Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: A Gap in Social Work Education and Social Work Field Education

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Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture:
A Gap in Social Work Education and Social Work Field Education

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A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University / University of Saint Thomas
School of Social Work

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Abstract

Social work education and the signature pedagogy of social work, field education, allow students to learn social work ethics. Within the agency setting of field placement, social work students experience organizational culture and organizational climate. The purpose of this banded dissertation is to understand the relationship between ethics learned within the classroom and field education, specific to organizational culture and organizational climate. Ecological and general systems theory provides the conceptual framework to understand the relationship.

Social work ethics and organizational culture are experienced in field education. Product One, a conceptual paper, asserts the need for understanding organizational culture and its relevance to field education. Understanding ethics and organizational culture is imperative to students’ learning and preparation for field education. Incorporation of organizational culture in social work ethics education will enhance social work education and ethical practice.

A qualitative systematic review research study for Product Two, asked the question how might field education effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics and organizational culture? Study results indicate the relevance of incorporating organizational culture, organizational climate and social work ethics in teaching social work field education.

A workshop presentation was given at the National Association of Social Workers Ohio Chapter Conference for Product Three. This presentation presented the concept of social work ethics and organizational culture with field education, based upon Product One of the banded dissertation.

Organizational culture and organizational climate are important factors that influence and impact social work ethics and practice. There is a need for these concepts to be incorporated into
social work ethics education and the pedagogy of field education. Without such education, social work students are not adequately prepared for field education or acculturation to the profession and ethical practice of social work.
Dedication/Acknowledgements

Dedicated to the glory of God, in thankfulness for being my rock, strength and guide to complete this journey, fulfilling a God given dream for a DSW; to my daughters, Emily and Natalie, for your love, support and belief in me, you are my inspiration; and thankfulness for the love from heaven of my parents and love of my life, Larry.

Thank you to the faculty and staff, my roommates, cohort 2 - I have learned from each of you and gained my voice. Thank you to my ‘village’-my family, friends, church and Emmaus family-who have walked this journey with me with love and encouragement to take the next step; special thanks to Jane Hoyt-Oliver, PhD, Rebecca Evanoff and Rebecca Fort for your mentorship, support and guidance.
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Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture:

A Gap in Social Work Education and Social Work Field Education

The field of social work is a helping profession. Social workers address a myriad of different problems with various types of people. They provide services in different settings and locations within agencies and organizations at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. For these reasons, social work is also known as a profession of many faces (Morales & Sheafor, 1980). Despite these differences, there are central factors within the practice of social work. These include the purpose of the social work profession, social work education, social work ethics, and the practice of social work within organizations or human service agencies.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) establishes the mandates and expectations for both baccalaureate and master’s level social work education within the United States. The CSWE’s (2015) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) identifies that the purpose of the social work profession is to “promote human and community well-being” through the enhancement of the “quality of life for all persons, locally and globally” (p. 5). CSWE identifies field education as the signature pedagogy of social work. Through a competency-based education framework, with nine identified competencies, the CSWE’s EPAS directs that social workers must understand the profession’s ethical values and standards, which is evidenced by demonstrating ethical and professional behavior.

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2017), a foundational premise and “the core of social work” is professional ethics (p. 2). The NASW Code of Ethics illustrates the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of social work and serves to guide all social workers and social work students in ethical practice. The NASW Code of Ethics may also be used by organizations and human service agencies as a frame of reference for ethical
standards and practice. The first competency of the CSWE’s (2015) EPAS is to “demonstrate ethical and professional behavior”, making “ethical decisions through the application of the NASW Code of Ethics” (p. 7). Social workers and social work students will thus learn about social work ethics through their social work education and the social work pedagogy of field education.

The ability to integrate both personal and professional ethics is necessary and important for social workers. Vallereal (2005) purports that this integration is “either self or organizationally imposed” (p. 64). Vallereal further asserts that the acceptance of professional ethics as personal ethics is “honest ethical practice” (p. 67).

Professional social workers and social work students at the bachelor or master’s level will most often seek work and/or field education placement within a human service agency or organization. The types of organizations sought will vary, though each will have its own identified mission, vision, goals, purpose, and population to be served. Kungelman-Jaffee (1990) describes organizations as “social units deliberately constructed to seek specific goals” (p. 18). Organizations are each unique, malleable, and subject to change and will incorporate contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities, and confusion (Bellot, 2011). Two particular contexts within organizations are organizational culture and organizational climate.

Organizational culture is considered to be the beliefs, values, and norms that are fundamental within an organization’s operations (Ouchi & Wilkens, 1985; Glisson, 2007; Trevino, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998). The way an organization’s environment is perceived is known as its organizational climate. Organizational climate is created as workers “share the same perception of how the work environment affects them as individuals” (Glisson, 2007, p. 739). Organizational culture and organizational climate have been researched and studied by multiple
disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology and psychology, since the 1970s (Ouchi & Wilkens, 1985; Glisson, 2007). This research has contributed to understanding the role of organizational culture within an organization. Organizational culture has been used to determine and predict the relationship and behaviors of workers, including performance, worker morale, service quality and delivery, the effectiveness of an organization, and the influence upon ethical and unethical behavior (Glisson, 2007; Kaptein, 2011; Agbenyiga, 2011; Trevino et al., 1998).

Social workers, as professionals and/or as students, are required to practice ethically. This is mandated by the professional standards set forth by the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics and the educational standards established by CSWE (2015). Learning and understanding the concepts of ethical social work practice will occur within the classroom through the explicit and implicit curriculum. It will also occur within an organization, in conjunction with demonstrated behaviors and experience, during field education placement.

In the research that comprises this banded dissertation, it is asserted that organizational culture and organizational climate will have an effect upon the learning, understanding, and practice of social work ethics. It is proposed that organizational culture may not be specifically included in the teaching of social work ethics, though organizational culture and organizational climate will be experienced during the field education placement. This raises the question of what social work students learn about social work ethics through the explicit and implicit curriculum and through the field education placement. The purpose of this banded dissertation is to study and understand the relationship between social work ethics as learned within the classroom and as learned and experienced within the field education placement, specifically in relation to organizational culture and climate.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this banded dissertation is based upon the theory of ethics in conjunction with ecological and general systems theory. For the purposes of this banded dissertation, the theory of ethics is based upon Barker’s (1995) definition of ethics and the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics. Barker (1995) defines ethics as “a system of moral principles and perceptions about right versus wrong and the resulting philosophy of conduct that is practiced by an individual, group, profession or culture” (p. 124). The core assumptions of ethics theory are that key beliefs and standards guide behavior and practice, and that dilemmas occur due to conflicting values. Core concepts of this theoretical framework include right and wrong values, codes of ethics, and moral behavior. The theoretical proposition is that a lack of understanding regarding ethics and standards will prevent a social worker’s ability to recognize ethical dilemmas, and non-adherence to ethical standards will result in unethical behavior. The NASW Code of Ethics is illustrative of the theory of ethics, as it provides ethical principles, ethical standards, and social work values while giving guidance for ethical social work practice.

The ecological theory maintains a systems perspective with the assumption that there is interactive and interdependence within all systems, environments, and persons. Within these interactions and relationships, there is reciprocal influence, connectedness, complexity, transactions, and adaptations that occur at all levels: micro, mezzo and macro (Murphy & Dillon, 2011; Gitterman & Germain, 2008). This theory proposes that effective intervention can occur by understanding persons, their environments, and the interactions that occur between them.

General systems theory emphasizes “the reciprocal influences between people and the environmental circumstances they encounter” (Von Bertalanffy as cited in Walsh, 2010, p. 231). General systems theory, therefore, makes the assumption that any change, behavior, or
interaction will affect and create change within a system. This will occur at any level: micro, mezzo or macro; it will be reciprocal, ongoing and constant. Thus, the proposition of general systems theory is that persons and environments are interactive and effect change within systems such as individuals, families, communities, or organizations.

The theory of ethics is foundational to the conceptual framework for this banded dissertation. The ecological theory allows for understanding the different systems/environments, interactions, and interdependent relationships in which social work students function, experience social work education, and learn social work ethics. Through the ecological framework, social work students are identified to be involved in the systems of their individual schools, institutions, social work departments, specific field agencies or organizations, social work faculty, field instructors or supervisors, and personal and professional ethics.

The conceptual framework of general systems theory provides a way of understanding, identifying, and addressing the relationships, homeostasis, boundaries, and flow of information between these systems. This framework establishes a construct for being able to determine and evaluate what the relationship is (if any) between the learning of ethics within the classroom and the learning of ethics within the field education placement—specifically the relationship to organizational culture and organizational climate.

**Summary of Banded Dissertation Products**

This banded dissertation consists of three products: (a) a conceptual paper, Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: Impact on Social Work Field Education; (b) a qualitative systematic review, Organizational Culture and Social Work Ethics: Relationship to Field Education; and (c) a presentation, Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: Impact on
Social Work Field Education, given at the 2017 NASW Ohio Chapter Conference. This presentation was based upon Products One and Two.

The First Product, *Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: Impact on Social Work Field Education*, a conceptual paper, proposes the importance of understanding social work ethics as learned within social work education and its relationship to what is learned about social work ethics within the field education placement, specifically to organizational culture and organizational climate. The review of literature provides information regarding ethics, social work education, field education, organizational culture, and organizational climate. There is, however, a lack of information that addresses the relationship, impact and/or effect organizational culture and organizational climate will have upon the learning of social work ethics during the field placement. The purpose of the paper is twofold: (a) to add to the literature the importance of understanding the relationship of organizational culture and organizational climate to social work education, ethics, and field education and (b) to incorporate the teaching of organizational culture into social work education in order to enhance the learning of social work ethics and preparation for field education placement.

