



The System: A Multilevel Social Service Simulation

By Gregor V. Sarkisian¹

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The System: A Multilevel Social Service Simulation

Abstract

Community psychology practice competencies emerged in an effort to provide guidance to the field of community psychology and training programs seeking to provide students with meaningful opportunities to develop a depth and breadth of practice skills. As a teacher of community psychology practice over the past eleven years, the author has consistently faced challenges in teaching the *Ecological Perspectives*, listed as number 1 under Foundational Principles – “The ability to articulate and apply multiple ecological perspectives and levels of analysis in community practice” (Dalton, & Wolfe, 2012, p. 10). This paper describes a multilevel social service simulation exercise as a teaching tool for community psychology practice competencies within an academic setting. The simulation focuses on *Ecological Perspectives* and the role of *Social Power Dynamics* in *Systems Change*. Suggested curricular content is also included to follow the simulation debriefing.

Simulations provide participants the opportunity to learn material through enacting a scripted experience with varying degrees of improvisation. They also allow for the exploration of complex systemic and group dynamics as a means of priming students for new experiences (e.g., See Wolff & Sarkisian, 2013, for a community coalition simulation) and paradigms such as the ecological perspectives and the role of social power dynamics in systems change.

One of the difficult tasks for making this paradigm shift is the ability to make space for ecological levels (e.g., micro, meso, macro) beyond one's physical location and type of activity. The typical bias of students when first exposed to this shift is a tendency to focus exclusively on a micro, individual or intra-psychic level. Understanding the ecological levels of analysis can serve as a building block to learning how the principles of ecology operate across levels. An understanding of the ecological perspective can also serve as a building block in developing a critical awareness of the role of social power dynamics in systems change. While these building blocks can best be achieved through experience over time, the social service simulation described below has

been found by the author and his students to be an effective tool for a training level of *Exposure* in ecological perspectives, social power theory and systems change.

Development

The development of this exercise occurred over ten years through the author's own praxis experience as a children's social worker and then as a doctoral student in community psychology. In the early 1990's, after first being exposed to community psychology, the author worked as a child protective service worker in South Los Angeles which provided many opportunities to experience systems changes and interface with social system players – clients, workers, supervisors, administrators, service providers, etc. In the mid 1990's, the author was in his doctoral program developing his understanding of both ecological perspectives and social power/empowerment through course- and fieldwork. The author participated in the Community Action Poverty simulation- (<http://www.povertysimulation.net/>), now owned by the Missouri Association for Community Action (2002), as part of a psychology and public policy course late in his doctoral program. While the author found

the exercise to be greatly beneficial for the purposes of raising awareness to the circumstances of living in poverty and the difficulties in meeting basic survival needs, he believed it could be further developed to better reflect ecological perspectives and systems change. He developed *The System: A Multilevel Social Service Simulation* and since its initial development in 2005, the author has run this simulation ten times with Master's level students and five times with Doctoral level students training in community psychology practice.

The System

The overall goal of this experiential learning exercise is to provide participants with a shared experience and then incorporate curricular content for ecological perspectives (i.e., levels of analysis and principles of ecology) (Vincent & Trickett, 1983; and Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) and social power (Lukes, 1974; & Gaventa, 1980; Pilsuk, McAllister & Rothman, 1996) into the context of the participants' shared experience. Finally, because the nature of the exercise involves negative impacts to clients, data from the California Child Welfare System (Casey Family Programs, 2012; California Department of Social Services [CDDS], 2014a; CDSS, 2014b) are utilized to reinforce the ecological perspective and provide participants with factual information on the impact of social service systems on clients. The specific learning objectives include providing a common experience of:

1. The variety of activities that exist at different ecological levels of analysis within social service systems;
2. How change can occur from one ecological level to another in social systems; and,
3. How the three dimensions of social power can manifest into human behaviors in social systems.

How the System Works

In this social service simulation, participants are divided into three groups – clients, workers and supervisors. Each group operates to get their needs met – supervisors translate state law into agency-prescribed procedures that workers must follow in service provision, workers provide services to clients using agency-prescribed procedures, and, clients complete tasks to meet their needs for survival – all through scripted roles. The materials include enough supplies for a total of 12 participants - 4 participants in each group. However, the simulation has been run with as little as 8 participants and as many as 20.

The simulation focuses on how a fictitious State Assembly Bill at the macro level forces change at the meso (adoption of new procedures by workers) and micro (interactions between workers and clients) levels. The specifics of the fictitious Bill are as follows:

Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act.

This bill represents the State Assembly's attempt to reorganize resources within the social service system while also cutting 45% of its total budget. AB 637 creates two major changes in how benefits are distributed to clients: (1) *All cash benefits to clients will be cut from \$800 to \$400 dollars a month.* The \$400 in savings will be diverted to training and the development of a specialized unit of social workers to assist youth in transition out of foster care; and, (2) *Bus passes will only be issued to clients with court-ordered drug testing upon proof of a negative drug test* in the form of documentation issued by the Corp Comp Drug Testing Company. Clients with a positive drug test will lose their bus pass privileges for a minimum of 1 month and will only be issued a bus pass in the future upon presentation of a recent negative drug test.

