5

EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

(PROJECTING BEYOND THE 21ST CENTURY)

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Edited by
Olawale A.Moronkola
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21-04-2015

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The Roles and Responsibilities of Social Workers in the Primary School Setting in Nigeria

29

Folaranmi, O. O.

Abstract

This paper attempts to examine some of the conditions in the Primary Schools that prevent pupils from maximizing the benefits of the education system. The performance of pupils after spending 5 or 6 years in the primary schools are assessed by the provisions in the objectives of the National Policy on Education for the primary level of education. The discussion on the state of education is discussed based on a review of literature. There seems to be a gap between what the policy says and what is being achieved in the schools in relation to the needs and expectations of pupils. It is believed that, the gap could be bridged by School Social Work intervention to improve the social and psychological functioning of the pupils and their families, and to maximize family well-being as well as the academic functioning of their children.

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Introduction

The primary education system in Nigeria prepares pupils between the ages of 6-12 years for the next stage of junior secondary school (JSS). There were over 45,000 schools as at 2006. The Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) is saddled with this responsibility in Oyo State and it has over 1,386 schools as at 2012. There are so many challenges confronting pupils attending these schools – which have negative effects on the learning outcome for them. Some of these challenges include poor school environment, lack of adequate

learning facilities, poor pupil-teacher relationship, aggressive and hostile peer relations in addition to the innumerable unfavourable social conditions from the pupils' family and home backgrounds. If the school as a major socialising agent for the child and the child or pupil as part of that interacting social system which includes the family, the peer group and the community, is confronted with so many challenges, one wonders how the child will be able to cope and pass out successfully. A professor of education once asserted in 1995 that the education system in Nigeria was an unprofitable industry where both primary and secondary schools produce functional illiterates in large numbers. Although there is paucity of data on the levels of enrolment and transition from primary to secondary, the reality is that a sizeable percentage of pupils at the primary level either drop out and or fail out from the educational system with little or no skill to enter the employment market.

This situation directly negates the objectives for which primary education is designed according to the National Policy on Education (2004). Section 4 is reproduced here for ease of reference.

Primary education as referred to in this document is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The duration shall be six years.

This being the case, the goals of primary education are as follow:

i. to inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy skills and ability to communicate effectively;
ii. to lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
iii. to give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
iv. to mould their character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;

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v. to develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;

vi. (give "the child opportunities for developing – manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;

vii. to provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The State of Education in Nigeria

A quick review of literature on the state of education in Nigeria is here presented. For example, a look at the very first policy provision is talking about inculcation of the 3Rs that is; reading, writing and rithmetic, it will be disheartening to visit any public primary school at random, pick any pupil at random and test him/her on the basics reading, writing or rithmetic skills, one would be shocked at the response of the pupil, as he or she will not be able to read or write at the level expected. Government pronouncements over the years show that, a huge proportion of the national budget is allocated to Education. Whereas almost all the unions in the education sector at all levels have been clamouring for increase in the annual budgetary allocation to education over the years, the government has not fully implemented the promise made on that. At the same time, the Education sector has been subjected to the same disruptions and neglect that have been the fate of all sectors of national life in the twenty years preceding the advent of the current democratic regime. The ill-effects of this state of affairs have been listed as follow:

i. Total decay of infrastructural facilities

ii. Demoralization on the part of teachers

iii. Inadequacy of instructional facilities, poor performance of pupils and students in public examinations.

iv. Poor access, poor retention, wide geographical/gender/social disparities in educational opportunities.

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v. Massive brain drain.

vi. A national literacy rate of 52%, qualifying Nigeria for membership of the league of E-9 countries (i.e. the nine countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterates) and;

vii. Total lack of confidence in the educational system by the populace.

The educational system in Nigeria, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, can therefore not play the role of prime mover of political and social-economic development. Something drastic therefore has to be done, and urgently too, to remedy the situation, and to reposition the education sector to play its prime role as a positive tool for genuine human development.

The Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan was established to provide the much needed manpower to provide services in the areas where need exist nationwide. In this regard, the services that will prevent pupils from dropping out/failing out of the primary school system is an area that needs urgent attention.

The department has started posting our Bachelor of Social Work students to the secondary schools in Oyo State to provide social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families. A lot of success was achieved and many letters of commendation received to attest to the fact. Students will also be posted to primary schools for their practicum to advocate, enable and support pupils to improve and make positive changes. This will be our own humble contribution to the education transformation embarked upon by the Senator Abiola Ajimobi's Administration in Oyo State.

The next sub-section of this paper is a quick review of what social work is all about.

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What is Social Work?