The Second Product, *Organizational Culture and Social Work Ethics: Relationship to Field Education*, is a qualitative systematic review. This qualitative systematic review addresses the question, “How might field education effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics and organizational culture?” A premise of this qualitative review is that organizational culture (broadly) and organizational climate (specifically) are important sources of influence and invite ethical consideration. The results of this qualitative systematic review make a case for the relevance of the incorporation of organizational culture, organizational climate, and social work ethics in teaching social work field education.
The Third Product, *Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: Impact on Social Work Field Education*, is a presentation based upon the concepts of Product One and the findings of Product Two. Following a peer-reviewed acceptance, paper three was presented at the 2017 NASW Ohio Chapter Conference on November 17, 2017. The conference theme was “Social Workers Stand Up.”

**Discussion**

In fulfilling the purpose and mission of the social work profession, social workers practice in a myriad of settings and provide a multitude of services at micro, mezzo and/or macro levels. Through social work education and the directives of the CSWE’s EPAS, social work students learn practice skills, ethics and professional behavior, cultural diversity, issues of social, economic and environmental justice, policy, and research and engage in the social work pedagogy of field education. Social work ethics and the experience of work or field education within an organization is foundational to social work practice for students and professionals. Social workers and social work students are expected to engage in ethical practice and to uphold the values and standards of the social work profession within all settings.

Through their field education placement, social work students have the opportunity to integrate learning of theoretical and conceptual constructs into the practical world of social work (CSWE, 2015). Field education, a laboratory for social work students, allows for “learning by doing” (Sunirose, 2009). Castro-Atwater and Hohnbaum (2015) propose that field education within an organization allows a student to become a “transitional professional” (p. 272). They assert that students will be able to identify with and learn from organizational professionals. This may include “questionable experiences” (p. 272), such as unethical behaviors.
The premise to this banded dissertation is that social work students will experience and be influenced in their learning, development and practice of social work ethics, and their acculturation as professional social workers by the organizational culture and organizational climate of an organization. Thus, social work students need to have an understanding of organizational culture and organizational climate, and their impact upon social work ethics and practice. Therefore, social work education needs to include organizational culture, organizational climate, and social work ethics within its curriculum, particularly in the preparatory teaching for field education. The findings of this banded dissertation give evidence that this topic is important and relevant to social work classroom education and social work field education.

The literature reviews for all three Products in this banded dissertation identified a research gap. Current literature includes information regarding ethics, social work ethics, social work education, social work field education, and organizational culture and organizational climate. The literature relevant and specific to organizational culture, organizational climate, and human service organizations is limited, with the exception of literature related to child welfare agencies. No literature was discovered that identified a relationship between the learning of social work ethics and the experience, understanding, or effect of organizational culture for social work students within the social work pedagogy of field education.

Through the research of the qualitative systematic review, three broad themes and topics emerged. The first theme, the process of ethical development, is illustrated by Papouli (2016a, 2016b). Through two studies, Papouli provides evidence that students integrated theory and practice, and learned about ethics and values during field placement from both positive and negative ethical experiences. The development of social work ethics also occurred as students were able to practice within the field, be aware of ethics within every occasion, and view field
instructors as ethical role models and managers as ethical leaders. The process of ethical development included ethical engagement identified as “regular discussion of ethical issues in daily practice” (Papouli, 2016a, p. 385). A non-supportive work environment was identified as effecting and creating stress which subsequently affected a student’s ability to practice ethically and led to “poor ethics learning outcomes” (Papoulia, 2016, p. 386). This evidences a relationship between the effect of the field education placement and organizational culture and climate in the development of social work ethics.

The resources related to ethics and organizational culture that are available to social workers is a second identified theme. The primary resource identified for students was their field instructors or supervisors, followed by peer consultation, learning opportunities within the organization, and the NASW Code of Ethics. Consultation and use of the NASW Code of Ethics as a resource for resolving ethical matters was limited in frequency (Dodd, 2007; Smith, Cleak, & Vregdenhill, 2015). Social workers tended to accept situations as a “fixed reality” when they had no resources and tried to change situations on their own, but they felt powerless and did not risk changing the situation (Papadaki & Papadaki, 2008, p. 176).

The third identified theme is the context of organizational culture and organizational climate. Papadaki and Papadaki (2008), Papouli (2016a, 2016b), Dodd (2007) and Roeder (2009) all indicate a relationship between organizational culture, organizational climate, social work ethics, and ethical practice. Topics of confidentiality, interprofessional relationships and teamwork, interagency work, agency policy with fiscal issues and delivery of services, clients, and organizational management and leadership were specific topics related to the context of organizational culture and organizational climate (Smith et al., 2015). These concepts were considered to be relevant to social work education and social work field education.
The research acknowledged the importance for social work students to be aware of the areas identified through these themes. The research both references and recommends that the areas of these themes should be addressed in social work education and preparation for field education. Though there is no direct recommendation to include the concepts of organizational culture and organizational climate within social work education and social work ethics, there is a significant implication for the relevance of this inclusion.

Further evidence of the identified gap was illustrated by the comments and discussion received during the workshop presentation of Product Three at the 2017 NASW Ohio Chapter Conference. Participants acknowledged the topic as being important, valuable, and relevant; admittedly, they had not considered the relationship of social work ethics and organizational culture, nor had they considered students’ experiences during the field education placement. Participants reported gaining a different perspective on understanding students’ learning, behaviors, and interactions with the field placement and organizations upon realizing the effects an organization’s culture has on social work students. Many acknowledged that the topic provided clarification and validation for students’ negative experiences during field education due to organizational culture and climate

**Implications for Social Work Education**

The focus of this banded dissertation has asserted strong implications for social work education and the pedagogy of social work related to field education. Each product is based upon social work education, the teaching of social work ethics, and field education as directed by CSWE (2015) and its nine educational competencies. This banded dissertation has introduced the concepts of organizational culture and organization climate relative to social work students’ experiences within the field education placement. The literature review and research findings
give evidence of a gap in social work education and social work field education in terms of how organizational culture and organizational climate are experienced within the field education placement. However, in many cases these concepts are not a part of social work education, social work ethics, or preparation for field placement. Without the inclusion of organizational culture and organizational climate in the context of social work education and ethics, social work students are not adequately prepared for what they will experience within a field placement organization. The findings of this banded dissertation indicate that social work organizational culture and climate do affect social work students’ ethics, practice, and experiences during field education.

Silverman (2014) asserts that it is important and necessary for social workers to “have an awareness of the importance of organizational assessment; an understanding of organizational purpose and culture; and, finally, an understanding of organizational systems inclusive of subsequent alignment of people and processes” (pp. 93-94). The ability to understand, adjust, and balance the interactions and tensions that occur within the organization, while implementing the mission and practice of an organization are difficult and may have significant impact upon the quality of the work experience (Spitzer, Silverman, & Allen, 2015). Silverman (2014) has identified this as organizational awareness, which includes awareness of organizational assessment, organizational purpose, organizational culture, and organizational systems (p. 2). Silverman advocates for organizational awareness to be considered a new social work competency. This dissertation supports Silverman’s advocacy for the CSWE to include organizational awareness as an additional competency in its EPAS. This would ensure that organizational culture and organizational climate would be included in social work education, social work ethics, and teaching for field education.
Implications for Future Research

The findings of this banded dissertation suggest a strong implication for future research that specifically addresses the relationship of organizational culture and social work ethics during field education placement. The research studies of the qualitative systematic review, though small in number, provided significant data regarding this topic. These studies need to be replicated while giving specific identification to organizational culture, organization climate, and social work ethics.

Without a CSWE competency for organizational awareness, research is needed to identify social work students’ understanding and awareness of organizational culture and organizational climate during their field education. Do social work students have an awareness of social work ethics related to and affected by organizational culture? Including field instructors and supervisors in the research regarding students’ awareness and understanding of organizational culture both broadly and specific to their own organizations is also necessary. Without the understanding or acknowledgement of organizational culture and social work ethics by these primary resources, social work students may not effectively learn or experience these concepts. A mixed methods study would be a significant research approach to addressing this.

Research is also needed to identify and address organizational culture within human service organizations. This research would fill the identified gap within the literature between social work education, ethics, and social work field education as related specifically to organizational culture.

Conclusion

The future of the social work profession is determined by social work education. Through education that provides knowledge, academic excellence, research, evidence-based practice, and
values and ethical standards—and includes the social work pedagogy of field education—social work students will enter the profession being able to practice as ethically competent professional social workers. The inclusion of organizational culture and organizational climate within social work education, ethics, and field education will enhance student learning, ethical development, and acculturation to the social work profession. This will allow students to enter the field of social work as competent, ethically practicing social work professionals.
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Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture:

Impact on Social Work Field Education

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Author Note

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Abstract

Using the ecological framework, this conceptual paper asserts the need for students to understand organizational culture and its relevance to field education. Social work ethics and an understanding of organizational culture are imperative to students’ learning in field education since integration of classroom learning, theoretical concepts, practice skills, and ethics all occur in field education. Students also encounter and experience agency milieu, organizational culture and organizational climate in their field education. Student acculturation to the profession, ethical behavior, and practice are all impacted by organizational culture and organizational climate during field education. Incorporation of organizational culture into ethics education for field education will enhance social work learning and ethical practice.

Keywords: ethics, organizational culture, organizational climate, field education
Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: Impact on Social Work Field Education

The foundation and standards for social work education is established by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Through explicit curriculum, all social work students learn theoretical constructs, practice skills, and ethics. The signature pedagogy of social work education is field education (CSWE, 2015, p. 12). Field education allows for “learning by doing” (Sunirose, 2013) and is experienced in the practice setting of social service agencies and organizations. CSWE (2015) identifies the classroom and field education to be “of equal importance within the curriculum and [to] contribute to the development of the requisite competencies of professional practice” (2015, p. 12). There are, however, two factors within social service agencies and organizations that are not addressed within the explicit curriculum, but which have an impact upon social work students’ learning and field education placement experience: organization culture and organizational climate.

