

Infusing a New Ethical Decision-Making Model Throughout a BSW Curriculum

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Abstract

Will BSW graduates be able to make ethical decisions in practice? This article describes the research, selection and implementation of an ethical decision-making model infused in a BSW curriculum. Informed by Program assessment data, a two-year implementation process is described, including sample course units, learning activities and teaching strategies.

Keywords: Ethical decision-making, teaching ethics, teaching values, curriculum design, undergraduate social work education

1. Introduction

The 2008 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Education Policy and Accreditation Standards focuses on developing student competencies for generalist social work practice. Competency in the application of “social work ethical principles to guide professional practice” is demonstrated in social workers who:

- recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice

- make ethical decisions by applying standards of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics
- tolerate ambiguity in resolving ethical conflicts
- apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008, E.P. 2.1.2)

Under the previous 2001 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards that were curriculum driven, the Social Work Program used data from Field Instructor evaluations, alumni self-assessment and employer surveys to evaluate the accomplishment of the Program objective related to values and ethics in social work practice. Analysis of this data suggested this Program objective was being met. With the current CSWE Education Policy and Accreditation Standards’ (2008) focus on demonstrating competencies, course embedded measures were added to the Program assessment protocol. After this assessment change a different picture of students’ ability to use an ethical decision-making model appeared. BSW seniors

in their Capstone Seminar were asked to resolve macro level ethical dilemmas presented in their field practicum. Students struggled with the ambiguity of organizational ethical dilemmas and were unable to articulate the strategy they had been taught or to apply ethical principles to come to a reasoned decision. On a rubric designed to measure the application of ethical decision-making, students did not meet Program assessment benchmarks. Informed by this Program assessment data, the Program faculty embarked upon a two-year process to adopt an ethical decision-making model that baccalaureate students could readily comprehend and apply as entry level social workers.

2. Review of the Literature

A search of the best practices in teaching values and ethics was completed, beginning with a review of theories that inform ethical decision-making. Kohlberg's developmental theory on moral thinking (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010) describes a stage model focused on how ethical sensitivity and moral judgment develops. Conventional thinkers have a moral certainty based on the conviction that following the letter of the law will lead to moral decisions. For students at this stage of moral development, legal mandates, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008), and agency policy become "rules" to follow. In contrast Kohlberg suggests that post-conventional thinkers consider multiple morally relevant factors to determine the best course of action. Kohlberg cautions that following rules may not always result in the best ethical decisions. Finally, Kohlberg suggests that many individuals never advance beyond conventional thinking or develop the understanding that moral decisions require consideration of multiple complexities (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Neo-Kohlbergian theory (Kaplan, 2006) describes moral development that occurs through experience and knowledge, a process which leads the individual to a more developed schema over time resulting in moral reasoning with increased complexity. Gilligan (2005) adds that moral

decision-making involves an inter-relational emphasis and that the "ethic of care" becomes crucial in the ethical decision-making process.

Vygotsky postulates a sociocultural theory of learning that emphasizes the importance of culture, history and social factors on learning and decision-making (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003). This learning theory supports the idea of scaffolding that moves the learner to ever increasing levels of complexity. The zone of proximal development, the space where the student is currently and where the student can achieve with guided instruction, is an important concept to the development of ethical decision-making (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003).

The review of the literature also included a search for successful methods of teaching ethics and ethical reasoning. Ethics education requires reflective engagement and reiterative process, not just memorization without application. The pedagogies suggested are service learning, reflective journaling, case studies, discussion, dialogue and practice over time (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; Harrington & Dolgoff, 2008; Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). The literature is mixed on the advantage of a stand-alone ethics course versus an integrated or infused curriculum (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Many authors have proposed models for ethical decision-making (Abels, 2001; Dolgoff, Lowenberg, & Harrington, 2009; Linzer, 1999; Reamer, 2006; Rhodes, 1991; Strom-Gottfried, 2007). Both rational and reflective models of ethical decision-making frameworks exist. The rational or process models are linear structures with a logical sequence of steps from the identification of issues to the resolution of the ethical dilemma (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; McAuliffe & Chenoweth, 2008). Rational frameworks vary in complexity from practical step models to more complex multi-leveled models which incorporate a screening process based on ethical principles and rules. The reflective models include intuitive as well as rational components; for example, the feminist approach acknowledges issues of power and relationships as well as the

