

AGENDA 10

Social Work Education and Practice, and Continuous Professional Development

As a helping profession, social work is people-centred and premised on a set of core values and ethics. Social work education and continuous education play an important role in the long-term development of this profession.

Social Work Education and Practice

Social work education trains a large number of professional social workers to serve people and contribute to society, so that the practitioners can advocate public welfare, concern themselves about social problems, help develop social service and solve social problems by making suggestions for policy making. There are two essential areas in developing social work education: theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Social work education development is closely related to the given economic and social background in any country and any region. Judging from the experience in developing social work profession in different countries, social work education is an indispensable part of professionalization. The globalization has resulted rapid change in social environment, increasingly complex social problems, more advanced information technology, people increased awareness of civil rights. Correspondingly, social welfare system is also rapidly changing. There emerges a diversified and complicated service types, a higher requirement for accountability and quality of service provision. All of these have brought severe test to social work and new challenges to social work education. “Continuous Professional Education” and “Professional Development” have become a hot topic among all professional sectors in the society, the sector of social work included. The development of continuous professional education for social work becomes a contested issue within the social work field. Questions on “why do the social workers need to receive continuous professional education”, “how to receive” and “what is the content” and so on are being raised constantly.

Continuous Professional Education and Professional Development

Before discussing the continuous professional education for social workers, we should first understand the definition and the objective of continuous professional education. Based on its function, continuous professional education aims to help us adapt to the social change, promote growth in professional knowledge, inspire self-transcendence so as to improve the quality of human resources in the organization, accelerate upward mobility of positions and help develop the organization. Defining it from the profession itself, continuous professional education is not only for enhancing the workers’ professional knowledge, strengthening their professional attitude, advancing their skills and abilities to work with and assist others, but also for facilitating their understanding of others and mutual interaction both directly and indirectly through on-the-job continuous professional training. With this, the organization’s service effectiveness will be further improved. In short, continuous professional education refers to the education and training of knowledge and skills designed for professional people or organizations to meet the demands of external changing environment and internal human resources development, to enhance work efficiency, and to further service effectiveness. With respect to 3 types

of orientation, namely, learning, goal and activity, the objectives of continuous professional education can be described as follows: (1) learning-oriented: adapting to social change, professionalization, and promote individual professional growth; (2) goal-oriented: uplift quality of human resources, accelerate upward mobility of positions, help develop the organization, prompt self-transcendence and enhance professional morale; (3) activity-oriented: motivation of learning springing from factors arising from theory to practice.

In countries and regions enjoying relatively mature social work development like US, Britain, Canada, Australia, Taiwan, and Singapore and so on, their social work organizations have laid down very clear definition, objectives and contents of social work continuous professional education. Their social workers can then receive continuous professional education and foster social work professional development. Hong Kong began to develop its social work more than fifty years ago. Its professional education for social workers is as professional as that in other developed regions like Europe and US. It has always been a consensus shared by the Hong Kong social work sector that continuous professional education can promote social workers’ professional standard as well as consolidate and promote professional development. According to the fifth point of the *Code of Practice for Registered Social Workers* formulated by the Social Workers Registration Board, continuous professional education is a personal responsibility of the social workers. They need to upgrade their professional skills and knowledge constantly to ensure more proper and sound services to recipients. The *Guidelines on Code of Practice for Registered Social Workers* also recommends that social workers should attend professional enhancement activities of not less than 24 hours a year (such as training courses/programs, talks, conferences, seminars, forums, workshops and other related activities) to upgrade their professional knowledge and skills. However, at present, there is no mandatory requirement on continuous professional education not has there been any organization formulating relevant guidelines in Hong Kong.

Problems Worthy of Further Explorations

How to carry out continuous professional education for social workers in Hong Kong? And how to make a choice and strike a balance between voluntary and mandatory continuous professional education? Which group should be responsible for supervising continuous professional education and conferring qualification? Should continuous education be linked to licence renewal? What is more, what should be the future direction of social work education, the target of personnel training and the curriculum content? Is it necessary to re-adjust the quality and quantity between social workers’ personal quality and practical training of social workers? How to strengthen the reflective capacity of social work value and individual value while emphasizing skills and knowledge training? All these questions are important issues which carefully consideration, discussion and solutions are badly needed for future social work professional development and social work education development.

How do you think about the themes/topics above? Are there any other themes left out that you would like to raise? What are other issues or problems related to this Agenda that you think should be explored and discussed?

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