify contributing factors.

4.6 Student understands the stages of the family life cycle as they occur in a variety of familial patterns.

4.7 Student understands the interaction between environmental factors especially in terms of racism, poverty, violence, and human development.

4.8 Student understands the impact of adult/parental substance abuse on child development and family functioning.

4.9 Student understands the impact of adult/parental psychopathology on child development and on family functioning.

4.10 Student understands the dynamics of adolescent sexuality and teen pregnancy and can assist the teenage parent in understanding his or her developmental needs in assuming parental responsibilities.

Section 5 – Workplace Management

5.1 Student effectively negotiates with supervisor and professional colleagues, systems and community resources to further accomplish professional, client, and agency goals.

5.2 Student is able to work effectively in a diverse environment.

5.3 Student can understand client and system problems from the perspective of all participants in a multidisciplinary team and can assist the team to maximize the positive contribution of each member.

5.4 Student is able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization in which he or she works.

5.5 Student is able to identify the strengths and weakness of the organization’s approach to cultural diversity and the development of cultural competence.

5.6 Student can effectively use advocacy skills in the organization to enhance service delivery.

5.7 Student seeks both client and organizational feedback in practice evaluation and in improving effectiveness of service delivery.

5.8 Student demonstrates a working knowledge of the relationship process of accessing community resources available to families and children; utilizes them appropriately and updates as necessary.
5.9 Student can develop a strategy to identify new agency and community resources to meet client needs.

5.10 Student is familiar with a range of collaborative models.

5.11 Student is aware of organizational policies about workplace safety and is able to develop skills at identifying and solving potentially dangerous situations on the job.

Section 6 – Child Welfare Policy, Planning & Administration

6.1 The student demonstrates an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a leader/manager in public child welfare.

6.2 Student demonstrates knowledge of specific laws, policies, court decisions, and regulations essential to child welfare services.

6.3 Student understands how a leader facilitates effective teamwork for the purpose of planning, formulating policy and implementing service.

6.4 Student understands how to use information and technology to evaluate practice and program effectiveness.

6.5 Student can demonstrate knowledge of how organizational structure and climate impact service delivery, worker productivity and morale and how students can contribute to improvement.

6.6 Student can demonstrate knowledge of public child welfare funding streams for public child welfare agencies and their implications for agency policy objective and service delivery priorities.

6.7 Student can identify how the legislative process impacts agency policies, procedures and programs.

6.8 Student can demonstrate knowledge of contracting for services in public child welfare and understands how these services can be evaluated.

6.9 Student understands the purpose of evaluation and the use of evaluation to achieve accountability at every level of the organization.

6.10 Student understands the leader’s responsibility to plan and develop systems that address the diversity of staff, children and families in public child welfare.

6.11 Student understands that decision-making processes in public child welfare practice require ethical reasoning that is informed by professional stands.

6.12 Student understands how managers create opportunities for collaboration with other work units, related agencies, regulatory bodies, courts and law enforcement.