feeling process in making decisions (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; McAuliffe & Chenoweth, 2008). While each model has strengths, many models present complexities and levels of cognition that exceed the developing critical thinking skills of undergraduate social work students, leaving them with only a rudimentary understanding of ethical decision-making and few actual skills in utilizing and applying the process to actual social work practice experiences (Abrami, et al., 2008; Gibbons & Gray, 2004; Paul, 2006).

The ETHIC Model (Congress 1999, 2000) was selected as the most appropriate model for

BSW students because the concrete sequential steps provide an easy-to-remember framework. Congress (1999) first developed the ETHIC Model to help social workers make ethical decisions as quickly and effectively as possible. The original Model includes an emphasis on values, the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and the context of social work practice (Congress, 2000). In 2009, Congress added the Advocate step to the Model (Table 1) to expand the focus on oppression and the search for social justice in ethical situations (personal communication, E. Congress, 2009). Table 1 outlines the Congress (2009) Model of ethical

Table 1 ETHICA Model and Program Redesigned Model

ETHICA Model (Congress, 2009)	E T H I C S-A Model: Redesign for enhanced teaching and learning.
Examine issue and dilemma.	Examine the situation—determine if this is an ethical dilemma. Examine values—personal, societal, agency, client and professional values.
Think about values--personal, societal, cultural, agency, client and professional.	Think about ethical issues, principles, standard laws or policies that apply to this ethical dilemma.
Hypothesize possible scenarios and consequences of different decisions including the role of advocate.	Hypothesize all possible decisions or options.
Identify who will benefit or be harmed with a commitment to the most vulnerable.	Identify consequences of each possible decision or option.
Consult with supervisor and colleagues about possible ethical choices.	Consult with supervisor and colleagues about ethical choices. Select decision or ethical action and get support.
Advocate within agency, social work community, local, state and national.	Advocate for change on appropriate system level. Document both decision-making process and ethical decision. Legal scan: is the process and decision ordinary, reasonable, and prudent?

decision-making and the subsequent changes the Program faculty made implementing the Model in the BSW social work curriculum.

The original ETHICA Model (Congress, 2000, 2009) was changed based on faculty and student feedback. The Social Work Program faculty redesigned the original ETHICA Model (Congress, 2009) to become the ETHICS-A Model. The 'Select and Support' step was added to make students conscious of the final decision step and the need for support after the decision is made (Table 1). A documentation section was added to the end of the Model based on the advice of a social work attorney to assure that the decision-making process is legally sound (NASW-MN Ethics Committee, 2009). Changes were made to the wording of the steps and further development of the questions posed in each step to improve the clarity in teaching the Model to BSW students. The redesigned ETHICS-A Model was presented to social work educators and practitioners, resulting in additional changes that improved the teaching-learning process.

The teaching and learning of the ETHICS-A Model includes a series of questions at each step that presents the basic concept and then encourages the student to examine the complexity of the ethical situation from a variety of perspectives. These questions become a guide that teaches the student to use the steps or rules as a conventional thinker in actual social work practice. Further, the scaffolding of questions poses simple to more complex concepts which encourage post-conventional thinking about multiple relevant factors.

3. Method

The Program faculty determined that infusing ethics content into several social work practice courses would be preferable to a stand-alone ethics course. This would allow for a reiterative process, reinforcing concepts and scaffold learning activities in order to encourage more complex ethical thinking over time. The process of curriculum immersion began by the identification of the ethical concepts of values, boundaries, and the NASW Code of Ethics (2008)

as crucial foundation knowledge. Next, the teaching strategies of case and service application, in-class discussion, and written reflection were selected to facilitate the acquisition of the core concepts. Finally, the content and process of ethics learning was infused into selected social work courses. Each course contained one or more core concepts with each course building upon the previous with some reiteration of content or teaching strategies.

