

Social Work Education for Social Development *

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ABSTRACT

Social work as a profession has an obligation to respond to and, if necessary create, societal agendas. Social development is clearly on the current societal agenda. This paper examines the different emphases and levels of social development and advocates a broad perspective of the concept. The relationship between social development and social work is then explored. Shared values and goals augur well for a constructive relationship. Finally the paper addresses the importance of education for social workers to participate in social development initiatives. Teaching and practice curricula are discussed as well as different levels of training. The paper concludes with recommendations for future networking, both between educators and disciplines, and research and literature.

Introduction

According to Ira Goldenberg, professions are shaped by the social and political realities of their time and by the societies of which they are a part (Franklin, 1990). This is clearly evident in the social work profession, which has been characterised by its focus on particular methods at certain periods in its history. The profession has either emphasised "private troubles" or "public issues" according to prevailing conservative or liberal political ideologies respectively. Integration and balance within the profession continue to present challenges, for both practitioners and teachers. Ongoing attempts to integrate and find balance in the curricula of educational institutions are evident (Gray, 1994a; Hutton, 1994). It has been argued that the profession is unprepared for new societal agendas (Franklin, 1990). The new agenda is clearly social development. This paper looks at social development, the relationship between social work and social development and the means by which social work educators can better equip new and returning students to contribute towards the new agenda.

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Social Development

Development seems to mean different things to different people and a single agreed-upon definition of social development clearly does not exist. Some writers define development so broadly that it encompasses every aspect of a society's functioning:

"...development may be said to represent the entire gamut of changes whereby an entire social system, attuned to divergent basic needs and desires of individuals, groups and communities within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as 'unsatisfactory' to a situation or condition of life which can be regarded as materially and spiritually 'better'" (Varma, 1990:12).

Others define it so narrowly that it becomes synonymous with community development, a less comprehensive concept than social development and just one of several strategic approaches to social development. Indeed, it may be helpful to conceptualise development as operating on different levels (Burkey, 1993; Cox, 1994; Louw, 1993). The macro level is characterised by policy and national initiatives. These include land reform, as part of rural development (Cooper, 1992), and restructuring of expenditure and taxes, necessary for economic development (Bethlehem, 1992). Development at a regional level complements the micro level and may seek to coordinate scarce resources. The micro level of development is also referred to as the community or grassroots level. The concepts of people's participation and empowerment are most prominent at this level. Community or grassroots development may be understood as a "populist strategy" in terms of Midgley's (1993) ideological classification of social development strategies. Literature is replete with a number of different "types" of development such as social, economic, political, self-development, human, community and grassroots. These types may refer to different levels of development, but they may also be different aspects of development within one level. Burkey (1993) conceptualised social development as a process of change starting from individual development of confidence, cooperativeness, awareness and skills. With this base, economic and political development could proceed and allow for social development whereby culturally appropriate social services and institutions could be initiated and maintained (see Figure 1).

Part of the reason for "...confusion about what the social development perspective entails" (Midgley, 1994:177) may be found in historical differences attached to the concept. During the 1950s and 60s, Western development thinking was along economic lines. However, the idea that economic growth (increased savings and

