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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

CURRICULUM MODULE OR INTEGRATING FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Caught Between Two Cultures

By: Dorothea Marie Epple, Ph.D., LCSW

Primary course: Human Behavior in the Social Environment (BSW or MSW course)

Secondary course: The module is adapted to an MSW Individual and Family Practice Class

CURRICULUM MODULE ON HOLDING ON LOOSELY

I. Core Competency Addressed:

Competency 3: Apply critical thinking in practice

Competency 4: Incorporate Diversity into Practice

Competency 7: Apply Knowledge of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

Competency 10: Engage, assess, intervene and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

II. Specific Practice Behaviors Related to the Module:

Practice Behavior 1: Transform one's behavior in response to recognition of one's biases based on difference and culture.

Practice Behavior 2: Adapt information and interventions to meet the needs of diverse populations and / or to challenge oppression

Practice Behavior 3: Apply strengths and empowerment perspectives with diverse groups.

Practice Behavior 3: Engage in ongoing learning about diversity and culture.

Practice Behavior 4: Examine one's role as a life-long learner in the area of diversity and culture.

Practice Behavior 5: Differentially apply theories and frameworks of human behavior and the environment, recognizing underlying assumptions, values strengths, and weakness of the theories.

III. Materials Needed and/or Assigned Readings:

Fifer, Sally J. (Producer) Wong, E. (Executive Director). (2003). *Daughter from Danang* (Film) . (Available from PBS home video www.pbs.org).

The film is utilized for students to demonstrate critical thinking and application of developmental theories, family dynamics, oppression, and the impact of two diverse cultures on a young adult who is born of an American serviceman and a Vietnamese woman and adopted into an American home following the Vietnam War.

Hutchison, E. D. (2008). Dimensions of human behavior: person and environment. Sage Publications: New York.

Hutchison, E. D. (2008). Dimensions of human behavior: the changing life course. Sage Publications: New York.

An alternate Human Behavior in the Social Environment text book could be utilized to the specifications of the course.

Straughan, Hope Haslam (2008). *Spiritual Development*. In Hugen, B. & Scales, T. L. (Editors) *Christianity and social work: readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* 3ed edition. North American Christians in Social Work: Botsford, CT.

Additional Materials Needed for the Secondary Course: Individual and Family Practice:

Kilpatrick, A.C. & Holland, T. P. (2009). *Working with families: an integrative model by level of need*. Pearson: Boston.

An alternate Family Therapy text book could be utilized to the specifications of the course.

IV. Description of the Module:

Heidi, the main character in this Academy Award Nominee film, was born to an American serviceman and a Vietnamese woman during the war. Later the seven year old child was placed on an 'Operation Baby lift' plane to be adopted by an American family in the effort to avoid persecution of racially mixed children. Twenty-two years pass before she is reunited with her family in Danang and caught in a clash of cultures. This film sets the stage for the application of theories learned in Human Behavior and Social Environment Class. The second module utilizes the film in a Family Practice Class to assess family dynamics in two different cultures, the long term affects of separation issues, and family practice theories.

Module 1. Human Behavior and Social Environment Class (BSW or MSW)

Assignment on Application of the Theories Discussed in Class: This culminating paper, in Human Behavior and Social Environment Class, gives the students the opportunity to apply the theories discussed in class. Each student will view the film "Daughter From Danang" a PBS Academy Award Nominee Home Video. Students will assess the main character, Heidi, utilizing three of the theories discussed in class i.e. Erickson, Bowlby, Ainsworth, Kohlberg, Piaget, Levinson, Arnett. Students will also assess the main character in the film from the person and environment perspective based on Biological, Cultural, Spiritual, Family Systems, and Physical Environment. The spiritual assessment will include Hope Haslam Straughan article on spiritual development. This final assignment is a formal paper and provides a comprehensive understanding for the students' learning in this course. All references and quotes are to be completed using APA style. Be concise and engaging. A suggested format for the paper includes:

- **Introduction** – Provide a concise introduction to the paper.
- **Section one** – Micro Level - Discuss the main character, Heidi, from three self selected theoretical models i.e. Erickson, Bowlby, Ainsworth, Kohlberg, Piaget, Levinson, Arnett. Discuss her early years in Vietnam and her adoption to a single Caucasian middle class American family following the war. Utilizing these developmental theories examine her early developmental years, her middle and adolescent years in a new country, new culture, new faith and new family. Examine her current life challenges in early adulthood as she reunites with her biological family. Contrast her relationships with her Vietnamese family and her relationships with her American family and how they impacted her early development and affected her current life challenges.
- **Section two** – Mezzo Level – Heidi is impacted by two cultures. Discuss the main character from the biological, cultural, family system, and physical environment perspective. How have these major differences affected Heidi? Consider the physical environment in her 'home' in America and her reaction to her biological family 'home' regarding privacy, control, affection, expectations, hygiene, laundry, cooking, and food.
- **Section three** – Spiritual Development - Address both cultures spiritual beliefs, and the individual vs. collective values of the family systems. Use Fowlers stages of faith development to assess Heidi's spiritual development. Joan Borysenko's bio psycho