Table 2 outlines the courses in the Social Work Program where the ETHICS-A Model is taught. Each course contains aspects of the ethical decision-making process that builds upon the previous course in depth and complexity. In each course the Model is taught at a particular system level (micro, mezzo or macro) that coincides with the course content. Students are able to develop a systematic approach to using the ETHICS-A Model in multiple contexts and situations. Table 2 highlights the ethics instruction in each course followed by instructional details.

Table 2 Curriculum Sequence of ETHICS-A Model

Course	Level	Ethics Concept	Learning Activities
Introduction to Social Work	First Year or Sophomore	Introduce NASW Code of Ethics.	
Social Work through Service Learning	Sophomore	Personal v. professional value identification. Personal v. professional values. Cross-cultural value identification. NASW Code of Ethics, focus on dual relationships. Introduce ETHICS-A Model and practice Examine and Think steps.	Small group exercise. Large group discussion. Small group exercise Written case application. Boundary self-assessment Cross-cultural case application Small group exercise
Practice I: Individuals and Families	Junior	Entire ETHICS-A Model	Group exercise and student presentation of ETHICS-A Model use in case.
Practice II: Groups and Communities	Senior	Community ethical dilemmas.	Group exercise, use of ETHICS-A Model.
Senior Capstone	Senior Concurrent with Field Education Practicum	Organizational ethical dilemmas Ethical Decision making in actual practice situation.	Case study exercise from organizational perspective. Written ETHICS-A Description paper.

National Association of Social Workers (2008)

4. Introduction to Social Work: Managing Personal and Professional Values

The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) is presented to students in the first course in the major, Introduction to Social Work. Students read about professional values in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) preamble and also identify important personal values. The instructor provides examples of professional social work values and facilitates a small group discussion of value laden cases. Students use small group discussion to discern the difference between personal and professional values

apparent in the actions of social workers in the case situations. Finally, the instructor poses more complex questions regarding the overlap of personal and professional values in client-social worker interactions. For example, “Does a social worker ever disclose personal values to a client?” This question provides an opportunity for students to think more deeply about their own beliefs and about the boundary between personal and professional obligations. Five strategies are shared to encourage students to continue their own value clarification in light of the professional values of social work (Roeder, 2009). Table 3 details the learning activities in this course.

Table 3 Introduction to Social Work: Managing Personal and Professional Values

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	The Preamble and Purpose of the NASW <i>Code of Ethics</i> in your text. Write two important personal values you hold and bring to class.
In class short lecture	Values defined: In social work values are “what is considered right.” Present the professional values of social work.
Small groups case study	What were the personal values of the individuals in the case? What personal values do you think the social worker held? What values of social work were evident in the social worker’s interactions in the case? Name the professional value and provide an example from the case to illustrate that value. What values of social work were not evident in the case? What do you think were the barriers that kept the social worker from putting this value into practice? What would you have done differently?
Class Discussion	Each group reports their case and identifies personal and professional values.
Values: Critical thinking activity	Instructor poses questions and responds to student ideas. Each group reports their case and identifies personal and professional values.
Resolution strategies	<i>Challenge yourself</i> to use your current level of competence and capability. <i>Enhance your education.</i> Focus on the mission and purpose of social work while obtaining additional education to work with value conflicts. <i>Consider training</i> to serve clients with diverse values. <i>Seek in-agency or solicit out-of-agency consultation.</i> Use expertise of colleagues and supervisors to develop value-based skills. <i>Consider therapeutic intervention.</i> Explore the practice and personal challenges that prevent you from serving clients to gain resolution. <i>Provide a referral.</i> It may be in the client’s best interest to provide a referral to allow access to needed services. (Adapted from Roeder, 2009)

5. Social Work through Service Learning Course

Values, boundaries, and the ETHICS-A Model are units of study in the second course in the major, Social Work through Service Learning. The ETHICS-A Model was added to existing units in this course to provide students a decision-making process to resolve value and boundary dilemmas. The value clarification questions used in the Introduction to Social Work course

are purposefully repeated in the first unit in the Service Learning course, with a case that adds the dimension of cultural difference and an ethical dilemma to value identification. In this complex exercise students are actually completing a value assessment of all the diverse individuals in light of ethical concerns--the same process employed in the Examine step of the ETHICS-A Model.

