Fieldwork in
Social Work

Fieldwork in Social Work

Origins, theory and rationale

Definition

CCdC model of fieldwork

6 Basic components

Duration

Supervision

Planning, reporting & recording

Settings

These are text slides, readers should expect more words than usual per slide

THE ORIGINS, THEORY & RATIONALE OF FIELDWORK

- Learning in Africa, as is in many if not all parts of the world, involves observation and doing

- For example, aunts or uncles pass on knowledge about mentoring by allowing young people to observe them, and to practice while they watch
    - In short the 'interns' learn to think and act like their aunts or uncles. Theory and practice are integrated

- The African theory of education (ATE) and African philosophy of education (APE) came from the philosophy described above.

- There are several other African theories that support fieldwork or experiential learning.: pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism, developmental social work, Ubuntu, Indigenization, Decolonisation etc

- African orature (oral literature) contributes significantly to the need for learning by doing e.g. proverbs

- ATE teaches us that education should not only be academic, it must serve a relevant purpose, and must be relevant and useful to our communities

- APE teaches us that our communities have a role to play in education, in fact, before modern day education, learning was happening in our communities, especially experiential learning.

- Both ATE and APE emphasize ubuntu, that is, education is not only about the learner, but their interaction and interdependence with their family, community and society at large.

- Fieldwork provides an opportunity for learners to use knowledge gained in the classroom to test and improve their skills through experience

- In the process, they gain more knowledge, gain confidence by working with clients and confirm their skills

- In professional social work, every trainee social worker needs to undergo this ritual of field placement

MODEL OF FIELDWORK IN AFRICA (THE CCdC MODEL)

1. **C**onventional social work placements
   - Include placements in clinical social work, welfare and charity settings, usually urban focused, non-preventive and individually-focused
   - Can include classroom or laboratory based simulations
   - Work well where there are enough experienced social workers and adequate resources to support students on placement, not usually the case in Africa

2. **C**ommunity and **d**evelopmental social work placements
   - Involve communities, villages, remote and rural areas – these are community focused or bottom up placements
   - Student can be placed in an agency that has no social workers or placed within a community instead of an agency
   - Work in communities that have no access to agencies, social workers or are remote
   - Promotes equitable development because without their involvement, the communities will never benefit from social work
   - The focus is to reduce poverty, empowerment and prevention of social challenges
   - More than 75% of people in Africa are poor, with no access to social workers, social work agencies or training institutions making these placements relevant

3. **C**reative social work placements
   - This model views social work students as innovators, contributors, creators or curators.
   - Social work as an art, using individual talents to solve social challenges.
   - Working with other disciplines or communities where there are no social work supervisors or where social work is not usually there

- It is important for students to have experience from at least 2 types of placements

- 2 & 3 work very well in Africa where there is shortage of supervisors, by involving communities and other professionals there will be checks and balances. After the placement, the student writes a comprehensive report that includes potential roles of social work in the community of placement.

- 2 & 3 allow us to learn from our communities, and contribute new knowledge to social work. 1 has numerous limitations in Africa that can be solved by using 2 & 3

DEFINITION OF FIELDWORK

- Also known as practicum, internship, field placement, field practice, industrial attachment, field learning or experiential learning.

- Usually done face to face, but remote or online placements are possible and increasing

- Put simply, fieldwork is *when a student social worker uses knowledge gained in their education or coursework for practice*.

- Learning happens through (1) observing and doing work with qualified social workers, usually in an agency (2) observing and doing work with another professional (3) observing and doing work with the community (4) observing simulated activities (5) independently working on a creative social work project

- Placements can be combined with other subjects in one semester (concurrent) or they can happen in a semester without other subjects (block)

- From the definition, it is clear fieldwork has five basic components, there are **SISSCR**:
  - **S**tudent social worker
  - **I**nstitution training social workers
  - **S**upervisors
  - **S**ervice provider - agency providing social work services
  - **C**ommunity – the community where field education takes place
  - **R**egulator – this is the institution, body, committee responsible for setting guidelines, regulations and standards

6 BASIC COMPONENTS OF FIELDWORK

- These 5 basic components are known by the acronym **SISSCR** which stands for:
  - **S**tudent social worker
  - **I**nstitution training social workers
  - **S**upervisors
  - **S**ervice provider - agency providing social work services
  - **C**ommunity – the community where field education takes place
  - **R**egulator – this is the institution, body, committee responsible for setting guidelines, regulations and standards
- These 6 basic components are described in turn.

