

Working with Interpreters: Using Role Play to Teach Social Work Students

Authors : Yuet Wah Echo Yeung

Abstract : Working with people from minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seeking communities who have limited proficiency in the language of the host country often presents a major challenge for social workers. Because of language differences, social workers need to work with interpreters to ensure accurate information is collected for their assessment and intervention. Drawing from social learning theory, this paper discusses how role play was used as an experiential learning exercise in a training session to help social work students develop skills when working with interpreters. Social learning theory posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context when people observe, imitate and model others' behaviours. The roleplay also helped students understand the role of the interpreter and the challenges they may face when they rely on interpreters to communicate with service users and their family. The first part of the session involved role play. A tutor played the role of social worker and deliberately behaved in an unprofessional manner and used inappropriate body language when working alongside the interpreter during a home visit. The purpose of the roleplay is not to provide a positive role model for students to 'imitate' social worker's behaviours. Rather it aims to active and provoke internal thinking process and encourages students to critically consider the impacts of poor practice on relationship building and the intervention process. Having critically reflected on the implications for poor practice, students were then asked to play the role of social worker and demonstrate what good practice should look like. At the end of the session, students remarked that they learnt a lot by observing the good and bad example; it showed them what not to do. The exercise served to remind students how practitioners can easily slip into bad habits and of the importance of respect for the cultural difference when working with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Keywords : role play, social learning theory, social work practice, working with interpreters

Conference Title : ICSW 2018 : International Conference on Social Work

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : September 13-14, 2018