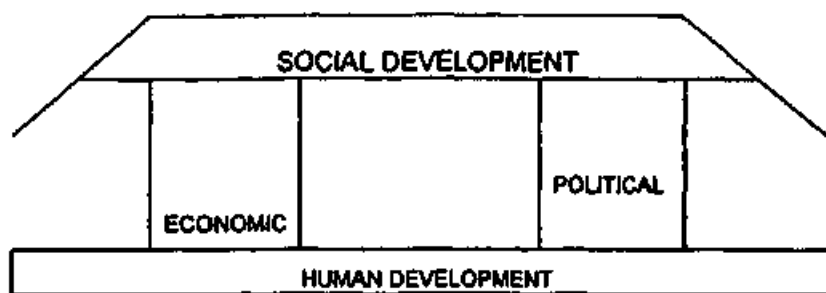


Figure 1: Burkey's 1993 conceptualisation of development

investment) would result in development in Third World countries, as it had in some Western economies, proved unfounded. Increased poverty was more the norm (Burkey, 1993; Lombard, 1991). It became recognised that social and institutional change was also required to facilitate social development (Elliott, 1993). The 1970s saw the formulation of the basic needs approach which sought to emphasise the importance of such needs being met (Burkey, 1993). Social justice and redistribution emerged as important considerations in the development process (Elliott, 1993). Debates of that decade considered normative issues, such as the manner in which development should take place and the desired outcomes. Need-oriented, endogenous, self-reliant and ecologically sound development, based on structural transformation, was advocated. The need for each society to find its own development strategy, based on its own goals and circumstances, was recognised.

The 1980s were characterised by worldwide economic problems and developing nations' increasing indebtedness, which led to the imposition of structural adjustment requirements on the latter (Anheier, 1990). According to Midgley (1994), these circumstances impeded social development efforts. However, there is now a renewed interest in human beings as the pivot of social development.

This paper adopts a broad perspective of social development. It is seen as a comprehensive concept incorporating political, economic and cultural changes as part of deliberate actions to transform society (Varma, 1990). Such a perspective entails a normative component in that it refers to an ideal state of affairs which is approximated by societies in varying degrees. The task of social development requires a multifaceted approach in which all sectors of society work together to address issues of concern, the most pronounced being poverty.

Social Work in Relation to Social Development

Poverty has also been prominent on the social work agenda since the early days of the profession. Social work approaches to addressing poverty have varied but overall have followed a "...remedial-residualist and maintenance-oriented social service approach" (Midgley, 1994:2). Social work is traditionally associated with the provision of social welfare. By and large social welfare programmes are not designed to promote economic development. They are rather seen as mechanisms for helping people who are not able to make a substantial contribution to the economy, such as the aged, the mentally and physically challenged, and children in need of care. For the most part, social services are compartmentalised from the economy and they generally have a maintenance and protective rather than a developmental function (Midgley, 1994). It has also been expounded that social work has taken on a control function in maintaining the status quo, while deviating from its avowed mission of eradication of poverty. This deviation has detracted from its contribution to social development. Social work has tended of late to withdraw from the coal face, leaving the grassroots level to para-professionals. Simultaneously, social workers have not been renowned for their contribution towards policy formulation and social planning, again viewing such activities as best left in the hands of others (Cox, 1994).

Development is a relatively new area for social work and is one which requires a massive paradigm shift for social workers. Social work has struggled to establish itself as a distinct profession and discipline, with its own knowledge base and values. In social welfare provision, social workers now have a recognisable place and established professional boundaries. In the multidisciplinary approach of social development these boundaries become blurred and the contribution which each discipline potentially makes to the development process becomes indistinct and negotiable (Gray, 1994b). Social development theory has been extremely general and thus has not had a major impact on social work. In addition, the multidisciplinary nature of social development has "...tended to ignore individual social development at the micro level and has emphasised economic planning" (Elliott, 1993:27).

In spite of these tensions, social work is coherent with a social development approach in terms of values, focus and theory. A significant point of connection is a shared humanistic value base. Both social work and social development recognise that people's interests are of paramount importance and they have a right to participate in their own development. Power structures and policy makers need to be encouraged to be responsive to people's needs, especially where their needs and interests are overlooked for the sake of broader political, economic or social goals.

Social justice is a basic goal. Social work and development share a commitment to the eradication of poverty, a commitment which is receiving renewed, vociferous attention within the social work profession. The multidisciplinary approach of social development is consistent with the ecosystems perspective of social work, a perspective which recognises the impact of different systems upon each other.