Student

- Sometimes called the attachee or intern.
- As already student, the student will be enrolled in a social work program.
- The student is expected to have covered basic social work subjects to allow them to practice.
- Most important subjects are introduction to social work, theories of social work and practice skills for different methods of social work.
- The student's role is to:
  - Come up with objectives for their placement
  - Inform the training institution about their preferences
  - Complete all necessary forms required by the institution and service provider.
  - Observes and interacts with the agency supervisor about practice issues
  - Interacts with academic supervisor about knowledge issues
  - Reports their learning orally or through reports
  - Ensure there is no conflict of interest

Institution

- The institution plays an important role in field placement:
  - Finds places (service providers) for fieldwork
  - Provides relevant clarity on prior experience, exemptions and credits (considers reduction of hours for those with it)
  - Accepting the student's objectives
  - Providing social work knowledge
  - Links student with service providers
  - Trains supervisors through seminars, webinars and courses.
  - Assesses student progress
  - Create a Fieldwork manual with information for students, academics, agencies and supervisors
  - Review placement regulations regularly
  - Provide support to students on placement e.g. counselling or dispute resolution if required.
  - Ensures roles and responsibilities are clear
  - Deals with appeals and grievances
  - Interview students and agencies to ensure readiness
  - Ensures students are fit to practice (screening for offenders or infectious conditions)
  - Provide fieldwork taught courses/subjects or seminars

Supervisor/s

- At times supervisors are called field educators.
- They usually have two or more years of experience
- There are 3 types of supervisors (1) academic – from training institution and (2) agency – from service provider, also known as practice educator (3) external – nominated by institution or service provider from outside their institutions
- Supervisors are expected to be social workers.
- Academic supervisors can use regular seminars with students for supervision
- Agency supervision (practice educator) meetings can be weekly but also fortnightly or as required.
- Where social workers are not available, supervisors should be outsourced from qualified social workers.
- Their roles are to:
  - Assess and help student improve objectives
  - The agency supervisor acts as a mentor to the student over the period of the attachment
  - Assesses student progress

Service providers

- The service provider is usually an agency providing social work services
- Ideally, they should employ social workers or work closely with social workers
- In other situations, the service group may be an individual social worker or a group of social workers providing social work services
- Service providers can also be communities
- Service providers should be able to provide a 'work day', that is work running continuously for a day (6-8 hours)
- Where social workers are not available, supervisors should be outsourced from qualified social workers.
- Non-traditional service providers, where there is no social worker employed, are more common in Africa because of a shortage of social workers, and also increasing social work students numbers
- Their roles are to:
  - 'Employees' the student
  - Provides a qualified supervisor
  - Provides working space
  - Provides feedback to the training institution
  - Ensures student safety

Community

- Communities host social work agencies, and they are usually the sources of clients
- There are other communities that do not have social workers because no social work agencies are working there
- In that case, should the social work profession not involve them in placements?
- Most of these communities are rural or remote and usually neglected
- In Africa, over 75% of villages, small service centres, missionary centres, mining centre and farming communities do not have access to social work
- It is still possible to have student placements in those communities
- The student works with their academic supervisor and the community leaders to creatively develop objectives for the placement
- Preference must be given to social work students who come from or know that community
- The community plays a role of:
  - Agreeing to use services of a student, knowing that their skills are still developing
  - Welcoming students and providing accommodation
  - Planning the attachment program with the student
  - Identifying a leader or team to work with the student
  - Giving feedback to the academic supervisor through a team or community meeting

Regulators

- Regulators set guidelines, benchmarks or standards for one or multiple institutions.
- Guidelines protect students, academic institutions but more importantly communities.
- Regulation arrangements vary but often include a combination of the follows:
  - Each fieldwork subject will have its guidelines
  - The training institution will have its fieldwork policy or manual
  - The association of social workers will have its guidelines, and also ethics
  - Social work educators will have their guidelines
  - Association of field educators will have its guidelines
  - Public or government council or department of social work will have its guidelines
  - National tertiary education or qualifications authorities will have guidelines
  - Other government policies may also regulate fieldwork
  - Agencies or service providers will have their guidelines
  - Communities will have their expectations and these should not be sidelined
  - International social work organizations suggest standards

LENGTH OR DURATION OF PLACEMENTS

- After studying 3 social work institutions in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, Dhemba (2012) recommended 960 hours of placement time

- In Zimbabwe, most institutions offer field placement in 3rd year for 8 months, 20 work days a month, 160 work days. Each working day has 8 hours, so this translates to 1280 hours placement time for a 4 year bachelor's degree.

- Some South African institutions have first year placements of 40 – 320 hours plus 4th year placements of 480 – 800 hours, giving a potential maximum of 1120 hours.

- The author recommends 1120 hours for a 4 year degree program, the average of the potential maximum hours from the 3 sources above (960 + 1280 + 1120 divided by 3). This translates to 140 work days of 8 work hours. This is a simple calculation, but nonetheless, very useful.

SUPERVISION

- Supervision hours vary

- Contact includes face to face, by phone or online

- Contact maybe one to one, or in groups or meetings

- The academic supervisor can have weekly contacts of about 30 minutes via phone, online, individual or group meeting
  - Visit to student on site in the middle or end of placement or both. This visit involves speaking with student and agency, together, separately or both
  - Academic supervisor can organize regular supervisor seminars for students

- Agency supervisor needs constant contact with the student including (1) daily check-ins or observations (2) weekly briefings (3) monthly meetings

- Types of supervisions:
  - Observation
  - Discussion with student or agency supervisor or both
  - Discussion with service users or community or both
  - Report assessment
  - Daily or weekly journal checking
  - Peer feedback
  - Creative work e.g. exhibition or content assessment
  - Community work e.g. community mobilisation event or content assessment
  - Oral presentation to an audience with questions and comments