Table 4 details the values case application exercise in the Service Learning course.

Table 4 Service Learning Course: Personal and Professional Values in Cross-Cultural Practice

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	Congress, E. P. (2000). What social workers should know about ethics: Understanding and resolving practice dilemmas. <i>Advances in Social Work</i> , 1(1), 1-25. Una Rosa case in Rivas, R., Hull, G. (2004). <i>Case studies in generalist practice</i> . 3 rd . Ed. Belmont, CA: Brooks Cole.
In-class short lecture	Discuss the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) Professional values and preamble statement.
Small group case study	What are the personal values of Una Rosa? What personal values do you think the social worker held? What values of social work were evident in the social worker’s interaction with Una Rosa? a. Provide a case example to illustrate the social worker’s values. b. What values of social work were not evident in the case? c. What do you think were the barriers that kept the social worker from putting this value into practice? d. What would you have done differently?
Discussion	Share your small group value discussion with class.
Short Lecture	What is an ethical dilemma? Using the Una Rosa case, instructor assists students in understanding that this situation poses more than an ethical question and is an ethical dilemma.
Small Group	Use the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) to respond to Una Rosa’s request for friendship after the end of a professional relationship.

Boundaries are the second unit in the Service Learning course presented through reading, self-assessment, and in-class activities. The students complete a boundary self-assessment (Corey & Corey, 2003) followed by an instructor-facilitated discussion of boundary crossing, bartering, gifts, improper requests, sexual attraction, and boundary violations. This lively discussion is grounded in the concepts of professional values, cultural competency, and the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), especially dual relationships in Standard One of the Code. Again

an applied teaching strategy of case application is used to identify ethical issues inherent in the dual relationship case situations. Often the greatest learning occurs as students attempt to justify their answers to the challenging questions that follow each case using the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) standards. This boundary exercise (Table 5) replicates the process students will use in the Think Step of the ETHICS-A Model, using the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) standards as well as ethical principles, laws, or policy to inform the decision-making process.

Table 5 Service Learning Course: Professional Boundaries

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	Chapter 10: Managing Boundary Issues From Corey, M., Corey C., (2003). <i>Becoming a helper</i> . (4 th ed.) Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Thomson Learning.
Complete boundary self-assessment, Corey page 254-255 and bring your answers to class.	Which item on the assessment gave you pause? Which item is a new idea to you? Which item do you have questions about?
Review PowerPoint slides	Managing boundaries and dual relationships.
Instructor facilitated class discussion	From your self-assessment identify a boundary issue of concern to you. What is the ethical issue of your boundary concern? What do you think is the professional response to that issue? What is your personal response to this boundary issue?
Small group case study	Identify the boundary issue in the case study. Use the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) Dual Relationship section to devise a response to the case. Prepare a summary for class discussion.
Class Discussion	Each group reports their case and identifies boundary issue and ethics informed response.

Next the ETHICS-A Model is presented to students in the third unit of the Service Learning course (Table 6). The Una Rosa cross-cultural case (Rivas & Hull, 2004) used to identify values in the first unit is now the focus of a decision-making process applying the ETHICS-A Model. Because the values and ethical concerns were already identified, the students are able to use this basic assessment to think critically through the more advanced questions in the Examine and Think Steps of the ETHICS-A Model. Thus, the scaffolding process of simpler to more advanced

critical thinking is employed through the value, boundary, and ethics case application exercises in this course. Students begin this course reviewing personal versus professional values and end the course applying the first two steps of the ETHICS-A Model to a fairly complex cross-cultural and boundary case. Table 6 describes the questions posed at each step in the ETHICS-A Model.