**Background**

**Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate**

Organizational culture is considered to be the beliefs, values and norms that are fundamental within the operation of an organization. The culture of an organization is socially constructed by the shared experiences of groups within the organization. Each organization is unique, malleable, and subject to change. It also incorporates contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities, and confusion (Bellot, 2011). The tone of the organization’s environment is set and shaped by the interactions of individuals and leadership behaviors through its practice, policies, and procedures, as well as by how individuals experience the organization. This can affect an
individual’s involvement with the organization (Patterson Silver Wolf, Dulmus, Maguin, Kessler, & Powell, 2014).

**Social Work Ethics**

Social work ethics is a foundational premise and “the core of social work” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017, p. 2). Ethical climate is conceptualized as a “type of organizational work climate that reflects the organization procedures, policies, and practice with moral consequences” (Reichers & Schneider, as cited in Kish-Gephart, Harrison & Trevino, 2010). The culture and climate of an organization will affect the manner in which a person works, behaves, and makes decisions (Glisson, 2007; Kaptein, 2011; Agbenyiga, 2011; Trevino, Butterfield & McCabe, 1998), which may or may not be ethical. Thus, social work students practicing in field education placement will experience and be impacted by organizational culture and organizational climate specific to a particular field education agency or organization.

Field placements have significant impact upon how a student learns “right” or “correct” ways to be a social worker, understands how organizations work, emulates behaviors, develops beliefs, delivers services, and practices ethics—all of which a student will observe during field education. Because the social work curriculum may not routinely include teaching about organizational culture or organizational climate, social work students may not be aware of, understand, or even realize the impact these have upon their learning, their acculturation to the profession, and their overall ethical practice.

**Research Gap and Purpose**

Current literature includes information regarding ethics, social work education, social work field education, organizational culture and organizational climate. However, there is a lack of information that addresses the relationship, impact, and/or effect organizational culture and
organizational climate has on social work students’ learning during their field education placement. This gives evidence of a gap in the literature.

Using the theoretical perspectives and frameworks of the ecological model and general systems theory, the purpose of this conceptual paper is twofold: (a) to add to the literature the importance for understanding the relationship of organizational culture and organizational climate to social work education, ethics, and field education; and (b) to incorporate knowledge of organizational culture and climate into social work education and social work ethics. Incorporating the teaching of organizational culture and organizational climate into the bachelor (BSW) and master-level (MSW) social work ethics curriculum will enhance both social work education and students’ preparation for field education placement. Ultimately, students should be able to recognize how organizational culture and climate may affect social work ethics, practice, and delivery of services. This will strengthen students’ skills, enabling them to enter their profession as more competent and ethical professional social workers.

**Ecological Framework and General Systems Theory**

The ecological framework makes the assumption that within all systems, environments, and persons, there are interactions and interdependence. Within these systemic interactions and interdependences, there are reciprocal influences, connectedness, transactions, and adaptations, all of which can be complex. General systems theory provides a framework for understanding the functioning of an environment/system, the level and type of interactions, and the influences and subsequently created effects on all persons involved. Systems theory deals with the reciprocity that exists within all environments, at all levels: micro, mezzo, and macro. (Walsh, 2010).
The ecological framework and general systems theory are concerned with the interactions, relationships, boundaries, homeostasis, and flow of information between systems. This framework and theory provides the ability to understand and evaluate the interactions, relationships, boundaries, homeostasis, and flow of information between the systems of students’ field placements. The framework and theory further establishes a construct for being able to understand, determine and evaluate what relationship may exist for social work students between their involved systems, environments, and learning—specifically, the relationship between organizational culture and ethics.

By understanding persons, their environments, and the interactions that occur between them, effective interventions can occur (Gitterman & Germain, 2008). Thus, the ecological framework, in conjunction with general systems theory, allows social workers and social work educators to identify, view, and understand the different systems, the interactive and interdependent relationships in which social work students operate. It further allows them to understand the interaction between explicit and implicit social work education, the field education placement organization, and the social work student. This framework identifies students as being involved in multiple systems, including their schools, their social work departments, their assigned field agencies, their social work faculty, their field supervisors, and their own personal ethics.

**Literature Review**

**Ethics**

The standard and essence of social work ethics is illustrated through the NASW Code of Ethics. This code, which provides guidance and standards for accountability for the profession of social work and practicing social workers, has evolved throughout the history of social work.
Reamer (1998) identifies the periods of this evolution to be: morality, values, ethical theory and decision-making, ethical standards, and risk management. Social work ethics has progressed from the profession’s early focus upon the values and morality of its clients to providing ethical guidelines and a conceptual framework for addressing complex ethical issues (Reamer, 1998). Individual state social work licensure boards also mandate social work ethics through the laws and rules of their codes of conduct. The primary responsibilities of both the NASW Code of Ethics and state licensure boards are to be accountable to the public and to protect citizens (NASW, 2008; Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, Marriage and Family Therapist Board, 2018). These ethical standards are to be maintained by all practicing social workers, including social work students. Personal and professional ethics are integrated individually by a social worker or imposed by an organization; acceptance of professional ethics as personal ethics is considered “honest ethical practice” (Villereal, 2005, p. 67).

The CSWE, through its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), mandates that social work ethics be incorporated within BSW and MSW social work education. The CSWE’s EPAS establishes “thresholds for professional competence” and identifies nine competences in which social work students are expected to be “able to demonstrate the integration of the competencies in practice” (CSWE, 2015, pp. 5-6). The first competency states that social workers must demonstrate ethical and professional behavior by understanding the ethical standards of the profession, ethical decision-making by applying the NASW Code of Ethics, maintain professionalism in practice situations, and demonstrate professional demeanor in their behavior (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).

The CSWE’s EPAS also identifies relevant and necessary learning through explicit and implicit curriculum. The signature pedagogy of field education, which integrates classroom
learning in a practice setting, is a part of the explicit curriculum. The environment in which social work education occurs is considered the implicit curriculum and also includes the field practice setting. Both the implicit and explicit curriculum affect a social worker’s learning, development, and professional practice (CSWE, 2015).

Based on my experience as a clinical social worker and adjunct professor, social work students want to practice ethically. Through their explicit curriculum, social work students come to understand ethics and believe they are prepared to recognize ethical and unethical behaviors, as well as to practice ethically. They are eager to enter field education so as to apply and integrate what they have learned. However, students are not always prepared to recognize or understand the context of the social service organization setting, the organizational culture and organizational climate of their field education placement.

Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate

Organizational culture has become a significant area of organizational research since the 1970s and 1980s (Ouchi & Wilkens, 1985; Glisson, 2007). Researchers from multiple disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology, have provided significant contributions to understanding the role of culture within organizations. Organizational culture, for the purposes of this paper, is defined as norms and shared understandings that guide a social climate within an organization (Ouchi & Wilkens, 1985). Tensions between implicit and explicit factors, as well as rational, chaotic and non-rational features of organizational life, are reasons to study organizational climate. Work performance, worker morale, disengagement, worker burnout, ethical and unethical conduct, retention of services, service quality and delivery, and effectiveness of an organization are some of the factors related to organizational culture (Glisson, 2007).
Agbenyiga (2011) engaged in a cross sectional exploratory study which evidenced a connection between organizational culture and the delivery of services. Results evidenced that an agency’s understanding of organizational culture affected its ability both to recruit and to retain workers, as well as to provide improved services and leadership. Common concerns regarding the delivery of services in the practice of social work include burnout and employee disengagement. Hernandez, Stanley and Miller (2014) concluded that most all cases of burnout and employee disengagement is the result of organizational culture rather than the specific social worker.

While organizational culture is the way in which things are done, the norms, and the expectations in an organization, organizational climate is the way in which workers perceive the work environment (Glisson, 2007). An organizational climate is created as workers “share the same perception of how the work environment affects them as individuals” (Glisson, 2007, p. 739). The organizational mission, communication between frontline social workers and management, and workers’ perceptions of organizational culture all influence ethical practice (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2014). Organizations are involved in decision-making at all levels: macro, mezzo and micro. The ability to evaluate and be aware of the complexities related to actions and decision-making within an organization affects its organizational culture and climate; thus, these are parts of the ethical functioning of a social service organization.

Organizations may violate basic ethical standards (Pope, 2015). An organization may or may not have a specific code for behavior and ethical standards, but having such a code may or may not affect workers’ attitudes and ethical behaviors (Ahmed & Machold, 2004; Trevino et al., 1998). Without an understanding of how an organizational system works, workers may feel
dismayed, and they may be unable to implement effective services or ethical practice (Fabelo, O’Connor, Netting, & Wyche, 2013).

Culture of any sort may be difficult to recognize. Social work students are not educated about the complexities of organizations, including organizational culture and climate, prior to entering their field education placement. Though it might not be defined or identified, students will observe and experience the environment of an organization. Through observation and participation in the field placement experience, the organization and professional social workers model and influence the social work students’ learning, understanding and application of social work ethics and practice.

