

Development of self-awareness and cultural competency in social work education

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Both self-awareness and cultural competency are well-known concepts in the social work profession. There is a myriad of research on both subjects; however, empirical research on each concept is limited. In addition, the relationship between self-awareness and cultural competency has rarely been explored. The goal of this research was to explore social work educators' views on the concepts of self-awareness and cultural competency as well as the relationship between the two concepts. Three different but interrelated studies were conducted. In the first study, the identification, development, and teaching of self-awareness were investigated. Thirty-five social work educators representing 27 colleges and universities across the United States participated in this study. The phenomenological approach of qualitative research was used to address research questions. The method of collecting data was phone interview. The main result indicated that resiliency and self-awareness are associated. In the second study, the relationship between self-awareness and cultural competency were explored along with generalist educators' methods for teaching cultural competency. Sixteen social work generalist educators were selected by convenience sampling from 15 colleges and universities across the country. The main data-collection method was conceptual interview. The core result showed that in teaching cultural competency, educators rarely evaluated Whiteness and White culture. In the third study, clinical social workers' views on the relationship between self-awareness and cultural competency and their methods for teaching cultural competency were evaluated. Nineteen clinical social work educators from 17 colleges and universities were selected by convenience sampling. The method of inquiry was the phenomenological approach of qualitative research. The key results determined that emotion has a significant role in teaching cultural competency and that teaching about racism was seldom a chief concern of clinical educators. When looking at these three studies together, the research suggests that exploring self-awareness should precede exploring the relationship between self-awareness and cultural competency. The research also suggests that studying cultural competency through self-awareness is a new perspective that needs more attention from social work researchers.