Table 6 Service Learning Course: Introduction ETHICS-A Model

Step	Corresponding questions
<p>Examine Step Determine if an ethical dilemma. Identify the relevant values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it a practice concern or ethical dilemma? ○ What exactly is the situation? What are the known facts? ○ Are the pressing issues ethical, moral, legal or a combination? ○ Who are all the players and their roles, and how are they affected? ○ What values help in understanding the context of the situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the Social Worker’s personal values that apply to the situation? • What are the client values? • What cultural values could impact the situation? • Which social work professional values relate to dilemma? • What are the agency values?
<p>Think Step Consider ethical issues, principles, standards, laws or policies that apply to this ethical dilemma.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Describe, in writing the ethical dilemma. ○ Who could be harmed in this ethical situation? ○ What is your professional power in relation to client? ○ What are the specific areas of ethical conflict? ○ Which standards in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) apply? ○ Which federal, state, and local laws may impact the ethical dilemma? ○ What written or unwritten agency policies or practices pertain to this situation?
<p>Hypothesize Step Specify all decisions or options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are all the reasonable and possible ethical choices or actions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List all possibilities as a visual description of actions provides a different level of cognition to decision-making process. • Choosing not to act is a legitimate choice. ○ What have other people recommended?
<p>Identify Step Pinpoint consequences of each possible decision or option.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In the short and long term, what is the impact of each option on employers, clients, social worker, society, self, practice settings, the profession, and license boards? ○ Who will benefit or be harmed the most, the least? ○ What are the consequences in terms of finances, legality, emotionality, colleagues, self-esteem? ○ What are the dissonance and ambiguity of the ethical situation?
<p>Consultation Step Confer with supervisor and colleagues about ethical choices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What did your supervisor advice in this ethical situation? ○ What new information, different perspectives or additional options were gained from colleagues while maintaining confidentiality? ○ Would a case conference be appropriate in this ethical situation? ○ Could an ethics committee assist in a multidiscipline ethical situation?

(Continued)

Table 6 Service Learning Course: Introduction ETHICS-A Model (continued)

Step	Corresponding questions
Select action and get Support Step Make decision or choose ethical action and seek support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the reasons for or against each course of action? ○ Which option is selected that is the ‘least harmful’ action for each party involved? ○ Which option assures the rights of the most vulnerable? ○ Where can you secure support from colleagues, consultation, ethics codes, licensing, literature, or evidence-based practice?
Advocacy Step Take action for change on appropriate system level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does this ethical situation indicate the need for change within the agency, within the social work community? ○ Is change required of local, state, or national policy or laws? ○ What is your advocacy role now that you understand this ethical dilemma?
Document Step Write the decision-making process and action taken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What was the process used to determine ethical decision? ○ What was the rationale for the ethical action taken? ○ When and whom did you consult?
Legal Step Scan decision-making process for legal standards of ethical practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the decision prudent: a careful, cautious “do no harm” choice? ○ Is the decision reasonable: the result of a conscious, thoughtful, planned and deliberate process? ○ Is the decision ordinary: what an average practitioner would do using the NASW Code of Ethics (2008)?

6. Practice I: Micro Case Application of ETHICS-A Model

The next course in the sequence of learning ethical decision making is Social Work Practice I: Individuals and Families. The focus in this junior level course is the use of the ETHICS-A Model to make a practice decision (Table 6). Students review the ETHICS-A Model previously learned in the Service Learning course. Next, in small groups students apply the Model to make an ethical decision in a domestic violence and child abuse case. To allow students the time to use all of the steps in the ETHICS-A Model, the ethical dilemma is identified for each group. The roles of the three social workers in the case are quite different, providing students the opportunity to make an ethical decision from the perspective of the worker’s particular agency – a domestic-violence,

child-protection, or mental-health agency (Thomlison, 2010). As each small group reports in class their ETHICS-A Model process and final ethical decision, students learn the variety of ethical actions that could be made in the same case situation. Students’ ability to understand differing agency values, varied professional perspectives, and unique client obligations is the expected outcome in this ETHICS-A Model exercise. Table 7 details the three different social work roles and the identified ethical dilemma in this case exercise.

In the Practice I course the ethics unit is taught at the end of the semester after students complete a four-hour social worker shadow and two days volunteering in a local homeless agency. Practicing the ETHICS-A Model after these actual community experiences gives students a reality context in which to ground their decision-making process.

