FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ORAL EXAMINATION
JACQUELINE STOKES

FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
EdD

Friday August 14, 2009
College of New Caledonia
Board Room 3-330 at 2:00 PM

EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair: Dr. Fred Renihan

Senior Supervisor: Dr. Adam Horvath
Member: Dr. Glen Schmidt
Member: Mr. Peter Cunningham
Internal/External: Dr. Cynthia Lewis
External Examiner: Dr. Gerard Bellefeuille
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PRACTICE WISDOM IN CHILD PROTECTION DECISION MAKING

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study was to explore the complexity of everyday decision-making in child protection. Specifically the research examined the factors social workers are paying attention to when they are making decisions in order to understand the different sources of knowledge that social workers draw upon in practice.

Methods: This was an exploratory study using a factorial survey approach, which combines elements of survey research and experimental design. Case vignettes were constructed by randomly assigning characteristics to vignettes that research indicates have an effect on assessing child risk. Child protection social workers assessed the vignettes on risk level, the importance of a home visit, the number of contact hours they would have with the family as well as the services they would provide.

Results: The results indicate the factors that are paid attention to when making a decision, and the kind of knowledge that is used, depends on the kind of decision that has to be made. Social workers are more likely to utilize technocratic, evidence-based knowledge from the case situation when making decisions about risk level or service provision; whereas factors about the social worker and his or her work environment are more influential in their desire to develop subjective, or contextual, knowledge.

The research also revealed that structural issues such as income and race, as well as the resources and strengths of the client are not statistically reliable factors in decision-making.

Conclusion: Child protection practice and decision making is complex. In every day practice, it seems that social workers are using a combination of empirical knowledge and experiential knowledge. As child protection policy in B.C. refocuses on collaborative practice models, paying attention to the development of self-reflective practice is as important as the ongoing attainment of evidence-based knowledge if social workers are to develop practice wisdom in their decision-making.

Academic Record

1996 - Master of Social Work, University of Northern British Columbia
1985 - Bachelor of Social Work, University of British Columbia

Professional Experience

2004 - Present Faculty, College of New Caledonia, Prince George
2001 - 2004 Regional Manager, Addictions Services, Northern Health
1998 - 2001 Manager, Ministry for Children and Families, Prince George
1996 - 1998 Faculty, University of Northern British Columbia
1985 - 1993 Executive Director, Mackenzie Counselling Services, Mackenzie