Clients who do not have court-ordered drug testing are not affected by this change.

At three points in time after the simulation begins (2, 4, & 6 minutes), system changes are initiated by supervisors, impacting workers then clients. The simulation runs until clients have completed all of their tasks or when it becomes clear that clients cannot accomplish any additional tasks (typically 45 minutes after the simulation begins). Clients and workers remain unaware of the fictitious Bill until after the simulation is over through debriefing.

Instructions to Facilitate and Debrief the Simulation

The facilitator should possess expertise in mediating and diffusing conflict as well as advanced organizational skills to run the simulation smoothly. *Appendix I* includes detailed instructions for facilitating this simulation – preparation (including number of participants & materials), beginning the simulation, briefing participants by group before the simulation, and the facilitator role during the simulation.

Appendix II includes a checklist and all of the materials needed to conduct the simulation with a total of 12 participants. These include: Materials checklist, role scripts, referrals to parenting and anger management, welfare checks of \$400 and \$800, bus passes, drug tests results, and social service station signs.

Appendix III includes instructions for debriefing after the simulation and curricular content with discussion questions using material from the simulation and the state of California child welfare system to reinforce learning ecological perspectives and the role of social power in systems change.

Summary

Community psychology practice competencies are often difficult to learn through a lecture and discussion format. This

article describes a simulation to teach Ecological Perspectives and the role of social power in systems change as an alternative to traditional teaching approaches. The simulation is followed by a debriefing and curricular content on ecological perspectives and social power with illustrative examples from the simulated experience and factual examples from the California child welfare system. However, factual examples could be substituted if one is facilitating the simulation in a different region or state or country.

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Appendix I

Facilitator Instructions

Estimated Time for Set Up, Briefing, and Simulation: 1.5 hours
Estimated Time for Debriefing & Content Delivery: 1.5 hours

Before You Get There.

Develop familiarity with materials. Read through the simulation materials to develop an understanding of participant roles, how system change will occur, and how one will facilitate conflicts, if necessary, that are likely to emerge between clients and workers.

Number of Participants and Materials. Print materials to accommodate the number of participants in the simulation. The simulation was developed with 12 participant role scripts. However, the simulation has been run with as few as 8 participants and as many as 20. There should always be a minimum of 4 clients and more client roles can be added. Note that Client C plays an adaptive role and acts unlike the other clients. If there are less than 12 participants, one participant can play multiple supervisor or worker roles but combine supervisor roles before combining worker roles, and, do not combine the Transportation and Drug Testing roles of workers or supervisors.

Once all materials and role scripts have been printed, corresponding supplies are stapled directly to participant role scripts. And, role scripts indicate on the top which materials come with that role. For example, the Supervisor for the Department of Human Welfare should have \$400 checks stapled to their role script.

Room Layout. Be sure that you have a sufficient space to accommodate four tables, one for each work station, and chairs for client and worker participants. *Figure 1* illustrates a suggested layout for tables and chairs by the three types of roles (clients, workers and supervisors).

Briefing Participants on Client, Worker and Supervisor Roles

Before the simulation begins, the exercise is introduced, participants are grouped into Client, Worker, and Supervisor roles – each group is taken outside the room, provided with their role, asked to read their role and then asked if they have any questions. Then each group is told not to discuss the briefing or their role with anyone when they return to the main room.

To begin Briefings, read this passage to participants:

“Before we begin today’s exercise, I’m going to split the class up into three groups. First, I’ll need four volunteers.”

The first four volunteers will be the clients, the second set of four volunteers will be workers, and the third set of four volunteers will be supervisors. Each group should be taken out of the room and briefed in an area where the rest of the participants cannot hear the briefing.

