

Open Education Resources in Child Welfare Continuum Course

Redesign of online Child Welfare course creates a low cost option for Social Work students. Students use and create Open Education Resources while accessing professional resources online.

Background

SOWK 680: Child Welfare Continuum online course was updated for the new MSW Online Program. The course was developed throughout 2021 and implemented in the Fall 2021 Semester. The course instructor was a part time Adjunct Lecturer for the School of Social Work.

While researching ideas for this course, a wide selection of Child Welfare course syllabi were reviewed and a majority revealed that supplemental readings and open resources were used in lieu of a textbook for the course. Additionally, several recently published Child Welfare textbooks were reviewed and were found to contain outdated and/or racist language. We then determined the best course of action would be to use Open Education Resources for course readings. We have already incorporated frequently used websites such as the Child Welfare Information Gateway (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/>) and the National Indian Child Welfare Association (<https://www.nicwa.org/press-releases/>).

Development

In 2020 I began research on this course by reviewing current Child Welfare textbooks on the market and reviewing syllabi that were available online. Through my research it became apparent that many child welfare courses use open education resources due to the practical nature of the course. Most students that take the course are planning on entering child welfare as a career or are currently in the profession. Many of the tools and resources used in child welfare courses are tools that can be used on the job.

The redesign incorporates more current literature, anti-racism language and materials, intentionally features written work by women of color, and brings in assignments that improve the digital literacy of our students. I selected the novel, *The Glass Castle* (\$17), a memoir, by Jeanette Walls, that takes place in Welch, West Virginia, to discuss the intersection of poverty, culture, and mental illness when assessing for child neglect and abuse. Child Protective Services has a difficult task of distinguishing the line between a family's culture, their accepted norms, the impact of poverty and when neglect begins. The assignments around the memoir allow students to explore and discuss these issues.

The *Glass Castle* was selected for several reasons, one of which is that it takes place in Southern West Virginia, in the heart of Appalachia. It was important to feature a story that our students could relate to personally and could be very similar to the neglect cases they work in the field. Michael Laird, LCSW (2019) stated: According to the Council on Social Work Education (2015), "Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations in a purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being." As social workers, we can apply social work knowledge, values, and skills in a purposeful and intentional way to literary fiction as a way to strengthen our craft.

One of the assignments in the course is for the students to create a Wiki on "Child Welfare's Response to Diversity". I have attached the assignment and the rubric used for grading. This assignment allows the students to build a project that could be used as an Open Education Resource.

Implementation

In the Fall of 2021 the new Child Welfare course was taught for the first time. One section was taught fully online and the other section was taught as a hybrid, asynchronous online with several class meetings over the semester. Both sections of the course were taught by the same Adjunct Instructor.

The first time teaching any online course is challenging. There are often tech issues with assignments and some things do not work out as intended. For example, the Book Club assignment required students to read a section of the book, then complete an assessment on the characters as if they were clients, and then the students were to meet on VoiceThread to discuss. However, it worked out better that the students worked together on the assessment instead of working on it independently.

I also had to meet with the instructor several times over the semester to explain assignments and to help set up eCampus. If you are teaching a course that someone else has designed it can be difficult to navigate the course and be prepared for student questions.

The course will be taught again in Fall 2022 by two new adjunct instructors that have not taught this class before but are experts in the field.

Results

In addition to the SEI reports for the course I developed a survey for the students in both sections. Only 12 students responded and provided comments about the course. Based on responses, it does not appear that the students understood what Open Education Resources are and how they are accessing them. However, they did appreciate not having to buy an expensive textbook.