PLANNING, RECORDING & REPORTING

- Student creates objectives and a plan of activities for their placement, to be agreed by both supervisors
- Objectives may include:
  - Development work tasks
  - Community work tasks
  - Group work tasks
  - Casework or individual work tasks
  - Family work tasks
  - Administrative tasks or leadership objectives
  - Research tasks
  - Professional development tasks
  - Communication skills tasks
  - Collaboration tasks
  - Theory or ethics tasks
  - Creative task
  - Indigenising or decolonial objectives

- Student creates, collects and keeps records: journal notes, meeting minutes, copies of communications, reflection notes, activity notes etc
- Student could be asked to provide these reports to both supervisors
  - Placement initial report
  - Mid-term report
  - Final report or creative works
  - Oral report, presentation or exhibition
- Reports can be narrative, creative or community-focused with more visuals than text

SETTINGS FOR PLACEMENTS

- Communities for creative or developmental placements
- Government departments providing social work e.g. Department of Social Development
- Non-government agencies providing social work services.
- Community based organizations
- Health centres
- Charity or religious centres
- Development agencies
- Research centres and institutes
- Corporate companies
- Consultancies
- Local government and municipalities
- Community centres
- International settings
- Classroom, laboratories or simulation rooms

In thinking about settings, it is important to think about the four domains and eight methods of African Social Work (ASWNet, 2020) as follows:

1. Understanding, Developing and Protecting Families
   1. Social Work with Individual Family Members (sometimes called Casework or Individual Social Work or Social Work with Individuals)
   2. Family Social Work
2. Understanding, Developing and Protecting Communities
   1. Community Social Work (or Community Work in short or Social Work with Communities)
3. Understanding, Developing and Protecting Society and Nations (Socially, Economically, Politically and Spiritually)
   1. Social Development*
   2. Economic Development*
      +=Developmental Social Work or Socio-Economic Development
   3. Political Development (Political Social Work)
   4. Spiritual Development (Spiritual Social Work)
4. Understanding, Utilising & Protecting the Environment
   1. Environmental Social Work

International settings

- Because of globalization, it is now possible and necessary for social work placements to take place in another country or continent
- This is done face to face, where possible
- Increasingly, more placements are taking place remotely, online
- There are different options:
  - Training institutions can make arrangements
  - Networks and consultancy can arrange placements
  - Service providers can work with training institutions
- For students from outside aiming or doing placements in Africa, it is important to first learn about decolonization to allow them to reflect on their positions.

In thinking about international social work placements, it is important to think about the eight key and universal elements of African Social Work (ASWNet, 2020) as follows:

1. Families
2. Spirituality
3. Indigenisation
4. Community
5. Land and Environment
6. Developmental
7. Income Generation and Protection
8. Research (Understanding)

IN SUMMARY

- In professional social work, every trainee social worker needs to undergo the ritual of field placement

- Placements can be conventional, community-developmental or creative (CCdC)

- This is an opportunity for them to gain new skills, improve existing skills, gain confidence and learn by doing

- From the definition, it is clear field has six basic components, there are **SISSCR**:
  - **S**tudent social worker
  - **I**nstitution training social workers
  - **S**upervising social worker
  - **S**ervice provider - agency providing social work services
  - **C**ommunity – the community where field education takes place
  - **R**egulator – this is the institution, body, committee responsible for setting guidelines, regulations and standards

- Developmental, community and creative placements are important in Africa because there is a shortage of social workers, and some communities have no social work agencies.

WORKS CONSULTED

- In compiling these slides, the author used experience and insights gained as a field supervisor and academic supervisor.

- The author consulted with field educators from different training institutions.

- The author consulted the following written works:

Amadasun, S (2020) Is the signature pedagogy still worthwhile? An empirical study of field practice experience among social work students in Nigeria, *Social Work Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2020.1771300

Dhemba, J. (2012) Fieldwork in Social Work Education and Training: Issues and Challenges in the Case of Eastern and Southern Africa. *Social Work and Society, (10) 1*, online.

Jönsson JH & Flem AL (2018) International field training in social work education: beyond colonial divides, *Social Work Education, 37:7*, 895-908, DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2018.1461823

Lombard A. (2015) Internationalising Social Work Education. The South African Experience. *Indian Journal Of Social Work, Volume 76(1)*, 1-16

Schmidt, K. (2014). A Qualitative Evaluation of Social Work Field Instruction offered by Universities in The Eastern Cape, South Africa. Masters of Social Science Social Work Thesis, University of Fort Hare

Schmidt, K., & Rautenbach, JV. (2016). Field instruction: is the heart of social work education still beating in the Eastern Cape?. *Social Work , 52(4)*, 589-610. https://dx.doi.org/10.15270/52-2-532

Uche, Okala & Uche, Ijeoma & Eme, Okechukwu & Malachy, Ebue. (2014). A Critical Appraisal of the Relevance of Field Work Practice in Social Work Education in Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences. 5*. 10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n27p1328.

- These slides were reviewed in 2020 and will be reviewed continuously.

THE END