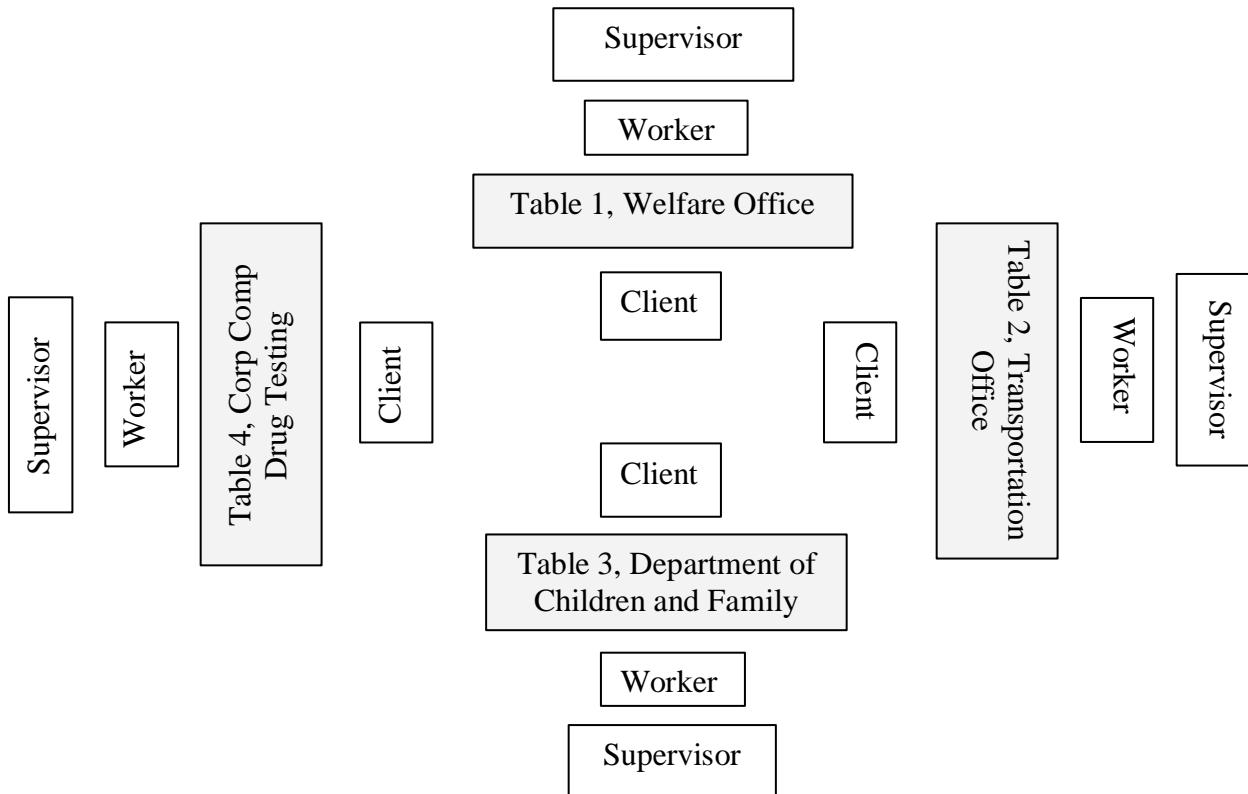


Figure 1:Suggested Room Layout

Client Briefing

(Client Role Scripts: Client A, Client B, Client C, and Client D):

“During this exercise, you will be playing the role of a client in the social service system. Each of you will have a variety of tasks to complete in a limited amount of time. It is important that you complete your tasks in the order they are presented on your script. Please read your role script and let me know if you have any questions. When you return to the main room, please do not discuss your role with anyone else.” Be sure that clients understand that they have to try to accomplish everything on their list in the specific order on their script. And, be sure that **Client C** has seen the note on their script that says they will not follow the order in the script. The clients and facilitator re-enter the room. The facilitator asks for four additional volunteers and exits the room with them.

Worker Briefing

(Worker Role Scripts: Department of Human Welfare, Department of Transportation, CorpComp Drug Testing, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS))

“During this exercise, you will be playing the role of a worker in the social service system. Each of you will be interacting with clients to assist them in getting their needs met. You may

also be approached by a supervisor who may direct you to change how you interact with clients. Please read your role script and let me know if you have any questions. When you return to the main room, please do not discuss your role with anyone else." The most complicated scripts are for the roles of the DCFS Worker and CorpComp Drug Testing Worker. The workers and facilitator re-enter the room. The facilitator asks for four additional volunteers and exits the room with them.

Supervisor Briefing

(Supervisor Role Scripts: Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Department of Human Welfare, Department of Transportation, CorpComp Drug Testing)

"During this exercise, you will be playing the role of a supervisor in the social service system. Each of you will be interacting with workers and driving changes through the system. Please read your role script and let me know if you have any questions. When you return to the main room, please do not discuss your role with anyone else." Once the supervisor of DCFS has read their role script and the facilitator has addressed their questions, send the supervisor of DCFS back into the main room. With the remaining three supervisors (Human Welfare, Transportation, Drug Testing), review the sequencing of systems changes. **"It is important that you initiate system changes in a specific order. The time provided on your script is a guideline. There will be a total of three system changes. The first change will be initiated by the supervisor in the Department of Human Welfare (approximately two minutes into the exercise), the second change will be initiated by the supervisor in the Department of Transportation (approximately four minutes into the exercise), and the Third change will be initiated by the supervisor from Corp Comp Drug Testing (approximately six minutes into the exercise)."** Be sure that the three supervisors are aware of who is making change first, second and third so that they can follow each other's lead.

After the three briefings have been completed, the room is reconfigured; the four worker station signs are taped to tables, the tables are positioned as a large rectangle so that the clients are on the inside with chairs (similar to waiting room) and the workers are facing the clients with a chair on each side of the table (See Figure 1). Supervisors will start or eventually enter the room and be seated furthest from clients, behind the workers. The facilitator then explains that clients are in the waiting room, workers are at their work stations, and supervisors are or will be in the "back room" area behind the workers.

To begin the Simulation, read this passage to participants:

"We are going to engage in an exercise to simulate the complex nature of social systems. This experience will be structured by various scripted participant roles. Because this is a time-limited experience, scripts have been developed to guide the process of the exercise. Thus, it will be important for you to follow your pre-scripted role as closely as possible. During this exercise, participants will sometimes experience strong emotional responses. Remember that is an exercise. Be respectful, be creative in taking on your role, and, we will be sure to spend time at the end of the exercise to discuss your reactions and how Ecological Perspectives, Social Power, and Systems Change played out. We will stop in 45 minutes to an hour. Please stay in your role until I stop the exercise. Ready...Begin!"