Table 7 Practice I: ETHICS-A Micro Case Application

Read Case Study Jeanine pp. 190-191 in Thomlison, B. (2010). *Family assessment handbook* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson.

Case # 1: You are the social worker at the domestic violence agency that assisted Jeanine in filing a restraining order after she entered the shelter. As a social worker in this agency you are obligated to serve Jeanine and her son, Ryan. Child Protection Services has filed a petition to remove Ryan from his mother and place in foster care. Jeanine has asked you to assist her in preventing this placement. You determine that an ethical dilemma exists between your responsibility to serve Jeanine and protecting Ryan.

Case # 2: You are a social worker in Child Protection Services who completed the investigation regarding the safety of Ryan. After consultation with your supervisor you filed a petition to remove Ryan from his mother's care to protect him from the effects of witnessing the domestic violence between his parents. In consultation with the domestic violence shelter you learn that Jeanine has filed a restraining order against her husband Rick and is cooperating with services in the agency. Jeanine asks you to allow Ryan to remain with her at the shelter until she can establish a home for the two of them. You determine that an ethical dilemma exists between your responsibility to Ryan's safety and providing supportive services to his mother.

Case # 3: You are a social worker at the community mental health center. You have completed an assessment of Rick, who voluntarily came to the center seeking services for domestic violence. Upon the recommendation of his attorney, Rick is seeking services to prevent prosecution from the domestic violence charges. You are impressed with how open and honest Rick was during the assessment as he took partial responsibility for the violence in the family. However, you are not sure if you believe that Rick is motivated for treatment or if he is attempting to circumvent the legal consequences of his situation. As a social worker you determine that an ethical dilemma exists. You are concerned that if you provide services to Rick and he escapes prosecution and later abuses his wife you may be responsible. Yet you believe everyone deserves the opportunity to change.

Large Group presentation of case decision

Each group explains the **process** used to reach an **ethical decision** in the case. (Adapted from Thomlison, 2010).

7. Practice II: Community ETHICS-A Case Application

Practice II: Groups and Communities, a course taken during the senior year, focuses on ethical dilemmas and decision-making at a macro level. Students learn more about the NASW Code of Ethics, particularly our ethical responsibility to the Profession and the broader society (2008).

Students use the ETHICS-A Model to reach an ethical decision in a community-focused case study. Through discussion and case application, students learn that ethical decisions involve multiple constituencies and contexts in macro situations. By this time students have been exposed to the ETHICS-A Model in multiple courses, applying the Model at micro, mezzo and macro system levels.

Table 8 Practice II: ETHICS-A Model Community Practice

Pedagogy	Course Activities
Before class read	Read the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) with attention to Standards 5 and 6.
In class short lecture	Discuss the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) concerning ethical responsibility to the profession and society.
Small group case study discussion	Use the ETHICS-A Model to come to an ethical decision in the case. Share small group decision-making process.
Short lecture	Discuss the social justice implications of each macro ethical decision.

8. Senior Capstone Course: ETHICS-A Model in Organizational Practice

Ethical practice in organizations is the focus of the Senior Capstone course completed concurrent with Field Education. Mid semester the ETHICS-A Model is reviewed with eye rolling and student comments like “not again.” However, a case discussion of a medical social worker in an ethical bind among the physician, the hospital administration, and her client brings to light the Advocacy step of the ETHICS-A Model. This challenging case includes information about the impact of power differences in ethical decisions and the use of an Ethics Committee to assist in life-threatening situations. As students are immersed in their field practicum by mid semester, the realization that ethical advocacy on behalf of a client may result in organizational change is the intended outcome of this case application.

After the in-class organizational ethics application, students are asked to identify an

actual ethical dilemma in their field agency, to use the ETHICS-A Model to come to a decision, and to detail their process and resulting ethical action in an ETHICS-A Description Assignment. Capstone faculty assesses the student’s ethical decision-making process using the following rubric (Table 9).