Social work has been defined in so many ways by different scholars and authors. It has been explained as a profession, a programme, a practice and a process using the 4Ps. On the one hand, Social Work has been defined as being "concerned with the interactions between people and their social environment which affect the ability of people to accomplish life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspirations and values. The purpose of social work therefore is to (1) enhance the problem-solving and coping capacities of people,(2) link people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities, (3) promote the effective and humane operation of these systems, and (4) contribute to the development and improvement of social policy" (Pincus and Minahan 1973, p.9).

On the other hand, the international definition explains social work as a profession that promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. *International Association of Schools of Social Work* IASSW *and International Federation of Social Workers* IFSW Foundation Documents (2004).

Social Work is a professional and academic discipline that seeks to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals, groups, or communities by intervening through research, policy, community organizing, direct practice, and teaching on behalf of those afflicted with poverty or any real or perceived social injustices and violations of their human rights. Research is often focused on areas such as human development, social policy, public administration, psychotherapy, program evaluation, and international and community development. Social workers are organized into local, national, continental and international professional bodies.

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Social Work, an interdisciplinary field, utilizes theories from economics, education, sociology, medicine, philosophy, politics, anthropology and psychology. In many jurisdictions, clinical social workers are licensed mental health professionals.

Duties of a Social Worker

Social Work is a profession for those with a strong desire to help improve people's lives. They engage in the following activities and many more that could not be listed:

i. Assist people by helping them cope with issues in their everyday lives, deal with their relationships, and solve personal and family problems.
ii. Help clients who face disability or a life-threatening disease or a social problem, such as inadequate housing, unemployment, or substance abuse.
iii. Assist families that have serious domestic conflicts, sometimes involving child or spousal abuse.
iv. Conduct research, advocate for improved services, engage in systems design or are involved in planning or policy development. US Bureau of Labour(2003).

Child, family, and school social workers may also be known as child welfare social workers, family services social workers, child protective services social workers, occupational social workers, or gerontology social workers. They often work for individual and family services agencies, schools, state or local governments.

Other types of social workers include social work administrators, planners and policymakers, who develop and implement programmes to address issues such as child abuse, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and violence. These workers research and analyze policies, programmes and regulations. They identify social problems and suggest legislative and other solutions. They may help raise funds or write grants to support these programmes.

In summary, social work mediates the process through which the individual and the society reach out for each other

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in mutual need for self-fulfilment.
Social work is the concern for the well-being of individuals groups and communities from the beginning to the end of their lives. Johnson (1997)

What is School Social Work?

School social work takes place in school settings, where practictitioners work with students, families, other school personnel, and communities to provide the best education possible for today's youth. Constable(2002) explains that, the educational process is dynamic and wide ranging; involving children, their families, and an institution called school, it is the context for school social work. School is no longer a building, or simply a collection of classrooms in which teachers and pupils work together. School is conceptualized as a community of families and school personnel engaged in the educational process.

School social workers, then, strive to improve the overall functioning of students, teachers, school systems and communities. They address 'conditions that interfere with the pupil's ability to connect with the educational system' (Allen-Meares, 2008; Constable, 1999). School social workers work with young people and with their school and family environments assisting them to accomplish tasks, associated with their learning, growth and development and thus to come to a fuller realization of their intrinsic dignity, capability and potential. School social workers must be skilled and flexible because they assume a wide range of roles and usually must define their key functions within their own school setting (Constable 2002). School social work involves not only providing clinical services such as counselling for students who have behavioural problems, are depressed, or are experiencing family difficulties. It also entails working with the multiple systems with which students are involved to strengthen them and make it easier for students to perform in the school environment.

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Having passed through this phase in our own lives, we know it took us substantial concentration, work, and stamina to succeed in a school environment. This situation is still the same, for pupils if not worse considering the distraction of ICT in earlier phases of the educational process. One of the first things to suffer when a child experiences social and emotional problems is performance in school and attendance. Such children simply do not have the strength and endurance to expend the emotional energy required to cope with serious personal problems and still have enough energy left over to perform well in school.

School social workers, then, may become major players in helping such children, along with their families, teachers, school administration, and social service agencies within the community, develop a plan to empower them.

School social workers are one of the three professional pupil services groups that provide counselling services to children and adolescents in schools in the United States. School social workers have worked in schools for over 100 years and are recognized in a majority of U.S. states and several foreign countries. Most school social workers hold a Master of Social Work degree and have specialized training in helping students within the context of local schools.

In schools, social workers often serve as the link between students' families and the school, working with parents, guardians, teachers, and other school officials to ensure that students reach their academic and personal potential. They also assist students in dealing with stress or emotional problems. Many school social workers work directly with children with disabilities and their families. In addition, they address problems such as misbehaviour, truancy, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol problems and advice teachers on how to cope with difficult students. School social workers may teach workshops to entire classes on topics like conflict resolution mass failure, examination malpractices and so on.