During the Simulation: Three systems changes will occur over the course of the exercise moving from Supervisors to Workers to Clients at 2min, 4min, and 6min intervals into the exercise. The facilitator should monitor the three changes below to ensure that they occur in this specific order:

Change 1, 2 minutes after the exercise begins: Supervisor, Human Welfare, \$800 client checks replaced with \$400 checks.

Change 2, 4 minutes after the exercise begins: Supervisor, Transportation, Bus pass contingent upon clean drug test with written documentation.

Change 3, 6 minutes after the exercise begins: Supervisor, Drug Testing, Drug testing documentation now provided to clients for bus passes.

Conflict: The facilitator should be aware of conflicts and intervene as a security guard to mediate conflicts before they become disrespectful.

The simulation is stopped once clients have accomplished everything they can on their list or it becomes clear that there is little else that can be done by clients. Typically, 45 minutes from the start of the simulation.

After the Simulation. Immediately after the simulation is concluded, participants are asked to give a round of applause to themselves and their colleagues. The participants take a break and reconvene to process the simulation and incorporate course content related to the simulation experience.

Appendix II

Simulation Materials The System: A Multi-level Social Service Simulation

Materials NOT included:

- Tape to Secure Social Service Station Signs
- Blank file folders for DCFS Worker.
- Four Pens for workers.
- Four tables and enough chairs for the number of participants in the simulation.

Materials Checklist

(1) Participant Role Scripts

If there are less than 12 participants, one participant can play multiple administrator or worker roles but combine administrator roles before combining worker roles, and, do not combine the Transportation and Drug Testing roles of Workers or Administrators.

- Client Role Scripts (4 total)
- Worker Role Scripts (4 total)
- Supervisor Role Scripts (4 total)

(2) Materials for Workers and Supervisors

Materials should be fastened directly to participant role scripts before the exercise using a paper clip or stapler.

Worker, Department of Human Welfare

- Four \$800 checks

Worker, Department of Transportation

- Four Bus Passes

Worker, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

- Eight Referrals - 4 Parenting and 4 Anger Management

Supervisor, Department of Human Welfare

- Four \$400 checks

Supervisor, Corp Comp Drug Testing

- Four Drug Test Results (1 per client, letters A, B, C, D)

Materials for Room

- Four Social Service Station Signs (Welfare Office, Transportation Office, Corp Comp Drug Testing, Department of Children & Family Services)

Client A Script

During this exercise, your role will be that of a system client. The letter "A" above, next to the word "client" will serve as your identification. You will have a limited amount of time to accomplish all of the tasks on your "to do" list, in the order specified below. You will accomplish each task at the designated station.

- Go to DCFS to visit with your caseworker and figure out what else you have to do before your case can be closed. Feel free to act angry with the caseworker as you have now been in the system for 2yrs and you still don't understand why your children are not back home with you.
- Go to the CorpComp Drug Testing facility to see if you passed your recent drug test. You will need to be sure that they send the results to DCFS so you're in compliance with the court.
- Go to the Transportation Office to pick up your monthly bus pass.
- Go to the Welfare Office and get your monthly check. You are expecting to receive \$800. This money barely covers your monthly expenses of \$500 for rent and utilities and \$300 for you and your kids to eat.

Client B Script

During this exercise, your role will be that of a system client. The letter "B" above, next to the word "client" will serve as your identification. You will have a limited amount of time to accomplish all of the tasks on your "to do" list, in the order specified below. You will accomplish each task at the designated station.

- Go to DCFS to visit with your caseworker and figure out what else you have to do before your case can be closed. Feel free to act angry at the caseworker as you have now been in the system for 6 months and you still don't understand why your case has not been closed.
- Go to the CorpComp Drug Testing facility to see if you passed your recent drug test. You will need to be sure that they send the results to DCFS so you're in compliance with the court.
- Go to the Transportation Office to pick up your monthly bus pass.
- Go to the Welfare Office and get your monthly check. You are expecting to receive \$800. This money barely covers your monthly expenses of \$500 for rent and utilities and \$300 for you and your kids to eat.

Client C Script

During this exercise, your role will be that of a system client. The letter "C" above, next to the word "client" will serve as your identification.

You will have a limited amount of time to accomplish all of the tasks on your "to do" list, in the order specified below. You will accomplish each task at the designated station.

- Go to the CorpComp Drug Testing facility to see if you passed your recent drug test. You will need to be sure that they send the results to DCFS so you're in compliance with the court.
- Go to DCFS to visit with your caseworker and figure out what else you have to do before your case can be closed. Feel free to act angry at the caseworker as you have now been in the system for a year and you still don't understand why your case is not closed.
- Go to the Welfare Office and get your monthly check. You are expecting to receive \$800. This money barely covers your monthly expenses of \$500 for rent and utilities and \$300 for you and your kids to eat.
- Go to the Transportation Office to pick up your monthly bus pass.

