PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

In order to prepare for the rapid growth in the Social Work field (16% or 109,000 jobs by 2026), programs need to expand online education offerings to reach more potential students (BLS Occupational Outlook, 2018). Offering Social Work Education online makes the profession available and accessible to students more readily. Teaching Social Work in an online environment presents many challenges and can raise concerns about student preparedness for practice (Reamer, 2012). Through a mixed-methods study, I intend to assess student preparedness for Field Education, and present a model demonstrating effective online practices in an effort to influence perceptions.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- How, and to what extent, can we adequately prepare students for Field Education in online Social Work Programs?

- Measuring student self-efficacy and preparedness for field education, with interview questions around these constructs - preparation, technology utilization, challenges, and assessment.

CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The overall goal is to adequately support and prepare our students for social work Field Education courses, and ultimately practice. Participants in this study were field placement coordinators in Cycle 0, and field placement coordinators and faculty who support a closely related program (Counseling) in Cycle 1. In future cycles, students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Social Work program will be studied.

THEORIES GUIDING THE RESEARCH

The frameworks chosen are a combination of e-learning theory and self-efficacy. These theories help shape the development of the online learning environment, and the outcomes to be measured in student’s preparedness for Field Education.

CYCLE 0 AND CYCLE 1 INNOVATION/INTERVENTION

Survey and Interviews are being held with Field Placement Coordinators and similar-program faculty during Cycle 1 to assess student needs within field education preparation. In future cycles, the intervention I will hope to develop is a set of online asynchronous field education orientation modules for our Bachelor of Science in Social Work students. These modules are intended to increase student self-efficacy and preparedness for field practice. This intervention will foster change within the students’ professional development and preparedness for social work practice.

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