spiritual model (see Hope Haslan Stroughan's article) embraces a communal spiritual developmental process. Examine the usefulness of Borysenko's feminist approach to development in helping Heidi face her questions of purpose, meaning and felt sense of significant relationships. Examine Borysenko's metaphor of 'dancing Sarah's circle' as an image to ponder in Heidi's early relationships with family of origin, relationships in adoptive family and now in her marriage and children.

- **Conclusions** – Provide a concise concluding paragraph that summarizes the main points of the paper and represents a direction that a social worker may work with this "client" to help her resolve her current life challenges and find meaning in her past experiences.

Alternate Class Activities and Assignments:

Another option for utilizing this film in Human Behavior and Social Environment class is to have the students watch the film at the beginning of the semester. As the semester progresses, each new lesson taught on developmental theory is discussed reflecting on this film. Student groups are utilized. Each group has specific questions each week related to the integration and application of theory. The individual groups then report back to the larger class. Questions include but are not limited to:

1. Examine the developmental theory of Erickson and the psychosocial challenges for Heidi at each stage of development.
2. Examine Bowlby's and Ainsworth's theories of attachment and the effect on Heidi's acculturation into the American culture.
3. Examine Heidi's story through the lens of Fowler's faith stages. Consider values, beliefs, the sense of meaning in regard to the tasks, tensions and challenges at various times in Heidi's life.
4. Develop an eco map, a geno gram, and a cultural gram for Heidi.
5. Discuss Heidi's response to the culture, physical living arrangements, food, spiritual practices, family expectations, and boundaries related to physical closeness as she reunited with her biological family.
6. Discuss Heidi's feelings and thoughts as she returned to America on the plane.
7. Discuss her challenges in life after visiting her biological family.
8. Discuss how a social worker may work with Heidi to find meaning and purpose in her life experiences. Utilize Hope Haslam Straughan article on "Spiritual Development" to explore Heidi's spiritual development.

Module 2: Individual Family Practice Class (MSW Program)

Experiential Group Practice Assignment for Application of Family Treatment Theories

This film is utilized in a family practice class with a focus on the understanding and application of family therapy models. Family theory models are assessed regarding appropriateness to the clients presenting problem and evidence based research. Role play is incorporated and offers experiential practice in building a relationship with Heidi and developing and implementing goals and interventions. Student groups are utilized. Each group has specific questions related to the integration and application of theory. The individual groups then report back to the larger class discussion. Questions include but are not limited to:

1. Examine roles, rules, boundaries, triangles, secrets and homeostasis for Heidi's adoptive family and family of origin.
2. Draw an eco map and a geno gram.
3. Identify family life cycle transitions.
4. Discuss the impact of culture, social class, economic structure, gender and power on Heidi and her adoptive family and family of origin.
5. Identify the strengths in both the family of origin and the adoptive family. Identify Heidi's strengths.
6. Identify the religious beliefs and practices of Heidi's adoptive family and family of origin.
7. Identify the family therapy model (Social Learning Theory, Cognitive Behavioral Theory, Solution Focused, Bowen Family Systems Theory, Narrative Family Interventions, Object Relations Family Interventions) that is most appropriate to the clients presenting problem, level of need (as described by Kilpatrick & Holland) and evidence based research. Explain your decision.
8. Discuss the importance of the client therapist relationship especially in light of Heidi's separation from family of origin and later disconnection with her adoptive mother. What issues of transference may develop (trust, abandonment, and commitment)? How do these issues relate to Heidi's faith development? What would Fowler say about the importance of trust in early relationships related to the development of faith?
9. Each group role plays the initial sessions of presenting issues, obtaining a Bio psycho social spiritual family history, building a relationship with Heidi, and identifying goals and interventions.
10. Each group role plays a section of work with Heidi to find meaning and purpose in her life experiences. (Hope Haslam Straughan article on "Spiritual Development" is utilized as a base of understanding for this role play).

V. References

Fifer, Sally J. (Producer) Wong, E. (Executive Director) . (2003) . Daughter from Danang (Film) . (Available from PBS home video www.pbs.org).

Hutchison, E. D. (2008). Dimensions of human behavior: person and environment. Sage Publications: New York.

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