**Field Education**

Field education is an integral part of social work education, and social work students meet this venture—the culmination of their social work education—with mixed anticipation for what they will be able to do and what they will experience. Their field placements have lasting impacts on all aspects of the students’ acculturation into the profession and practice as professional social workers. In addition to integrating knowledge from their explicit curriculum during the field placement, students gain opportunities to build connections with an organization, learn about their roles within an organization, and develop their own awareness as beginning professionals. However, there may be examples within the field placement of questionable ethical practices, some of which violate the code of ethics for the profession, violate the code of ethics for the agency, and/or violate clients’ rights (Castro-Atwater & Hohnbaum, 2015). Engaged in an active learning process, students acquire social work skills through the observations of others and good role models (Fortune, McCarathy, & Abramson, 2001; Lee & Fortune, 2013).
**Field education and ethics.** Congress (2002) identifies aspects of the 1996 NASW Code of Ethics that need to be taught prior to students entering the field placement. These include confidentiality, technology, family and group work, dual relationships, appropriate professional relationships, and impairment and incompetence of colleagues. Congress (2002) maintains that educators who understand and teach the NASW Code of Ethics will “model professional behavior . . . through ethical educational practice” (p. 151). Ethical standards are thus incorporated into educational practice, which allows social work students to observe them in action. This affects students’ abilities to observe ethical standards within the field placement.

Strom-Gottfried (2000) describes a high potential for ethical conflicts related specifically to field education. The areas in which ethics complaints have been filed with the NASW during field education include confidentiality, boundaries and dual relationships, fair evaluative practices, and professional competence and supervision (Strom-Gottfried, 2000, p. 242). Congress and Strom-Gottfried both indicate the importance of preparing social work students for field education related to ethics, social work practice, and field education. They identify specific parts of the NASW Code of Ethics to be taught and specific complaints and violations of the Code that illustrate the context and content of social work ethics, and the practice of social work within social service organizations (Congress, 2002; Strom-Gottfried, 2000). Thus, they also illustrate the experience of the organizational cultures in which the social work students are placed for field education.

During their observations, social work students take notice of skills, behaviors, and interactions which include the climate, the practices, and the policies of their field placement organizations. My experience has been that social work students might or might not receive educational explanations about such observations. As a result, students might or might not ask or
talk about their observations, but instead might draw conclusions about and acceptance of how social work practice is done. Social work faculty might not ask about the organizational culture or organizational climate during class; thus, students might not discuss their observations or consider them to be significant. Students might presume that any discomfort or question they experience during field education is due to their level of experience and is part of the acculturation process of becoming professionals.

**Field education and social work students’ experiences.** Williamson, Hostetter, Byers, and Huggins (2010) studied BSW students’ reflections regarding their professional development as a result of the field education placement and identified significant areas, including values and ethics, awareness of self in practice, and confidence. These were in addition to the overall view that the field placement was where the learning became real and relevant as students integrated knowledge and skills in the doing of social work and “becoming a social worker” (Williamson et al., 2010, p. 239). This study gives credence to what Barnett and Coate (2005) identify as significant to student learning: knowing, acting and being.

Evans and Sherr (2006) illustrate ethical issues, specifically of dual relationships, confronted within an MSW field placement in a rural environment. The field agency was the only agency in the county to provide counseling services. The MSW student, a former pastor and a student at a faith-based university, had to address the handling of referrals made specifically to her because of her spiritual beliefs, as well as persons who knew her from her former church.

A descriptive study by Dodd (2007) identifies ethical issues MSW social work students experience most frequently during field placement. The primary issue identified was beneficence versus agency policy and autonomy within the context of tension related to the organization with agency policy, staff, supervision and fiscal issues. Through a cross-sectional survey, via
questionnaires, Dodd uses the NASW Code of Ethics as a frame of reference for categorizing the conflicts according to ethical constructs and contexts. The identified ethical constructs include autonomy, beneficence, confidentiality, reporting incompetence, and veracity; the contexts include organizational setting, supervisory relationship, and individual skill level (Dodd, 2007, p. 8). The study supports the assertions made by Congress (2002) and Strom-Gottfried (2000).

An underlying concept throughout the literature and a principle of the NASW Code of Ethics is human relationships. Social work students are engaged in learning about different types of relationships and how to manage these relationships professionally throughout their education. Relationships within field education can be significant to social work students as they learn, observe, receive mentoring, and work to determine the role they will assume. Netting (2013) uses organizational culture theory to explain the centrality and significance of human relationships within social work practice. Through reflection, Netting describes how human relationships—such as relationships with peers, colleagues, clients and supervisors in general—are related to an organizational culture. These relationships subsequently may affect delivery of services and ethical behaviors.

Based on my experience, social work students look forward to their field education so that they may practice and learn to become social workers. Social work students want positive learning experiences. Zeira and Schiff (2014), through a two-year quantitative study, provide evidence that after one year in the field, social workers “tend to think less of their field education” (p. 1950). The study suggests that field education should provide students with the ability to gain skills for dealing with the broad nature of social work practice and services, as well as a better understanding of the complex situations that they encounter. Zeira and Schiff (2014) describe maintaining intensive training for field education with increased preparation for
“real-life and contextual situations” (p. 1964). They conclude that students are not being adequately prepared to enter practice as novice social workers.

The literature dealing with students’ field experiences shows that students’ lack of preparation for addressing the complex realities of social work practice is further increased by their lack of education in or understanding of organizational culture. Social work novices and social work students enter the field without any awareness of organizational culture or climate. Most often, social work students entering field education are focused upon implementing skills, theories, and engaging with clients. Student learners want “to do” social work, but they are not aware of organizational components, such as economics, political and social standards, and expectations that may exist within the organization.

Field education and the importance of organizational awareness. Silverman (2015) asserts that it is important and necessary for social workers to have “an awareness of the importance of organizational assessment; an understanding of organizational purpose and culture; and, finally, an understanding of organizational systems inclusive of subsequent alignment of people and processes” (pp. 93-94). The ability to understand, adjust, and balance the interactions and tensions that occur within the organization while implementing the mission and practice of the organization is difficult and may have a significant impact upon the quality of student work experiences, as well as other factors such as retention (Spitzer, Silverman, & Allen, 2015). Silverman (2015) has identified this as organizational awareness and advocates for this to be considered a new social work competency. This concept includes awareness of organizational assessment, organizational purpose, organizational culture, and organizational systems (Silverman, 2015, p. 94).
Silverman’s work shows that organizational awareness is necessary for all social workers. It is relevant and an important component of social work education in preparing social work students for field education. Organizational awareness supports the contention of this conceptual paper that the education of social work ethics must include organizational culture and organizational climate in preparing students to enter the social work pedagogy of field education.

Discussion

My experience with social work students as a clinical social worker and adjunct professor has shown that they want to be good social workers, and they want to practice with a high standard of ethics and practice skills. They believe themselves to be good persons, believe in the NASW Code of Ethics, and thus believe that they will practice ethically. They understand the importance of field education placement in relation to their overall learning experience and their preparations for entering the field of social work as professionals.

Ethical Dilemmas in Field Education

My experience with field education placements has been that students are able to recognize and identify occurrences of ethical issues and dilemmas. Students have completed assignments for field education and field seminar classes in which they have described observations of organizational situations such as staff meetings, policy implementation, interactions between colleagues, administration management, interpersonal interactions, communications, and practice situations. Students have expressed concerns and questions at the beginning of field education about what they see and experience related to ethics and social work practice. When asking questions of field supervisors or social work professionals about identified ethical incidents during field placement, students have become concerned, surprised, and frustrated, and do not always understand the responses given to them. Their understanding of
these responses is that the ethical issues which they had questioned have been denied or minimized. Such incidents create concerns and questions about social work ethics. As students become acculturated to their organizations, these concerns and questions may decrease, and students may begin to explain that—and accept that—this is how social service organizations operate and how social work is practiced.

Organizational leaders may not realize the extent of what social work students notice or recognize within the practice of an organization. Organizational leaders, therefore, may not acknowledge the influence of their modeled social work ethics and practices upon social work students.

The experience of field education influences social work students directly and subtly in their field placements and in their future practices as professional social workers. Students may or may not be able to effectively describe their experiences, or have the critical thinking skills to adequately understand their observations, know what they are experiencing, or even be able to name their observations and experiences. Social work students practice only what they have learned, observed, and perceived. This may result in unethical behaviors and practices. These experiences, as described, illustrate a relationship between social work ethics and organizational culture which occurs within the field education placement.

**Implications of Organizational Culture for Students, Practitioners, and Educators**

Organizational culture and organizational climate, as the literature indicates, will affect the function and services that social workers provide within social service organizations. Social work ethics is foundational to the practice of social work and is integral to preparation for field education. Social work students, therefore, experience organizational culture, organizational climate, and social work ethics within their field education placements. However, students are
not always adequately prepared to understand or to have an awareness of organizational culture and its relationship to social work ethics and practice. Students may have an understanding of the ecological framework and general systems theory, but they may not realize the relevance of this conceptual framework and theoretical perspective in their field education experiences and subsequent practices as professional social workers.

**Recommendations**

As the CSWE’s EPAS establishes the standard for professional competence, it is the contention of this conceptual paper that professional competence would be enhanced by the CSWE’s having an expectation to incorporate the teaching of organizational culture with social work ethics. To include organizational culture with social work ethics in the explicit and implicit curriculum of social work education would enhance social work students’ preparation and readiness for field education. Consequently, it would enhance the foundation of social work education and the development of best practice. A foundation of best practice would positively affect students during their field education placements, as well as their entrances into the social work field and practice as professional social workers (CSWE, 2015).

An understanding and competence in organizational culture and organizational climate would further enhance the profession of social work, as social workers would then be able to recognize the effects of organizational culture upon social work practice, be empowered to advocate for necessary change, and address unethical issues and practices that may occur within an organization. This would have direct impact upon organizational policy, social work practice, and service delivery. An understanding of and competency in organizational culture, or what Silverman (2015) refers to as organization awareness, would enable social workers to reflect and
address the culture and climate that exists within an organization, something that organizations do not readily do (a concept this paper has not addressed).