Note: You will not follow the order of tasks to be completed above.

You will immediately go to the Welfare Office once the exercise begins to get your \$800 check.

You will then go directly to the transportation office for your bus pass.

Then, you will decide which of the remaining tasks to pursue and in what order based on how quickly (i.e., which line is shortest) you can accomplish them.

Client D Script

During this exercise, your role will be that of a system client. The letter "D" above, next to the word "client" will serve as your identification. You will have a limited amount of time to accomplish all of the tasks on your "to do" list, in the order specified below. You will accomplish each task at the designated station.

- Go to the CorpComp Drug Testing facility to see if you passed your recent drug test. You will need to be sure that they send the results to DCFS so you're in compliance with the court.
- Go to the Transportation Office to pick up your monthly bus pass.
- Go to DCFS to visit with your caseworker and figure out what else you have to do before your case can be closed. Because you have been using crack cocaine for the past 10 years you will need to act confused and re-ask every question after it is answered by your caseworker. You vaguely remember hitting your child a few years back but you are unclear about the specifics. You were also abused as a child and were in the DCFS system from ages 6 to 18.
- Go to the Welfare Office and get your monthly check. You are expecting to receive \$800. This money barely covers your monthly expenses of \$500 for rent and utilities and \$300 for you and your kids to eat.

Worker Script
Department of Human Welfare
Materials: \$800 Welfare Checks

Your role during this exercise will be to provide clients with their monthly Welfare Check. You will need to see the top of the client's script to verify their identity before providing them with their check – Client A, Client B, Client C, Client D. Checks are stored in the back room. Every time you go to the back room you are distracted for about 30 seconds before returning with one check at a time.

When the exercise begins, you will be at the front desk. Every time 5 minutes passes, go to the back room and take a break (i.e., sit far behind the table and pretend to be reading). After 1 minute, return to the front and continue issuing checks.

All clients receive \$800 unless otherwise directed by your Supervisor. If your Supervisor directs you to do something differently then you will need to follow her/his orders or you will be fired – and you really need this job.

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

\$800

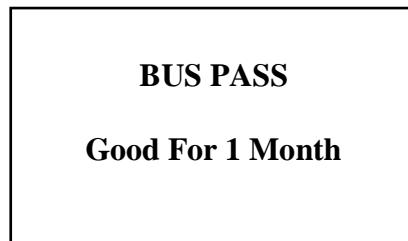
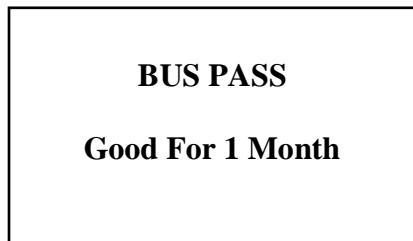
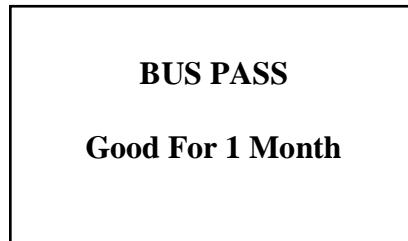
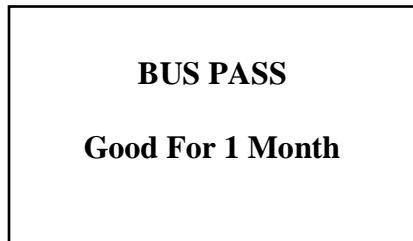
\$800

\$800

Worker Script
Department of Transportation
Materials: Bus Passes

Your role in this exercise is to provide clients with their monthly bus pass. The current protocol is to verify the client's identity via the top of their role script. All bus passes are stored in the back room. Once you have verified the client's identity through seeing their client letter designation (A, B, C, or D), go into the back room and spend about a minute looking for their bus pass. Return and provide the client with their bus pass.

It is possible that there could be a change in protocol but that would come from your Supervisor.



Worker Script CorpComp Drug Testing

During this exercise, your job will be to provide clients with their drug test results. The current protocol is to release the information only to clients. Thus the client will have to show you the top of their script to verify their identity (i.e., as Client A, Client B, Client C, or Client D).

When a client asks to see their results, walk to the “back room” to find their file. Take at least 30 seconds minute. When you return **you provide the client with a verbal result and let them know that the official result will be faxed to their DCFS worker.**

Drug Test Results

Client A – Not in yet, check back in 5 minutes - Positive for Methamphetamine

Client B – Negative

Client C – Not in yet, check back in 5 minutes – in 5 minutes, negative

Client D – Positive for Crack Cocaine

It is possible that the protocol for how you operate will change. The protocol can only be changed if your Supervisor directs you to do so.

Worker Script

Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS)

Materials: Referrals to Anger Management and Parenting, Pen, Case File Folders

Your role in this exercise is to provide case management services to clients. Before speaking with any client they will need to present you with their identification (Letter of client on client script - A, B, C, or D).