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Objectives of School Social Work

The objectives of school social work are basically the same with the school objectives. School social worker utilizes all the methods of their profession which are case work, group work and community organization, administration, supervision, education and training to provide services in the schools.

Responsibilities and Functions of a School Social Worker

i. Identification of children in need
ii. Mediating among students' parents, the school and the community to solve the students' problems.
iii. Advocating with the school or community for educational services.
iv. Acting as a liaison between the home and the school.
v. Helping teachers to understand the needs of their students better.
vi. Assisting school administrators with policy formulation and planning for educational needs.
vii. Acting as a liaison between the school and social agencies.
viii. Providing referrals.

Roles of a School Social Worker

The basic job description of a school social worker is to provide social services and assist to improve the social and psychological function of children and their families and to maximize the family well-being and the academic functioning of children. They assist single parents, arrange adoptions, and find foster homes for abandoned or abused children. In schools, they address such problems as teenage pregnancy, misbehaviour, and truancy, and may also advise teachers on how to deal with problem children.

Other roles the school social workers play are discussed under the following seven sub-topics:

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Counselling: A school social worker helps the students with school problems, family problems, emotional problems and behavioural problems: For example, if a child is from a broken home or living with a single parent, this kind of emotional problem can distract such a child from concentrating on his/her studies. In this case, a school social worker can use the professional methods of interviewing the child to know the root cause of the problem, inviting or taking a step of going to the parent(s) involved and providing necessary assistance.

Assessment: A systematic way of understanding and communicating what is happening in relations in the classroom, in the family and between family and school and deciding appropriate interventions. As explained in the first role, a school social worker intervenes in the problem of any student so that the child can cope with/without the problem so that the child would not lag behind but rather concentrate on his/her studies. The focus of assessment is on strengths as well as problems.

Crisis Intervention: A school social worker helps in a crisis situation. A school social worker can help settle crisis in the home of a student. The school social worker makes it known to the parents what the consequences of the crisis has brought and can still bring to the child if not resolved as early as possible.

Caring: A school social worker helps students academically and socially; A school social worker is also to work with the teachers in knowing how the students are coping with their studies. To know what problems each student is facing, how it can be curbed or eliminated if possible. For example, if a child always doses in the class, a school social worker can see to the cause of this, trace the problem and proffer solution.

Prevention: A school Social Worker provides preventive programmes to the students: It is the duty of a school social

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worker to organize and coordinate preventive programmes that can educate the students and prevent them from being abused. Examples of these are pregnancy, abortion etc.

Mobilizing: A school social Worker provides unique services to students, parents, schools and community through the use of psycho-social assessment, counselling collaboration consultation and coordination of services.
Referrals: School social workers provide referrals to pupils or their parents in need of further professional services.

Some outcomes of social work intervention in the school may include: improved attendance/reduced truancy, increased graduations rates, reduction in dropout rates, increased school safety through positive social skills training, decreased substance abuse and increased parent involvement.
In this era of outcome based education, School Social Workers are cognizant of the importance of their interventions. The above outcomes are achieved through the following methodologies.

i. Individual & group counselling
ii. Crisis counselling intervention
iii. Family counselling
iv. Parent education and skills development
v. Increased parent involvement through home visits and outreach efforts with resistant and hard to reach parents.
vi. Participation with PTAs, School Advisory Councils and School Advisory forums.

The above outcomes are SMART i.e. specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and traceable.

In summary, a school social worker is part of an inter-professional approach to understanding and providing help for students. The purpose of the service is to provide help for the children/students with difficulties and to prevent the development of social breakdown.

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Conclusion

The school social worker's role is multifaceted. There is assessment collaboration and consultation within the school team. There is direct work with children and parents individually and in groups. There is programme and policy development. In 1989 a group of nineteen national recognized experts in school social work were asked to develop and list the tasks that entry-level social workers would perform in their day-to-day professional roles. The result was a list of 104 tasks, evidence of the complexity of school social work. These tasks, when they were defined, fell along five job dimensions which are relationships with the services to children and families, relationships with the services to teachers and school staff, services to other school personnel, community services, and administrative and professional tasks. The following are the recommendations:

i. The Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan in conjunction with the Oyo State Universal Basic Education should organise seminars/workshops for Head Teachers and Assistant Head Teachers to intimate them with what is being expected from the student social workers that will be posted to their schools

ii. Establishment of the position of school social workers in the schools and the inclusion of the roles and responsibilities of the primary and secondary school social workers in the section 11 of Educational Services in the National Policy on Education during the next review of the policy.

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