Conclusion

This conceptual paper proposes that there is a gap in the literature between the relationships of social work ethics learned through social work education and students’ experiences during field education placement with organizational culture and organizational climate. Future research is needed that specifically addresses the relationship between organizational culture and social work ethics as experienced and learned during field education. Suggested research would address questions related to social work students’ awareness of organizational culture and its influence on the development of their ethical practices; the relationship between learning social work ethics from their explicit and implicit curriculum and their field education placements; the influences upon the development of social work practice ethics; and the role of organizational culture and organizational climate in shaping their ethical practices. Recommended research would include quantitative and qualitative studies to be conducted with social work students, educators, and organizational leaders.

The results of such research will fill the gap that currently exists in the literature. Additionally, it will enhance social work education by providing a foundation for integrating organizational culture and organizational climate within the social work curriculum of social work ethics. This would further be enhanced with the addition of cultural awareness, as it is defined by Silverman (2015), as an additional competency in the CSWE’s EPAS. Overall, further research would enhance social work education and field education so that, ultimately, social work students are fully and effectively prepared to enter the profession as competent, ethically practicing social work professionals. The correlation between organizational culture
and the experiences of social work students in field education is significant and worth further investigation. Further study of this phenomena can only enhance the social work pedagogy of field education; empower social work students for practice during their field education and practice upon entry into the profession; and ultimately address, affect, and create positive change within the organizational culture and climate of social service organizations.
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Organizational Culture and Social Work Ethics:

Relationship to Field Education

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Abstract

Social work students are prepared for field education, the signature pedagogy of social work education, by learning the core values, ethics, ethical dilemmas, and skills of social work. They learn about culture and diversity, though not necessarily about the culture or climate of organizations and social service agencies. This qualitative systematic review addresses the question, how might field education effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics and organizational culture? Through a thematic approach, the findings identified four broad topics, categorized as: (a) ethical development, (b) resources related to ethics and organizational culture, (c) the context of organizational culture and organizational climate, and (d) guidelines and recommendations. A premise to this qualitative systematic review is that organizational culture (broadly) and organizational climate (specifically) are important sources of influence and invite ethical consideration. Results of this qualitative systematic review make a case for the relevance of the incorporation of organizational culture, organizational climate, and social work ethics in teaching social work field education. The studies reviewed particularly point to the need for increased preparation of students entering and functioning within field education.

*Keywords:* ethics, organizational culture, organizational climate, field education
Organizational Culture and Social Work Ethics:

Relationship to Field Education

Professional ethics, the experience of the field education placement, and understanding of the core foundational value of social work are central to social work education and training. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) identifies field education as the signature pedagogy of social work. Field education occurs in various types of organizations, such as social service agencies, child welfare, community mental health services, and hospitals. The purpose of field education is to integrate students’ theoretical and conceptual learning in the classroom with the actual practice of social work in a practical setting.

CSWE’s 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards has established the mandates and expectations for both baccalaureate and master’s level social work education in the United States. Social work students are prepared for their field placement by understanding ethics, ethical dilemmas, and other social work skills. Through a competency-based education framework with nine identified competencies, CSWE directs future social workers to understand the profession’s ethical values and standards by demonstrating ethical and professional behavior. Optimally, students also acquire an understanding of culture and diversity, and obtain an understanding of services that various social work agencies or organizations provide. Through its explicit and implicit curriculum, CSWE addresses the importance of demonstrating competence in understanding diversity and cultural humility in order to engage, assess and intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. However, social work students may not necessarily be taught about the environment and culture of agencies and organizations under current curricular guidelines.
Human service organizations provide services through particular contexts, such as organizational culture and organizational climate. Organizational culture is considered to be the beliefs, values and norms that are fundamental within an organization’s operations (Ouchi, & Wilkens, 1985; Glisson, 2007; Trevino, Butterfield & McCabe, 1998). The organizational climate is what workers perceive of the culture and functioning of the organization. The culture and climate within an organization is affected by multiple factors that create an organizational milieu, which can affect the manner in which a person works, behaves and makes decisions, which may or may not be ethical (Reichers, & Schneider, 1990; Trevino, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998; Glisson, 2007). Social work field placement occurs within these organizations; thus, social work students encounter and experience an organizational milieu, which involves the demonstration of both ethical and unethical professional behaviors. Encountering an organizational milieu inherently includes observing and experiencing ethical issues, behaviors, and dilemmas.

CSWE is instructive in establishing the parameters of social work education and field education. However, there is no directive for specific education related to the field placement experience and the organization in terms of its influence on, effect on, or relationship to a student’s learning—particularly in relation to social work ethics. My premise is that organizational culture and organizational climate both serve as important sources of ethical consideration and influence a social worker’s development of ethics, ethical practice, and ethical behavior during field placement education. The purpose of this paper, a qualitative systematic literature review, is to address the question of how field education might effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the relationship between social work ethics and organizational culture. Studies were specifically sought from three major social work related
databases that address three key points of the question: organizational culture, ethics, and field education. Because the goal of social work education and CSWE standards is to prepare students to practice social work in a competent and ethical manner that upholds the values and standards of the profession, this is a significant question to consider.

**Background**

CSWE requires social workers to understand diversity and its effects upon a person’s experience. Social workers know there are multiple factors related to diversity, including but not limited to: ethnicity, color, class, disability, and culture. They will know and recognize many aspects of culture, as well as the effects they may have upon and within any population, practice area, or level of practice (micro, mezzo, or macro) within social work. Culture includes human beings’ beliefs and values, their interactions with others, and the rules and behaviors that establish their part in a particular group, society, or organization (Botz-Bornstein, 2012; Fusch, Fusch, Booker, & Fusch, 2016). As social workers practice in social service organizations, they experience the cultures that are specific to each organization. Organizational culture and its relation to organizational behaviors is a significant aspect of understanding and studying organizations. Organizational behaviors include how individual persons carry out the mission and work of a particular organization, and can include ethical and unethical behaviors.

**Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate**

Organizational culture has become a significant area of organizational research since the 1970s and 1980s (Ouchi & Wilkens, 1985; Glisson, 2007). Multiple disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, and cognitive psychology, have made significant contributions to understanding the role of culture within organizations. Fusch et.al. (2016) show that such research makes it possible to see working behaviors within an organizational culture. Ouchi and
Wilkens (1985) indicate that a main reason for studying organizations is to better understand tensions between implicit and explicit factors within organizational cultures.

Organizational culture consists of the beliefs, values, expectations, and norms fundamental to the operations of an organization: the way in which things are done. An organizational culture is shaped by individuals’ interactions and leadership behaviors. It is determined through the practices, policies, and procedures of the organization’s environment, as well as by how individuals experience their environments (Glisson, 2007). Setting the tone of the environment can affect an individual’s involvement with the organization (Glisson, 2007; Patterson Silver Wolf, Dulmus, Maguin, Kessler, & Powell, 2014). Socially constructed organizational culture is the product of groups and is based on shared experiences. Unique, malleable, and subject to continual change, each organizational culture incorporates contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities and confusion (Bellot, 2011).

The way workers perceive their environment, known as organizational climate, is an important aspect within an organizational culture. Organizational climate is created as workers “share the same perception of how the work environment affects them as individuals” (Glisson, 2007, p. 739). Organizational climate and organizational culture have been studied and used to determine and predict the relationships between workers and behaviors of workers, as well as for their influence on ethical and unethical behaviors and the delivery of services. These include: work performance, worker morale, disengagement, worker burnout, ethical and unethical conduct, retention of service, service quality, and the effectiveness of an organization (Agbenyiga, 2011; Glisson, 2007; Kaptein, 2011; Trevino et al., 1998).

Findings vary as to what most influences unethical behaviors, organizational culture, and organizational climate. Patterson Silver Wolf et al. (2014) support the idea that organizational
climate is defined and understood through the perception of workers and provide evidence that upper management maintained a difference in the rating of organizational culture and climate. Their study is based on the comparison of frontline workers (employees having direct service contact with persons served by the agency) to senior managers (employees having no direct contact with persons served by the agency), and each group’s experience within the specific workgroup-level of organizational culture and climate. Participants within a single, large, child and family social service agency completed a survey, the Organizational Social Context Measurement Model. Senior managers rated the agency’s organizational culture as being less rigid and more proficient, functional, and engaged than did frontline workers. These two groups showed similar results only relative to the levels of resistance and stress within the agency, citing the need for interventions to improve communication between the two groups.

Field Education

As the signature pedagogy of social work, field education is the laboratory for social work students. It allows for “learning by doing,” giving students applied experience within social service agencies and organizations (Sunirose, 2009). Field education is intended to integrate classroom learning of theoretical and conceptual constructs into the practice of social work (CSWE, 2015). The practical experience of field education placement is facilitated by the field instructor. A trained professional social worker, the field instructor facilitates learning through the direct application of social work in practice, which includes socializing students to professional social work ethics (Sherer & Peleg-Oren, 2005). Social service organizations also affect what students learn and can affect a social worker’s decision to be involved in social work field education as a field instructor (Globerman & Bogo, 2003).
Field education is a highly anticipated aspect of social work education to which students attribute much of their learning of the practice and profession of social work. Zeira and Schiff (2013), however, offer evidence that social work students gave less credence and value to their field education experience after being employed in the field for one year than they did as students. Indications of not feeling well enough prepared for the complexities of routine work, crisis intervention, and large caseloads were cited. Zeira and Schiff thus question whether field education adequately prepares students for entering the workforce as competent, professional social workers.