When a client comes to see you be sure to:

- Spend at least 1 min. reviewing their case file before letting them ask questions.
- Notify them that you are still waiting to hear about their drug test results and can't give them any "for sure" answers until you receive the fax with the test results. If the client provides you with a test result, laugh, and say that you must receive the results directly from the testing facility.
- If they become even remotely angered by your responses, provide them with a referral to an anger management course in a calm, condescending tone.
- Explain to them that they need understand that they "must accomplish" all of the case plan goals set by the court orders (See below) before they can be reunited with their child/children." If they don't have a copy of the court report, you can mail them one.

Then, read the notes below to let clients know what needs to be done to get their case closed:

Short-Hand Notes of Court Orders

Client A – Test negative for drugs, provide safe home environment for children (Neglect), **Notify Client A what is missing from their file** – Missing: certificate of completion for parenting course supposedly completed 8 months earlier.

Client B – Test negative for drugs, provide safe home environment for children, participate in and obtain certificate of completion for parenting course (Neglect) – **Issue referrals for parenting and anger management when you meet with Client B**.

Client C – Test negative for drugs, provide safe home environment for children (Neglect) **Notify Client C what is missing from their file** – Missing: certificate of completion for parenting course supposedly completed 6 months earlier.

Client D – Test negative for drugs, provide safe home environment for children, participate in and obtain certificates of completion for parenting course and anger management course (Physical Abuse/Neglect) – **Issue referrals for parenting and anger management when you meet with Client C**.

- Try to set up an appointment in one month with them to make a home visit to assess child safety. Once the meeting is scheduled, abruptly tell them you are late for a meeting with another client and you will see them in a month. Stand up, shake their hand, and send them on their way.

Client Referral Date: _____

Parenting Class

Effective Parenting Specialists

(800) 444-7777

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Client Referral Date: _____

Parenting Class

Effective Parenting Specialists

(800) 444-7777

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Client Referral Date: _____

Parenting Class

Effective Parenting Specialists

(800) 444-7777

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Client Referral Date: _____

Parenting Class

Effective Parenting Specialists

(800) 444-7777

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Client Referral Date: _____

Anger Management Class

Anger Management Specialists

(800) get-calm

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

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DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Client Referral Date: _____

Anger Management Class

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(800) get-calm

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Client Referral Date: _____

Anger Management Class

Anger Management Specialists

(800) get-calm

DCFS Worker Signature: _____

Supervisor Script Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS)

During this exercise you will play the role of a Supervisor for the County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Your primary responsibility in this exercise is to develop policies into practices that are carried out by DCFS workers who work under your authority and provide clients with referrals to needed services in the community and ensure parent compliance with court orders and agency-prescribed case plans.

Earlier today when you were occupied with DCFS worker crises approving detention and placement paperwork, you missed a conference call with your local assembly member and senior leadership of the DCFS discussing the implementation of **Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act**. You know that the bill represents the State Assembly's attempt to reorganize resources within the social service system while also cutting 45% of its total budget. And, you heard that there was going to be some benefit to DCFS. Your next call with them is later this afternoon so you figure you can catch up with them then on any changes or they would have contacted you outside the call.

Before the exercise begins, sit behind your DCFS worker. You will monitor their behaviors from afar during the exercise and answer any questions the DCFS worker may have. Do not interact directly with system clients.

Supervisor Script
Department of Human Welfare
Materials: \$400 checks

During this exercise you will play the role of a Supervisor for the County Department of Human Welfare. Your primary responsibility in this exercise is to develop policies into practices that are carried out by workers under your authority who provide monthly checks to clients.

Earlier today you were on a phone call with your local assembly member and senior leadership of the Welfare Department discussing the implementation of **Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act**. This bill represents the State Assembly's attempt to reorganize resources within the social service system while also cutting 45% of its total budget.

AB 637 creates two major changes in how benefits are distributed to clients: **(1) Effective today, all cash benefits to clients will be cut from \$800 to \$400 dollars a month.** The \$400 in savings will be diverted to training and the development of a specialized unit of social workers to assist youth in transition out of foster care; and, **(2) Effective today, bus passes will only be issued to clients with court-ordered drug testing upon proof of a negative drug test in the form of documentation issued by the CorpComp Drug Testing Company.** Clients with a positive drug test will lose their bus pass privileges for a minimum of 1month and will only be issued a bus pass in the future upon presentation of a recent negative drug test. Clients who do not have court-ordered drug testing are not affected by this change.

Before the exercise begins, position yourself outside of the room. **Two minutes into the exercise** you will enter the room and call a meeting (go and get them) with your Welfare worker. Instruct them to close their work station, bring the remaining client checks, and follow you outside the room.

Once outside the room:

- **You will then notify your worker that, effective immediately, they will be providing a monthly check of \$400 instead of \$800.**
- **Take their remaining checks of \$800 and provide them with checks for \$400.**
- **Then, instruct the worker to go back and open their work station.**

Do not accept anything but full compliance from your worker. Once the worker returns to their station you will sit behind them and be sure they are implementing the policy correctly. Interact with system clients only if you have to. You know that clients will be angry with these changes and you want to be sure that your worker is up to this difficult task.