Education for Developmental Social Work

We contend that change begins with education. If social workers are to negotiate successfully the changed paradigm to contribute more effectively to social development, the impetus will have to come from the educators. In his review of the promotion of a developmental perspective in African schools of social work, Midgley (1994:17) reported that "...many schools have introduced content on social development to further this aim". This would appear to be valid comment in view of our own changes at the University of Natal and in view of literature emanating from other African universities, such as Botswana (Anderson, Wilson, Mwanza & Osei-Hwedie, 1994) and Uganda (Kabadaki, 1995). However, while African social work educators may be very aware of social development issues, we would suggest that the path to comprehensive revision of curricula is fraught with challenges. We assume that, in reality, the tensions between social work and social development perspectives as mentioned previously, are reflected in ongoing curricula revisions as we grapple to reconcile the different approaches of the more remedial social work models with the developmental approach. Thus this contribution is a mixture both of what is being done in education and what should be done.

A Change in Ethos

It is advocated that a change in ethos is required to permeate all courses taught. A philosophy of people-centred development, reinforcement of the importance of the enabler role, a curriculum with development as the organising principle and a broad knowledge base is proposed (United Nations, 1992). Hutton (1994) advocated the need to move from a focus on ways of working, that is social work methods, to a way of thinking. Empowerment, education, facilitation, brokering, prevention and policy development are some of the activities which would allow social workers to practice a developmental model of social work. Kabadaki (1995:80) reviewed the applicability of various social work models for rural social work in Uganda. He concluded that "...the integrated practice model which ... seeks to promote competency, normalisation and empowerment (and) allows flexibility for choice of locus regarding intervention" offered a good organising base.

We contend that social work education already has elements which prepare people for development practice and that the key to a developmental focus is the way in which social work theory, values and skills are applied in practice. Consider, for example, the skills required for development work such as the ability to link with people, to form community groups and to develop community projects. Our generalist trained graduates leave university equipped with these abilities, but most of them go into traditional social work structures where they end up applying these skills to largely individualistic approaches. Therefore, social work education alone cannot make the transition to developmental work. Predominantly social work organisations need to also open doors for developmental social work. Educators can produce graduates with a desire and commitment to contribute to macro-level intervention. This requires mainly a value change. Through the education programme students have to develop an enlarged perspective on social problems, their multicausal nature and the need for multilevel, holistic interventions. Such understanding and awareness is needed to inculcate in them the desire and motivation to engage in developmental work. To some extent, this requires a different view of professionalism and its desirability. For the most part, development requires a move away from recognisable contexts, familiar techniques and methods of working and established professional boundaries. Development is multidisciplinary, community rather than organisation based, and requires hands-on, grassroots work.

Teaching of Social Policy

Another way in which this philosophical change is achieved is through the teaching of social policy. Community development is just one strategic approach to social development. Another which has relevance in social work is the analysis, formulation and development of social policy. Courses on social policy need to teach students comparative approaches to show how residual, welfare state and political economic approaches to social policy differ from social development. To truly appreciate the value of the policy of social development and the need for planned, holistic development at the grassroots level, students have to understand the relationship between social, economic and political development. They also have to develop an understanding of social work as an intrinsically political endeavour, committed to the pursuit of social justice, to fully appreciate social work's role at the macro or policy level of social intervention.

Fieldwork Training

We have touched on several content areas of the social work curriculum which we consider crucial to teaching a developmental social work approach. However, we

are intensely aware that social work educators require the support of practitioners if they are to prepare students adequately for developmentally-oriented social work practice. They are reliant on organisations and communities to provide opportunities for fieldwork, long acknowledged as a vital component in social work education. We have struggled to find placements which could offer students models for developmental social work practice. This difficulty arose partly as a result of the continuing remedial, individualist orientation of many urban-based social work agencies and the urban bias which appears to typify social work practitioners worldwide. If developmental social work is to address poverty, this urban bias presents a major challenge, both in practice and in student training, in a country like South Africa where it is acknowledged that poverty is most prevalent in rural areas. Consequently, we have tried two approaches to resolving the fieldwork dilemma. The first involved the establishment of student units attached to and supervised by the Department of Social Work, as opposed to outside organisations. These units are specifically for final (fourth) year undergraduate students, who spend three days a week in the field. They are located in informal settlements and poorer areas around Durban. One of these units is part of a multidisciplinary, primary health care programme (NICHE) where our students are making a major contribution to the implementation of planned, holistic development.