Casto-Atwater and Hohnbaum (2015) suggest that field education provides an opportunity for a student to become a “transitional professional” (p. 272). They assert that in such a position, students have the opportunity to identify with and learn from organizational professionals. However, Casto-Atwater and Hohnbaum indicate that students sometimes had “questionable experiences” during their field experiences, many of which involved unethical behaviors. Such behaviors and experiences “[speak] to the student about how to stand up to an organization that has allowed unethical practices to occur” (Castro-Atwater & Hohnbaum, 2015, p. 272). Through their conceptual framework, which gives focus to a multi-step ethical decision making model called COVER, Casto-Atwater and Hohnbaum identified five ethical lessons to be learned. They contend that students must not only be taught and learn about ethical situations, but also about how to be prepared to respond to them in a constructive manner.

Social Work Ethics

The profession of social work maintains strong beliefs about its values. These values are put into practice as social work ethics. The evolution of social work ethics reflects significant time periods, which are evidenced through the profession’s ever-changing code of ethics
(Reamer, 1998). Ethics involve behaviors that reflect what is valued as morally right, wrong, good, or bad. Ethics can be understood as making wise and moral decisions, often in the face of legitimate and competing demands, thus creating ethical dilemmas (Barker, 1995). The core value of social work ethics is taught as defined and illustrated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. The NASW Code of Ethics provides an aspirational approach to ethics, ethical standards and the practice of social work. This is in contrast to the ethical practices that are mandated by individual state licensure boards through their codes of conduct, which are the laws and rules that mandate ethical behavior (Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, Marriage and Family Therapist Board, 2018). Social work ethics are incorporated into social work education as mandated by CSWE (2015) competencies, the first competency of which states that students must “demonstrate ethical and professional behavior” (p. 6).

Ethical frameworks have been developed in social work to provide a clear understanding of ethical practices, concerns, and decision making processes in the face of ethical dilemmas. Frameworks and models for ethical decision making have been developed and articulated in social work by authors such as Reamer (1987), Congress (1999, 2002), and Strom-Gottfried (2000). Each recommends the teaching of ethical models within social work education and their application within the field for both students and professionals.

Reamer (1987) offers guidelines for being able to resolve ethical dilemmas and advocates for the creation and use of ethics committees in agencies. Ethics committees serve to “educate, advise, formulate policies and review cases that contain complex ethical issues”, as well as “alert staff and clients to ethical issues related to the delivery of services” (Reamer, 1987, p.191). Congress (2002) maintains that social work ethics are important and even essential to social work education. Social work educators must know and be able to apply the NASW Code of
Ethics to teaching social work students, but also must model professional behavior through ethical educational practices. Strom-Gottfried (2000) describes a high potential for ethical conflicts related specifically to field education. This study of complaints filed through the NASW against social work students, faculty, administrators, and field supervisors addresses ethical violations related to social work education. Its findings conclude that social work ethical standards must be reinforced and maintained as important within the academic setting and applied to faculty, students, and administrators alike.

Students within the setting of social work field education are exposed to and have the opportunity to experience organizational cultures and organizational climates, social work ethics, and ethical dilemmas. Students enter the field with theoretical knowledge as well as an understanding of social work values and standards, social work ethics, the NASW Code of Ethics, and potential ethical dilemmas. Silverman (2015) asserts that it is important and necessary for social workers to have “an awareness of the importance of organizational assessment; an understanding of organizational purpose and culture; and, finally, an understanding of organizational systems inclusive of subsequent alignment of people and processes” (pp. 93-94). The ability to understand, adjust and balance the interactions and tensions that occur within an organization while also implementing the mission and practice of the organization is difficult and may have a significant impact upon the quality of student work experiences, as well as other factors such as retention (Spitzer, Silverman, & Allen, 2015).

Silverman (2015) has identified this ability as organizational awareness (a concept Silverman advocates as a new social work competency). This concept includes awareness of organizational assessment, organizational purpose, organizational culture, and organizational systems.
Current literature significantly indicates a connection between organizational culture, organizational climate, social work education, ethics, and field education. This, combined with my direct experiences as a clinical social worker and adjunct professor of organizational culture and climate, ethics, teaching, and observing students’ experiences during field education, led me to a question regarding the relationship between the areas of organizational culture, social work ethics and the social work field experience. Focused upon three specific variables (organizational culture, social work ethics, and field education), the following qualitative systematic review investigates how field education might effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics and organizational culture.

**Methodology**

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to examine the question: how might field education effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics and organizational culture? The literature reviewed illustrates significant connections between these three variables. The purpose of the systematic review is to understand and identify some significant or representative relationships between these specific variables through a thematic analysis.

**Definitions**

For this study, *organizational culture* is defined as: the beliefs, values and norms fundamental to the operations of an organization; the way in which things are done, and the accompanying norms and expectations. Within the context of organizational culture, *organizational climate* is defined as: the way an organization’s environment is perceived by the workers. The term *social work ethics* is defined according to the NASW Code of Ethics, and the
Term field education is defined according to the 2015 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.

**Types of Studies**

Studies selected for this systematic review include full text, peer-reviewed, empirical research articles completed between 2000 and 2017. This time period was selected in order to include both relevant history and current studies. The studies chosen were those most relevant to social work, broadly, and to field education, ethics and organizational culture, specifically.

**Search Strategy**

Articles were identified using the following academic databases: PsycINFO, psycNET, Social Work Abstracts, and SocINDEX. The bibliographies of identified and reviewed articles were also used. The research data were collected during August, 2017. The process used for narrowing the choices of studies will be explained under the subheading below, labeled: Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria.

Keywords searched through PsycINFO included field education, organizational climate and ethics, ethics in organizational climate or quality of work life or working conditions and social work. Keywords searched through PsycNET included work life, working condition. This was a Boolean thesaurus search with the assistance of the social work reference librarian at the University of St. Thomas. This search returned eight studies.

Keywords searched through Social Work Abstracts included: human service organization, climate and ethics and social work; social service organization, culture and social work field education, ethics; relationship of organizational culture to ethic and social work; organizational climate, culture, ethic and social work and field education; quality of work life, organizational climate, culture and ethic and social work field education. This search returned
204 studies. The search was completed through the database with no assistance or extra parameters.

Keywords searched through SocINDEX included: *organizational climate, culture, ethic and social work and field education; quality of work life, organizational climate, culture and ethic and social work field education; development of social work ethics, social services or human services or community services culture and field education and social work ethic; student field education experiences with organizational culture, climate in social service organizations and ethics*. This search returned 609,749 studies. The search was completed through the database with no assistance or extra parameters.

The keywords chosen for search terms were selected because they are widely used within the literature and are evidenced throughout articles and the literature review. It was necessary to change some keywords to increase search results; the databases PsycINFO and PsycNET did not retrieve results for the keywords, *social service organization or agency*, but did retrieve results for *organization and work life or working conditions and social work*.

**Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria**

Studies were excluded if all three variables were not included within the study, if studies were not related to social work, if studies were of a specifically identified population or problem, and if studies did not make reference explicitly to social work education. The exclusion of studies that were not related to social work was a significant factor in narrowing the number of studies appropriate for this qualitative systematic review.

To be included, each article needed to speak to all three variables: (a) organizational culture or climate, (b) ethics and field experience, and (c) social work education, including education both within the field experience and academic preparation—either prior to, during, or
recommended for future educational inclusion. The final review identified and consisted of seven studies (see Appendix for complete list).

**Data Analysis**

Themes were identified by recording each topic per study in a hand written spread sheet with data in columns that allowed for identification, comparison and color coding of the key concepts. The primary samples represented in these studies included MSW or BSW students in the final year of filed placement (6 of the 7 studies); the remaining two studies included professionals, child welfare professionals in a Midwestern state and social workers in permanent positions in public service organizations in Greece. The research designs across these seven studies included both exploratory and qualitative studies, with each type represented by descriptive study, cross-sectional retrospective survey, and narrative analysis. The findings sections in these articles tended to give attention to areas within social work practice and field placements that created and caused concern for students, including practice ethics, preparation for field placement, the context, and overall concerns by both students and professionals. The findings can be illustrated by three specific themes, which are as follows: (a) process of ethical development, (b) resources, (c) the link to the contexts of organizational culture and organizational climate that affect ethical practice and social work values, and (d) guidelines and recommendations. All studies made reference to the relationship between social work education and preparation for field placement and practice, and all gave explicit attention to social work values and ethics.

**Results**

This qualitative systematic review asked the question: how might field education effectively bring students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics
and organizational culture? This review used a thematic approach and identified themes categorized by four broader topics. These broader topics include: (a) the process of ethical development, (b) resources related to organizational culture and organizational climate, (c) the links to the context of organizational culture and organizational climate that affect ethical practice and social work values, and (d) guidelines and recommendations. The process of ethical development refers to students’ abilities to grasp ethical understanding incrementally and their consideration and application of ethics over time. Resources related to organizational culture and organizational climate refers to the resources available to and used by students in learning about social work values, ethics, organizational culture and organizational climate. The links to organizational culture and organizational climate refers to various aspects related to social work practice within an organization or social service agency, such as confidentiality, policy, fiscal responsibility, interprofessional teamwork, and practice.

**Process of Ethical Development**

The content and focus of the seven identified studies describe a progression of ethical development for students in the field. Two articles, Gelman (2004) and Dodd (2007), identified areas of concern and anxiety experienced by students in preparation for, upon entering, and during field placement. Three articles, Papadaki and Papadaki (2008), Papouli (2016a) and Papouli (2016b), related to the identification and experience of ethics, ethical values, ethical dilemmas, and learning activities experienced during field placement. Two, Papadaki and Papadaki (2008) and Roeder (2009), related to professional social workers experiencing ethics and organizational culture while practicing as professional social workers. All seven studies identified specific issues related to social work values and ethics, and the concern for being able to meet the best interest of clients, whether as students or professional social workers.
The articles reviewed point to an identified level of anxiety for both BSW and MSW students while acknowledging that some level of anxiety is to be expected. The level of anxiety was relevant to the age and experience (e.g., as a volunteer, work experience) of the student prior to beginning the field placement (Gelman, 2004). Students’ expressed levels of anxiety related to their concern for understanding the work within the agency, working with clients, meeting the needs of clients, and the overall feeling of being prepared (Dodd, 2007; Gelman, 2004).