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Supervisor Script Department of Transportation

During this exercise you will play the role of a Supervisor for the County Department of Transportation. Your primary responsibility in this exercise is to develop policies into practices that are carried out by Department of Transportation workers who work under your authority and provide bus passes to clients.

Earlier today you were on a phone call with your local assembly member and senior leadership of the Transportation Department discussing the implementation of **Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act**. This bill represents the State Assembly's attempt to reorganize resources within the social service system while also cutting 45% of its total budget.

AB 637 creates two major changes in how benefits are distributed to clients: **(1) Effective today, all cash benefits to clients will be cut from \$800 to \$400 dollars a month.** The \$400 in savings will be diverted to training and the development of a specialized unit of social workers to assist youth in transition out of foster care; and, **(2) Effective today, bus passes will only be issued to clients with court-ordered drug testing upon proof of a negative drug test in the form of documentation issued by the CorpComp Drug Testing Company.** Clients with a positive drug test will lose their bus pass privileges for a minimum of 1month and will only be issued a bus pass in the future upon presentation of a recent negative drug test. Clients who do not have court-ordered drug testing are not affected by this change.

Before the exercise begins, position yourself outside of the room. **Four minutes into the exercise** you will enter the room and call a meeting (go and get them) with your Transportation worker. Instruct them to close their work station and follow you outside the room.

Once outside the room:

- You will then notify your worker that, **effective immediately, they will have to see the written drug test results before they can issue a bus pass to clients.**
- **After they see the written drug test result and confirm it is negative, they can then issue a bus pass to clients.**
- **Workers may not provide a bus pass to a client with a positive drug test under any condition.**
- **Then, instruct the worker to go back and open their work station.**

Do not accept anything but full compliance from your worker. Once the worker returns to their station you will sit behind them and be sure they are implementing the policy correctly. Do not interact directly with system clients.

Supervisor Script
CorpComp Drug Testing
Materials: Physical Drug Test Results

During this exercise you will play the role of a Supervisor for the CorpComp Drug Testing Company privately contracted by the County of Los Angeles. Your primary responsibility in this exercise is to develop policies into practices that are carried out by CorpComp Drug Testing Workers who work under your authority and provide drug-testing services to system clients.

Earlier today you were on a phone call with your local service system administrator and senior leadership of the CorpComp Drug Testing Company discussing the implementation of **Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act**. This bill represents the State Assembly's attempt to reorganize resources within the social service system while also cutting 45% of its total budget.

AB 637 creates two major changes in how benefits are distributed to clients: **(1) Effective today, all cash benefits to clients will be cut from \$800 to \$400 dollars a month.** The \$400 in savings will be diverted to training and the development of a specialized unit of social workers to assist youth in transition out of foster care; and, **(2) Effective today, bus passes will only be issued to clients with court-ordered drug testing upon proof of a negative drug test in the form of documentation issued by the CorpComp Drug Testing Company.** Clients with a positive drug test will lose their bus pass privileges for a minimum of 1month and will only be issued a bus pass in the future upon presentation of a recent negative drug test. Clients who do not have court-ordered drug testing are not affected by this change.

Before the exercise begins, position yourself outside of the room. **Six minutes into the exercise** you will enter the room and call a meeting (go and get them) with your CorpComp Drug Testing Worker. Instruct them to close their work station and follow you outside the room.

- You will then notify your worker that, **effective immediately, they will need to change their protocol and provide written drug test results.**
- **Then, provide the written drug test results to the worker and instruct them to go back and open their work station.**

Do not accept anything but full compliance from your worker. Once the worker returns to their station you will sit behind them and be sure they are implementing the policy correctly. Do not interact directly with system clients.

Official Test Results
CorpComp Drug
Testing

Client A

Positive:
Methamphetamine

Official Test Results
CorpComp Drug
Testing

Client B

Negative

Official Test Results
CorpComp Drug
Testing

Client C

Negative

Official Test Results
CorpComp Drug
Testing

Client D

Positive: Cocaine

STATION 1:

WELFARE OFFICE

STATION 2:

TRANSPORTATION

OFFICE

STATION 3:

CORP COMP

DRUG TESTING

STATION 4:

DEPARTMENT OF

CHILDREN AND

FAMILY SERVICES

Appendix III

Debriefing, Curricular Content and Discussion Questions

Debriefing. To begin, participants are invited to share their experience of the simulation. The facilitator then reads the fictitious assembly bill AB 637 and asks the participants who were Supervisors to read aloud the systems changes they created from their script. Next, Workers are asked to read their roles from their script. Finally, the Clients are asked to read their role scripts.

Deconstruction. Next, the simulation is deconstructed using the levels of analysis, the principles of ecology and social power. These conceptual tools and theory are defined and illustrated in the context of the simulation experience. Finally, the principles of ecology are further explored through using real policy changes to illustrate a more accurate depiction of the CA Child Welfare System. If facilitating this exercise in a different state or region, similar information should be accessible from government and/or non-profit websites.

Below are notes on how the simulation relates to conceptual and theoretical content as well as how Ecological Perspectives can be illustrated through the actual CA Child Welfare System.