This year the Department has also placed third year students in developmentally-oriented organisations, usually without social workers in their employ. These students are also supervised solely by Departmental personnel. Four of these students are currently undertaking their placement with a rural development organisation on a three week, full-time basis. Owing to the long distance of the organisation from any sizeable town, these students will live on the organisation's premises for the duration of their placement and their academic requirements will be supervised by Departmental staff. We believe that in principle the student units and block rural placements do allow the students to put multidisciplinary social development principles into practice and enable greater integration of classroom teaching and field experiences. The units are, however, relatively expensive in terms of financial costs and staff time but such is our commitment to developmental social work that these costs are worth the benefits to be accrued for the future of social work in the long term.

Differing Levels of Training

Hutton (1994) mentioned the need for development training at different levels. Thus far we have talked about undergraduate degree level preparation for development work in the Department of Social Work at the University of Natal. In addition, we now offer a coursework masters programme which is targeted at

experienced social workers in management and supervisory positions who are able to institute changes in their organisational settings. The course introduces students to advanced social work theory which includes an intensive study of the philosophy and values of social work, the nature of relevant social work for our context and the future directions social work should take. Students then study research and conduct a community-oriented research project, do a course on social policy with specific reference to the policy of social development and a course on developmental social work. Here they are encouraged to integrate their new knowledge with their experience and to work out for themselves a way of proceeding in social work practice. New perspectives are gained and new directions are forged through education, but most importantly, new commitments are made. Education of this nature is immensely empowering for social workers and is essential.

Our department, through the Community Service Training Programme (CSTP), also offers re-training programmes for experienced workers, be they involved in health care, community development, education or social work. These short-term certificate courses offer those who request them a re-orientation to development through the provision of new knowledge and lessons as to how to apply existing skills and experience to developmental practice. Departments of Social Work are in an ideal position to provide refresher courses of this nature.

At another level, CSTP offers a two year development training programme for indigenous workers. The first year of the course introduces students to the theory and practice of community development. The second year involves supervised fieldwork in community development settings. The emphasis in this training is on hands-on development work. The course prepares students for grassroots work. To meet the growing demand for community development trained personnel, we are in the process of upgrading this training to diploma status.

Conclusion

In this paper we have addressed certain important issues relating to the role of social work in education for social development. There are many issues that have not been addressed, such as the need for indigenous research and literature, for networking and learning from one another, and for co-operation with other disciplines. We could all benefit greatly from the different approaches being taken to development education. Amongst other things, case studies could be developed, research initiatives and teaching materials, such as course outlines and reading lists, could be shared. There is a need to develop evaluation techniques since these are not well developed for social development, according to the literature. There is a need to compile a data bank on multidisciplinary team work. There is very little literature

on this and it is sorely needed in order to clarify the roles of various participants in the community development process. There is also need for the development of a network for sharing problems and experiences in introducing development courses into social work education programmes. Such a network offers opportunities for the development of indigenous materials and approaches to development education.

In conclusion, in this paper we have described the work being done at the University of Natal in Durban to integrate education for community development into our social work curriculum in the belief that this is the future direction for relevant social work in our context. We have been involved in linkages with the University of the North where a School of Development is to be instituted. Our student fieldwork courses confirm for us the value of the training we are offering for development work.

We have highlighted the differences between community and social development, the former being one of the strategic approaches used in development work. Another strategic approach which is particularly relevant to development-oriented social work is policy analysis, formulation and development. The policy of social development is particularly relevant to contexts where there are wide disparities between rich and poor, and urban and rural communities, and where poverty is widespread. It is thus the policy of choice for South Africa as attempts are being made to reduce past inequalities and to improve the quality of life for the most disadvantaged sectors of our society. The government's Reconstruction and Development Programme provides the social development framework within which welfare and social work can make a contribution to change in our country. The challenge for social work educators is to produce graduates who are able to participate actively in reconstruction and development, and who are able to enter into this process with a clear knowledge and understanding of the importance of developmental social work to this process.

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