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TRAINING

A Time for faculty renewal; valuing Child and Youth Care education

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Child and Youth Care Education has evolved over the past 35 years. In Canada alone we have seen a shift from no child and youth care educational programs to roughly thirty two- or three-year diploma programs, eight degree programs and two options for masters and doctoral studies (Phelan, 2004). Indeed we have seen growth and the evolution and establishment of programs mirror the needs and changes within our field. As with every other profession, Child and Youth Care on its road to professional status required professional training in order to gain acceptance, and as a result most Provinces established their programs independently of other jurisdictions. This development also coincided well with the growth of the community college network creation of the 1970's.

Along with the establishment of child and youth care services and education came the growth towards a child and youth care profession. Kelly (1990, 167) assessed the child and youth care professionalization fifteen years ago and identified the following characteristics that are required in professional identity and status:

(1) formal education;

(2) an organized body of knowledge with theoretical underpinnings and minimum

competencies;

(3) research activity,

(4) a code of ethics regulating the profession;

(5) a professional culture or association supporting a long term commitment to the occupation;

(6) autonomy and self regulation; and

(7) a clientele which recognizes the authority and integrity of the profession

Clearly, fifteen years ago there were gaps in our professional evolution and areas of address required in reaching full professional status. Variations according to nation, province/state and regional evolution means that each jurisdiction is likely at a different point in addressing each of these characteristics. We have seen considerable gains in the development of educational programs and development of our body of knowledge and research activity.

In the early establishment of our educational programs we relied on faculty whose formal education was grounded in social work, psychology and social science disciplines. There were no options to have those with child and youth care education to take leads, as graduate level training in this area was not available. Granted, many of those in educational leadership roles had practical background in the child and youth care field and would be considered child and youth care workers to the core. We today are now at a critical turning point in which the reigns of Child and Youth Care programs will be passed to a new generation of faculty. We now have the opportunity to reassess what should be the characteristics of those being hired into child and youth care educational programs with preference provided to candidates who have child and youth care specific education and practical experience.

Trends in the US and Canada demonstrate a huge turnover in faculty across disciplines. This clearly is being seen within child and youth care education. Our educational pioneers (look at the body of work within our child and youth care journals and on CYC-NET) are at or nearing retirement. We can probably expect to see up to a 50% turnover in faculty within most educational programs nationally over the next five years (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). To what extent will faculty renewal include the expectation that candidates have specific educational background in child and youth care? Should it?

These questions in no way are meant to downplay the role that our educational pioneers have played in our professional evolution. Instead, they highlight the impact that other disciplines have had on our educational development. We have matured and it is time to re-examine whom we want to guide our future development.

If we examine trends in other similar educational programs, for example, nursing and social work education, we will note that those disciplines have an expectation that those teaching have MSW or MSN degrees respectively. It would seem ludicrous to expect social workers to

be taught by psychologists or nurses by physicians. If we are to continue to develop our professional identity and to instill a sense of our discipline to our students then it is now time to ensure that our students' mentors be child and youth care workers first and academics second. This trend can be seen in many programs across Canada. It is time for our educational programs to ensure that faculty selection involves a concerted effort to value child and youth care education and to assist in ensuring that we move away from a paraprofessional status through the acknowledgement that we are different than other disciplines and thus require our training to be conducted, primarily, by those with our specialized training. We will always have room for others with allied training just as we value multidisciplinary practice, yet faculty who are child and youth care educated must be primary roles.

We will have an opportunity to assist in our professional development, gain more status as a profession and send the message to our students that we are unique. It is time for a focused faculty renewal plan. It is time to ensure child and youth care workers become leaders in their education.

References

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