Evaluating Practice Models

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Opinions expressed, including the description of Washington’s practice model, are solely those of the author.
Presentation & Discussion Purpose

• Provide a brief introduction to models of practice
• Provide an overview of issues that arise in trying to evaluate the impact of practice models on outcomes for children and families
• Use an ongoing evaluation of a statewide implementation of Solution-Based Casework to facilitate a discussion of evaluation issues
What is a Practice Model?

• Specifies an underlying theory of family change
• Specifies the kinds of attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviors needed by change agents
• Specifies the ways in which change agents should work with families
• Specifies the institutional context necessary for change agents to adhere to the model
What is the impetus for implementing practice models?

- **Standardize** Practice

- **Employ** Evidence-Based/Informed Practice

- **Improve** Outcomes for Families
  - Reduce the number of children coming into care
  - Get more children home sooner
  - Reduce the number of children coming back into care
Typical **Theory of Change** Underlying Practice Models

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Parental engagement is central to these models!
## Supporting Parent Engagement in Services

### Preconditions
- Separation/Loss
- Poverty-related stress
- Addictions/mental health
- Family stressors
- Client status: stigma, marginality
- Cultural barriers
- Negative service experiences

### Engagement Strategies
- Early/persistent outreach
- Supportive partnership
- Knowledge, skills
- Practical help
- Collaboration in case planning
- Family-centered, culturally responsive practice

### Engagement Services
- 1:1 casework (respect, support, skill-building)
- Instrumental help
- Parent/child visitation
- Peer to peer programs
- Foster/birth parent connections
- Conferencing
- Home-based services

### Treatment Services, e.g.
- Mental Health (adult and child)
- Substance Abuse
- Parent Training
- Interpersonal Violence

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Source: (Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood & Vesneski, 2009)
What is Washington’s “New” Practice Model?

Solution Based Casework

– A method of engaging clients by:
  • Listening to the client’s perception of the problem
  • Exploring what was different when things were going well
  • Working with the client to identify solutions that are relevant and measurable
  • Identifying client resources and strengths that can be brought to bear.
  • Includes concepts from Solution-Focused Therapy and Relapse Prevention
Implementation by the Children’s Administration

- **System wide** (state administered system divided into six regions, multiple offices)
  - Workers
  - Supervisors
  - Managers
  - Administrators

- Promote an **organizational culture** that is strengths based and solution focused

- Note: Case management provided by state workers with some contracting of services to private sector
Implementation Evaluation

Key Question: Is the model implemented as intended?

- What does the theory of change say about the **conditions necessary for practice change**?
- What does the implementation plan say about **how these conditions are to be created**?
- **Who is involved** in implementation?
Issues Confronting Implementation Evaluation

• What kind of data do you need to collect?
  - training documents/materials
  - observation
  - surveys (satisfaction; engagement)

• How widely do you collect it?

• From whom do you collect it?

• Obstacles
  - cost
  - timeliness
  - staff burden
  - opposition from implementers
Washington’s SBC Implementation Evaluation

• Observation
  supervisor training at sites across the state
  worker training in three pilot sites; following up after
  revision of training based on pilot feedback
• Focus Groups
  with supervisors and workers attending the training
• Interviews
  Regional Administrators
  SBC Implementation Team
• Attendance Data on Training Participation
• Survey on Organizational Readiness
The Basic Impact Evaluation Question...

Practice Model → Change in Practice/Services → Change in: Safety, Permanency, Well-Being

Should show that both changes represented by the arrows take place
Issues Confronting Impact Evaluation

• Design Issues

• Measurement Issues

• “Political” Issues

• Resources
Design Issues Confronting Impact Evaluation

• **Problems with experimental designs**
  - What is the unit of analysis?
  - Contagion (across units, workers, clients)

• **Problems with non-experimental designs**
  - Accurately capturing the “before” and “after” conditions
  - Distinguishing the impact of the practice model from other developments
Measurement Issues Confronting Impact Evaluation

- From whom do you gather data?
  - Workers, supervisors, administrators
  - Parents and children
  - Service and care providers

- What kinds of data do you collect?
  - Surveys (in-person, telephone, paper and pencil, web)
  - Observation
  - Administrative data

- Over what period of time?
Political Issues Confronting Impact Evaluation

- Audience(s)?
  - Management?
  - Policymakers?
  - Front-line staff and supervisors?
  - Broader child welfare and research community?

- Role of the evaluator
  - Strictly “outside?”
  - Ongoing consultation based on evaluation data?
  - Co-designer/evaluator?
Multidimensional Impact Evaluation of SBC

- Families
- Management
- Workers
- Records
Impact Study

- Survey workers, supervisors and parents and use administrative data, before and after implementation, to measure change.
Impact Study: Social Worker & Supervisor Survey

• Evaluation Question

What impact has SBC training had on organizational culture and casework practice?
Impact Study: Parent and Worker Surveys

• Evaluation Question

To what extent has SBC training had an impact on parent engagement?
Impact Study: Administrative Records

• Evaluation Question

What impact has SBC training had on child and family outcomes?
# Impact Study: Variables Measured

## Preconditions
- Poverty-related stress
- Addictions/mental health
- Domestic Violence
- Parenting Stress/marginality
- Cultural barriers

## Engagement Strategies
- Supportive relationships
- Knowledge, skills
- Practical help
- Collaboration and inclusion
- Family-centered, culturally responsive practice
- Organizational context

## Treatment Services, e.g.
- Mental Health (adult and child)
- Substance Abuse
- Parent Training
- Interpersonal Violence

## Outcomes
- Placement prevention
- Permanency
- Length of Stay
- Re-entry to care
Discussion

For more information about the evaluation of Washington’s Solution Based Casework Practice Model, contact Sandra Lyons at Partners for Our Children:

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