9. Findings and Discussion

The best practice of teaching ethics suggested service learning, reflective journaling, case studies, discussion, dialogue, and practice over time (Gray & Gibbons, 2007; Harrington & Dolgoff, 2008; Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). The Service Learning course provides the foundation of values, boundaries and ethical decision-making in three course units. In addition to case applications in the content areas, students participate in 25 hours of volunteer service in a human service agency. Students journal about their service and integrate that experience with self-selected course concepts. Many students

choose to write about values or boundaries in their Integrative journals. For example, a student early in the semester wrote this:

Keeping the drop-in center open shows the professional values of self-worth and dignity. They [the agency] put their clients' best interests first so they have a safe place to go where they won't feel alone in the recovery process. I sat and listened to one man talk for over two hours because that is what he needed. This was a humbling experience for me and when I was done, I felt good. I had listened with an attitude of dignity and respect and hopefully made him feel a little better that day.

The student's ability to 'see' the values of social work in community programs and in their own volunteer experience may assist students in learning how value-based practice will inform the ethical decision-making process. However, in this sophomore-level course students rarely reflected in their journals about ethical issues or concerns. Faculty realized that students at this level may not have the ability to identify ethical concerns in their volunteer experience. This experience mirrors the literature findings that sophomores may be more concrete thinkers and will develop the ability to recognize ethical issues with additional course content and guided practice.

During the implementation of the ethics curriculum, faculty found that moving to the next level of complexity in processing ethical decisions often requires the instructor to use additional class time. Though practiced in previous courses, the Examine and Think Steps are complex and students often struggle to identify exactly what is the ethical dilemma. After a 60-minute group discussion of the Examine Step, the Practice I case application was changed to state the ethical dilemma (Table 7). The small groups were then able to complete the entire ETHICS-A Model

case application in one class period. Further, the Practice I ethics unit was moved from the beginning to the end of the semester after students completed several community experiences. Based on the case application results, it was clear that students required some agency experience to complete the complex ethics practice case.

With any curriculum change, ongoing formative and summative assessment informs the teaching-learning process. End-of-semester course evaluations indicated modifications to the ethical decision-making teaching in individual courses. For example, the students in the Service Learning course expressed being overwhelmed using all standards of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) to inform the Una Rosa case application (Rivas & Hull, 2004). Consequently, the focus changed to Standard One, specifically dual relationships in subsequent semesters (NASW, 2008).

Summative assessment is planned using the Senior Capstone Ethics Description Assignment as a course-embedded measure. The 2012 class completed the infused ethics curriculum and met the global bench mark for ethical competency as defined in the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008, E.P.2.1.2. In this first group, 80% of the students achieved a score of 80% or better on the Ethics Description Assignment. In 2013, rather than a global bench mark the four ethics practice behaviors will be assessed in the Ethics Description Assignment. The opportunity to compare 2012 data with subsequent classes will help Program faculty understand if BSW seniors are able to make ethical decisions in practice.

10. Conclusion

The instructional methods employed in teaching the ETHICS-A Model mirrors suggested theoretical and pedagogical teaching models from the literature. Students move from concrete thought process to more sophisticated abstract thinking through each course in this ethics-infused curriculum. The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and redesigned ETHICS-A Model (Congress, 2000) are

applied at multiple system levels to demonstrate application of ethical decision-making in generalist practice. The teaching process reiterates concepts from course to course to foster concrete learning of the decision-making “steps.” Once students learn the basic steps of the ETHICS-A Model they are able to conceptualize when the questions in each step may or may not be applicable to particular practice situations. The teaching strategies across courses emulate the scaffolding and zone of proximal development models from Vygotsky (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003).

Teaching ethical decision-making to undergraduate social work students is critical in light of the complex practice environment graduates are entering. Through careful attention to ethics instruction and multiple practice opportunities, students can develop decision-making strategies that will be regularly used in practice situations. Students’ cognitive decision-making state and environmental context (student background, previous education and prior experience) will impact the students’ ability to master ethical decision-making successfully. By utilizing a developmental values and ethics curriculum, ethical competency can be accomplished at the undergraduate level.

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