The theme of ethical development was illustrated in Papouli’s (2016a, 2016b) two studies, an original and a follow-up study, regarding the development of social work values and ethics. Through the use of the critical incident technique, students recalled and expressed in their own words experiences and incidents of ethics and values. This particular method allowed students to learn from practice and show integration of theory and practice. Papouli’s (2016b) original findings indicate that students learned from both positive and negative ethical experiences. Learning from both types of ethical experiences provided insight to the development of ethical practice and understanding. This research indicated that students learned what not to do by identification of negative experiences—that these, too, could be instructive.

The follow up study by Papouli (2016a), was conducted through the use of focus groups. It gave credence to the original study while adding attention to the development of ethics. The development of social work ethics occurred as students were able to practice within the field placement practice and be aware of ethics within every occasion, and view field instructors as ethical role models and managers as ethical leaders. The role of client behavior was also evidenced as being important to students’ ethical development. The research identified that the behavior of clients required students to know and apply ethical standards and, thus, to practice in an ethical manner. The negative behavior of clients and a non-supportive work environment were
identified as causing and creating stress which subsequently affected the students’ abilities to practice ethically and led to “poor ethics learning outcomes” (Papouli, 2016a, p. 386). The concepts of ethical engagement and ethical resilience are important to the process of ethical development that Papouli (2016a) identified. Ethical engagement involves “regular discussion of ethical issues in daily practice” (Papouli, 2016a, p. 385), and ethical resilience involves “resisting undue pressure from a client . . . to ensure provision of appropriate social services” (Papouli, 2016a, p. 384).

Papouli’s two articles focused on students’ awareness of and ability to identify issues of ethical concern within the field placement by discussing how these incidents affected their recognition, understanding, learning and application of social work ethics. Students illustrated learning from both positive and negative ethical experiences and the benefit of being able to describe these experiences. Although the students alluded to characteristics of organizational culture and organizational climate, they did not necessarily identify them as such or make a connection to these concepts.

**Resources Related to Ethics and Organizational Culture**

Throughout the research, studies identified the resources available to and used by students within the field experience that related to the learning of social work values, ethics, and organizational culture. The most important resource identified in the review of these articles was the supervisor. This included attention to the importance of the relationship to the supervisor and the supervisor’s modeling of ethics. The field supervisor was cited as providing both positive and negative modeling of ethics and ethical behaviors (Dodd, 2007; Papouli, 2016b; Smith, Cleak & Vreugdenhill, 2015).
Learning opportunities provided within the agency were also considered a resource. Roeder (2009) identified learning that child welfare workers made through social work ethics and boundary training which focused on organizational culture. Through the use of agency action plans, workers were able to incorporate and evidence this training through direct application to and incorporation in their daily practices as related to ethical issues, organizational culture, and organizational climate.

The research indicated learning opportunities were found to be related to the specific organization and helped students to socialize and take on the identity of professionals. Smith et al. (2015) reviewed the extent to which students engaged in learning activities within social work supervision. They determined learning activities varied within social work placements and not all students had the opportunity for or engaged in learning activities with the field instructor. This had a negative effect upon social work learning, including ethics.

Lastly, the use of peer consultation and the NASW code of Ethics were identified as available resources used by students within the field placement. Following the field supervisor or instructor, peer consultation was identified as the second most important resource (Papouli, 2016b). Consultation and use of the NASW Code of Ethics was evidenced as limited in frequency and use as a resource for addressing and resolving matters of ethics (Dodd, 2007; Smith et al., 2015). Papadaki and Papadaki (2008) identified that social workers tried to change a situation on their own, but without resources they felt powerless and did not risk changing the situation; rather, they accepted unethical situations as a “fixed reality” (p. 176).

The types of resources and learning opportunities available to and used by social work students to learn about social work ethics, organizational culture, and organizational climate, as identified in these articles, varied between organizations. However, throughout all of the articles,
supervision was cited as the most significant resource. The infrequent use of the NASW Code of Ethics as a standard resource for identifying and addressing ethical situations and dilemmas was noted in several articles. Additionally, these articles identify and illustrate the effects experience has on students during field education as related to social work ethics and organizational culture.

**Context of Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate**

The studies included in this qualitative systematic review revealed several topics related to the context of organizational culture and organizational climate for students within field placement. These topics include: confidentiality, interprofessional relationships and teamwork, interagency work, agency policy with fiscal issues and delivery of services, clients and organizational management, and leadership (Dodd, 2007; Papadaki & Papadaki, 2008; Papouli, 2016a, 2016b; Smith et al., 2015). Confidentiality was observed and reported to be setting-specific. That is, it was found to differ depending on the level of organization and agency norms related to things like mandated reporting (Papadaki and Papakaki, 2008). Conflict between interprofessional and interdisciplinary teams related to a difference in the practice of confidentiality and social work values. These conflicts and differences were also noted with interagency work. Such differences involved organizational goals, misuse of power, unethical and unprofessional behaviors, and the functioning of the particular organization (Dodd, 2007; Papouli, 2016a, 2016b). Agency policy and fiscal issues were identified as an organization’s limited resources and its effect upon the services that were able to be rendered to clients, as well as its impact upon social workers’ efforts to provide services (Papadaki & Papadaki, 2008). Such issues were identified and viewed as creating ethical dilemmas for social workers and social work students. One article identified students and social workers’ expectations for the organization, managers,
leaders, and supervisors to maintain an ethical environment within an organization (Papouli, 2016a).

The articles related to the context of organizational culture and organizational climate revealed an awareness of the effects and barriers upon the ability of social workers to provide effective social work services due to organizational culture and organizational climate. This context also revealed the identification and creation of ethical dilemmas within practice.

Guidelines and Recommendations Provided by the Articles

All seven of the articles made reference to social work education and the preparation for field education placement and practice. The articles focused on the important relationship education has to social work ethics and values in order for social workers, students, and professionals to learn, practice, and provide services in a competent and ethical manner. The articles did recognize organizational culture and awareness as being important for social work education or as preparation for entering field placement. The term organizational culture was not used specifically in every article. The articles did, however, speak to the concept of organizational culture, whether or not they made use of the explicit term.

Discussion

A premise of this qualitative systematic review is that organizational culture and organizational climate are important sources of influence on social work students who will go on to become practitioners, and they are worth ethical consideration relative to student development. Thus, it is important to understand the relationship of these concepts to social work education, field education, and field placement for social work students. The purposes of this qualitative systematic review, therefore, addressed the question: how might field education effectively bring
students’ attention and understanding to the intersection of social work ethics and organizational culture?

The findings of this qualitative systematic review were evident across the articles reviewed. The primary themes identified through the seven reviewed articles included: (a) the process of ethical development, (b) resources related to ethics and organizational culture available to social workers, (c) the context of organizational culture and organizational climate, and (d) guidelines and recommendations. The identified themes relate to and link to the initial literature review. The studies of Papouli (2016a, 2016b) and Papadaki and Papadaki (2008) particularly illustrate the themes of the process of ethical development and its relationship to the context of organizational culture and organizational climate.

An important finding and theme related to the process of ethical development is the level of anxiety experienced by students entering field placement, particularly their anxiety about what would be encountered within field placement (Dodd, 2007; Gelman, 2004). The development and learning of ethics is related to students learning from both positive and negative ethical experiences; behaviors observed and experienced personally with their field instructors, managers, and organizational leaders; and interprofessional and interagency working and relationships (Papadaki & Papadaki, 2008; Papouli, 2016a, 2016b; Roeder, 2009). These findings give credence to the assertions of Reamer (1987), Congress (1999, 2002), and Strom-Gottfried (2000) that ethical standards must be incorporated into and maintained in academic education and preparation for field placement.

Within the theme of resources that are available to social workers, the field instructor and supervisor is identified to be of prime importance. Other resources include peer consultation, learning opportunities within the organization, and the NASW Code of Ethics. The NASW Code
of Ethics, a foundational premise and standard for social work ethics, is found to be of limited use and infrequently consulted as a resource by social workers (in the context of the field) to inform thinking about and/or resolving ethical matters and dilemmas. Again, this relates to and supports the ethical frameworks indicated by Reamer (1987), Congress (1999, 2002), and Strom-Gottfried (2000).

The concepts of organizational culture and organizational climate are evident in each of the articles reviewed. These concepts are particularly relevant and identified within the articles by Dodd (2007), Papadaki and Papadaki (2008), Papouli (2016b), and Roeder (2009). These writings indicate a relationship between organizational culture, organizational climate, social work ethics, and ethical practices. Throughout the studies reviewed, references and recommendations are made for social work education to address such areas during students’ preparation for field education and field placement. Interestingly, the findings make no direct recommendation to include organizational culture or organizational climate in the teaching for social work ethics in preparation for field education and placement. Such recommendation would give credence to Castro-Atwater and Hohnbaum (2015), Silverman (2015), and Spitzer et al.’s (2015) contention that social workers need to be able to speak up and stand up within organizations regarding issues of social work ethics, ethical practice and ethical leadership.

**Implications**

This qualitative systematic review has direct implications for teaching and practice, specifically for social work education, field education, and social work practice. This review implies that in addition to teaching social work ethics, the incorporation of organizational culture and organizational climate are important to prepare students adequately for entering field placement. Such learning would further prepare social work students for entry into the profession.
as more competent and ethically practicing social workers—social work professionals with an ability to practice within an organization who understand, recognize, and are able to address ethical issues that may occur within that organization. This includes attention to organizational culture and organizational climate. This qualitative systematic review further supports the importance of understanding organizational culture, organizational climate, and social work ethics, which need to be included in social work education and practice at each level of practice: micro, mezzo and macro.