Ecological Perspectives - Levels of Analysis (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010)

Macro Level

Collective values represented by politicians are developed into laws and policies that provide guidance for addressing social issues through state and federal programs and funding to support these programs.

Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act (Fictitious). This bill represents the State Assembly's attempt to reorganize resources within the social service system while also cutting 45% of its total budget. AB 637 creates two major changes in how benefits are distributed to clients:

- (1) **All cash benefits to clients will be cut from \$800 to \$400 dollars a month.**
The \$400 in savings will be diverted to training and the development of a specialized unit of social workers to assist youth in transition out of foster care; and,
- (2) **Bus passes will only be issued to clients with court-ordered drug testing upon proof of a negative drug test in the form of documentation** issued by the CorpComp Drug Testing Company. Clients with a positive drug test will lose their bus pass privileges for a minimum of 1month and will only be issued a bus pass in the future upon presentation of a recent negative drug test. Clients who do not have court-ordered drug testing are not affected by this change.

Meso Level

From AB 637, policy is developed into agency-prescribed procedures by supervisors that serve organizationally mandated obligations that workers have in their interactions with clients. Administrators direct supervisors to train and enforce new procedures. Supervisors train workers in new procedures and enforce that workers follow agency-prescribed procedures.

Changes in procedure needed to occur in all four offices based on the 2 changes at the macro level.

Unplanned Systems Glitches at the Meso Level: Changes only occurred in three offices due to a communication breakdown in DCFS – supervisor missed call and worker never accepted drug test in writing from client. The timing of change was late for the Drug Testing Office – after the Transportation office changed their procedure. And, no administrators were available to assist supervisors in implementing policy into practice.

Micro Level

Clients and agency workers interact within and outside of the agency-prescribed procedure. Workers and clients did not anticipate any of the changes and seldom do.

**Ecological Perspectives - Principles of Ecology
(Vincent & Trickett, 1983; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010)**

Interdependence

In Simulation: Macro-Meso-Micro- **Assembly Bill (AB) 637, the Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act (Fictitious)** (Macro), alteration of practices in four offices (meso), change in amount and process of receiving benefits for clients (micro).

In Reality: Macro-Meso-Micro – Foster Care Independence Act (1999) Chaffee Act – State can double number of transitional living programs and extend Medicaid until age 21 (California Department of Social Services [CDDS], 2014)¹.

- Community based programs are developed
- Twice as many youth have access to Independent Living Program Services

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/res/pdf/Chronology.pdf>

Adaptation

In Simulation: Client C – Not following rules. Have participant playing role of Client C read script.

In Reality: Macro level – Foster Care Independence Act (1999) Chaffee Act – Society's (Government's) response to the unmet needs of children in long term foster care emancipating from the system with no or minimal preparation for post-high school plans – higher education or trade school, career, employment skills, etc. – and evidenced by growing rates of unemployment, incarceration and homelessness among youth emancipating from long term foster care (CDDS, 2014)¹.

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/res/pdf/Chronology.pdf>

Cycling of Resources

In Simulation: Decrease in monetary benefits and condition of negative drug test limiting ability to receive bus pass for clients, increased resources to train and hire DCFS workers to assist emancipating youth.

In Reality: In Fall, 2012, California spent \$3,926,431,373 on Child Welfare Expenditures (macro) (Casey Family Programs, 2012).

<http://www.childwelfarepolicy.org/maps/state?id=5>

Review facts at a glance document to see the extent to which children benefit on the micro level (CDSS, 2014)².

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/res/pdf/Factatglance.pdf>

Succession

In Simulation: Outdated bureaucratic governance structure operating from deficit- and needs-based models of behavior change that emerged in the 1970s.

In Reality: Review chronology of child welfare services (CDDS, 2014)¹

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/res/pdf/Chronology.pdf>

Discussion Question: Given the way things played out in the simulation, how could thinking ecologically (levels of analysis and principles of ecology) benefit policymakers in developing laws that promote individual empowerment and community well-being?

Social Power (Lukes, 1974; & Gaventa, 1980; Pilsuk, McAllister & Rothman, 1996) in The System

Resources (Use of resources to improve, bargain, reward, and punish)

In Simulation:

- State (Physical) Custody of child and ability to limit visitation and terminate parental rights.
- Welfare payment reduction.
- Loss of bus pass due to positive drug test.

Agendas (Shaping forms of participation)

In Simulation:

- Court orders, mandated referrals, bureaucratic governance structure.
- Policy from Assembly Bill 637 Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act (Fictitious) cutting welfare check to increase number of social workers.
- Policy from Assembly Bill 637 Welfare Service Improvement and Parent Safety Act (Fictitious) making bus pass a condition of sobriety (i.e., negative drug test).

Ideology (Shaping the definition/understanding of public issues and influencing ideology)

In Simulation:

- Ideological (non-fact based) beliefs of status quo dictate systems change.
- Development of laws, policies, practices, behaviors and reactions.
- Learned helplessness and hopelessness about changing one's or others' situation.

Discussion Question: Given the way The System Simulation played out, what changes could be made to Resources, Agendas, and Ideologies to promote opportunities for clients to become empowered (using the definition below)?

Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989).