**Strengths and Limitations**

One strength of this qualitative systematic review is that it was able to give attention to these three central concepts: organizational culture, organizational climate, and social work ethics. The studies reviewed offer evidence that organizational culture and organizational climate are factors related to social work ethics, with important implications for field education placement and for practicing professional social workers. The qualitative nature of the studies also gives voice to the experiences of social workers and their potential impact. The articles reviewed and their findings illustrate the impact that occurs within organizations, with each speaking to organizational culture and organizational climate.

One limitation of this qualitative systematic review involves the small number of articles that were able to be identified and reviewed. Due to the small sample of articles in this study, the ability to generalize the findings is restricted. The studies were exclusively in English, although three of the studies were conducted in and related specifically to Greece (Papouli, 2016a, 2016b) and Australia (Smith et al., 2015). These studies’ findings do appear to be consistent with the studies conducted within the United States and the results of the literature review. Another limitation is the differences identified in organizational cultures intranationally. Papouli’s
(2016a) follow up study stated “there is a lack of collaborative culture in Greek working environments” (p. 383).

A final potential limitation is that the studies included in this study did not all focus solely on field education; two of the studies focused on professional social workers. These two studies did, however, relate to the three identified variables. Further, the studies reviewed did not all explicitly connect the concepts of organizational culture, organizational climate, social work ethics, and social work education even though the concepts were discussed and implied.

This review would suggest the importance of and the need for further study and research to be completed on this topic. This could include a future study testing the understanding, identification, or awareness of organizational culture and organizational climate in terms of how they might impact either social work students or professionals in practice.

**Conclusion**

This topic is not only important, but is directly relevant to social work and the future of social work. Through this qualitative systematic review, students identified issues related to social work ethics and the context of organizational culture, though they did not use this last term explicitly in every instance. It is important for social work education, when addressing the complexities of social work ethics, also to draw attention to the relationship of social work ethics to and its intersection with organizational culture, organizational climate, and field education. Inclusion and incorporation of these concepts in social work teaching and practice would enhance students’ preparation for practice in field education and could support graduates’ entry into the profession of social work. Building upon the importance and evolution of social work ethics as a part of ethical practice, students need to recognize the complexities that occur both in field education and in their eventual workplaces. Offering attention in undergraduate and
graduate social work education can further students’ abilities to reason ethically. The articles reviewed offer examples and resources for educators to support this process. This review suggests that attention to both organizational culture (broadly) and organizational climate (specifically) offers potentially rich sources for such reflection to take place in social work education. This is a subject that warrants further study.
References


doi:10.1080/10437797.2000.10779005


doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct038
### Appendix: List of Studies Included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>MSW/BSW</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papouli, E. (2016b).</td>
<td>BSW*</td>
<td>Using the critical incident technique (CIT) to explore how students develop their understanding of social work values and ethics in the workplace during their final placement</td>
<td><em>The Journal of Social Work</em>, 13(2), 56-72.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Study was of or included professional social workers.*
Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture:

Impact on Social Work Field Education

Stephanie A Bradford

St. Catherine’s University / University of St. Thomas
Abstract

Social work ethics and an understanding of organizational culture are imperative to students’ learning in field education. Integrating classroom learning, theoretical concepts, practice skills, and ethics, while also encountering and experiencing agency milieu, organizational culture and climate, occurs in the field education placement. Student acculturation to the profession, and ethical behavior and practice are impacted by organizational culture during field education. Using the ecological framework, this workshop will address the importance of understanding this relationship to enhance social work learning, ethical practice, and the need to incorporate organizational culture into ethics education as a part of students’ preparation for field education.

Keywords: ethics, organizational culture, organizational climate, field education
Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture:

Impact on Social Work Field Education

This presentation was given for the 2017 NASW Ohio Chapter Conference, held November 16-18, 2017 at the Quest Conference Center in Columbus, Ohio. The theme of the conference was “Social Workers Stand Up”. The presentation was scheduled for and given on Day 2, November 17, 2017, Breakout F: 3:30pm – 5:00 pm, Ohio Room, second floor. The presentation provided 1.5 continuing education units (National Association of Social Workers) for social work, counseling and chemical dependency and met the requirements for ethics training.

This presentation was related to the banded dissertation topic of ethics and organizational culture. Specifically, the presentation was based upon the conceptual paper written for Product One of the banded dissertation. The presentation was given from the following PowerPoint.
Social Work Ethics and Organizational Culture: Impact on social work field education

Stephanie A Bradford, MSSA, ACSW, LISW-S
NASW State Conference – Columbus, Ohio
November 17, 2017

Objectives:

- demonstrate a foundational knowledge or organizational culture and organizational climate
- integrate this knowledge to social service organizations that host as field education sites
- integrate and apply ethics knowledge with organizational culture
- demonstrate understanding of the relationship and effect of organizational culture, organizational climate and ethics upon social workers and their social work practice
- Overall objective: make an awareness or identification of at least one concept regarding the impact of organizational culture and social work ethics upon you as a social worker, in either a current or past field placement or work organization.

- ETHICS
  - Foundational premise and “core of social work”
  - Ethics involve behaviors reflective of what is right or wrong, morally good or bad
  - Ethics can be understood as making wise and moral decisions, often in the face of legitimate and competing demands
- NASW Code of Ethics --- aspirational

- Code of Conduct - Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, Marriage and Family Therapist Board --- law

- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) – mandate/expectations for social work education

- “Social workers’ core values and ethical beliefs are the profession’s linchpin and have matured considerably during the past century”

  (written in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the NASW)
Ethical Dilemma

- A situation in which you have to make a difficult choice (Merriman-Webster)
- Occurs where there are conflicting issues
- No clear right or wrong response
- Involves conflicting values
- There is tension

Ethical decision making

- 2017 revision of NASW code:
  - "ethical decision making is a process. In situations when conflicting obligations arise, social workers may be faced with complex ethical dilemmas that have no simple answers"
Ethical engagement:

a way of social workers being helped to develop ethical competence through regular discussion of ethical issues in daily practice;

regularly incorporating and discussing social work ethics into daily practice the more likely social workers will learn to act ethically and competently in professional practice.

*Doel et al (2009)

Models for Ethical decision-making

- Always being talking about ethics
- Consult, Consult supervisor, Consult the code of ethics, peer consultation
- Consult some more
- Don’t be afraid to bring up ethics; ask the question about it
- Ask yourself – How would this look as headlines on front page
ETHIC Model – Elaine Congress

E – Examine relevant personal, societal, agency, client and professional values
T – Think about what ethical standard of the NASW Code of Ethics applies to the situation as well as about relevant laws and case decisions
H – Hypothesize about possible consequences of different decisions
I – Identify who will benefit and who will be harmed in view of social work's commitment to the most vulnerable
C – Consult with supervisor and colleagues about the most ethical choice

COVER Model – Mitchell and Yordy

- Memorize phrase:
  - "First I Ask Some questions to COVER my bases"
- F – Facts
- I – Issues
- A – Alternatives
- S – Stakeholders
- After fact finding then use COVER
ETHICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

COVER

- C – Codes; identify and analyze legal and ethical codes to inform decision
- O – Outcomes; identify the pros/cons outcomes for each alternative course of action
- V – Values; review your personal and professional values, i.e. golden rule
- E – Editorial; analyze the “publicity effect” of any major decision (can/will I stand by this if word gets out?)
- R – Rules; evaluate each alternative as if it were to become the “rule for others to follow”, gives importance to all decisions vs “it is just one small violation”

Culture

- “the customs, habits, skills, technology, arts, values, ideology, science, and religious and political behaviors of a group of people in a specific time period” (Barker 1995)
- Inclusive of all that humans do, beliefs and values, rules and behaviors to follow to be a part of a particular group, society or organization (Fusch et al 2016; Botz-Bornstein, 2012 as cited by Fusch et al 2016)
Organizational Culture

- Beliefs, values and norms fundamental to the operations of an organization
- The way things are done, the norms and expectations
- Shaped by interactions of individuals and leadership behaviors, through practice, policies and procedure
  "the behavioral expectations that members of an organization are required to meet in their work environment"
  (Verbeke et al, 1998)

Organizational Climate

- The way the environment is perceived by the workers
- Workers "share the same perception of how the work environment affects them as individuals (Glisson, 2007)
Psychological Climate

- An individual employees’ perception of the psychological impact of their work on their own functioning and well-being

- Similar perceptions, put together as a whole will describe organizational climate

Field Education

- Signature pedagogy of social work
- Field placement/education “learning by doing” (Sunirose, 2013)
- Student position in field placement agency, “guests” in a host agency
- Student becomes a “transitional professional” (Castro-Atwater and Hohnbaum, 2015)
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“What students learn about ethics during their field placements is likely to be among the most important and compelling lessons gained during the course of their careers” (Reamer as cited by Papouli 2016)

Field experience – the ethical issues, problems and dilemmas encountered by students will challenge their personal values, beliefs, attitudes and ethical reasoning skills (Papouli, 2016)

Organizational culture and organizational climate used to determine and predict relationship and behaviors of workers

Influence upon ethical and unethical behaviors

Influences delivery of services
Organizational awareness

- Important that social workers have an awareness and understanding of organizational purpose, organizational systems, organizational culture and to know of organizational assessment
- Without this organizational awareness social workers enter the profession with disadvantage for having ability to make impact and influence within the agency/organization

(Silverman, E. 2014)
Organizational awareness

- Important that social workers have an awareness and understanding of organizational purpose, organizational systems, organizational culture and to know of organizational assessment
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(Silverman, E. 2014)
References


