

Research Article

Teachers in the Education for Professional Social Work

Pooja V. Kantariya

Abstract:

The central objective of every professional education is to incorporate knowledge and values into professional discipline to achieve a level of competence required for professional practices. A most significant feature of professional education is that it is always a response to society's demands. The social work profession is not an exception. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the existing education of professional social work on the scale of demands and needs of contemporary society.

In the process of evaluation of education of professional social work, we should consider three dimensions, i.e. why train? what to train? and how to train? In social work, we can find good literature on the question of 'What to teach?'. This paper emphasises the concept of 'Why to train?' and 'How to train?'

To answer, 'Why to train?' this paper delineates philosophical analysis of social work. However, to deal with 'How', this paper highlights its centre, i.e., Teacher in Social Work Education or Social Work Educator. In the part of 'How', this paper will explain the importance of teachers in the pedagogy of social work and portray the contemporary state of social work educators based on findings of unstructured interviews of educators. Further, based on philosophical analysis, it will discuss the prerequisites and roles of social work educators to make social work pedagogy more effective and efficient.

Keywords –Professional Social Work, Education, Social Work Educator

Introduction

Significantly, all the professions should possess certain features, including the base of verifiable knowledge, application of this knowledge to problems within the fields of a particular profession and has set of values and ethics, which should be applicable to the circumstances of that particular profession. The development and maintenance of these features of any profession follow a proper training programme called professional education of a specific discipline.

According to the Encyclopaedia, "Professional education is a formalised approach to specialised training in a professional school through which participants acquire content knowledge and learn to apply techniques. Although content is what the participant is expected to learn by attending professional school, such an education also helps the participant acquire the competencies needed for proper practise and behaviour. Some common goals of professional education include incorporating the knowledge and values basic to a professional discipline, understanding the central concepts, principles, and techniques applied in practice, attaining a level of competence necessary for responsible entry into professional practice, and accepting responsibility for the continued development of competence. It is designed to produce responsible professionals and ensure their continuing competence in the profession by helping them recognise and understand the significance of advancing professional knowledge and improving standards of practice. It involves translating learning to practice and is intended to prevent occupations and professionals from becoming obsolete." (Encyclopaedia of Business and Finance, 2nd ed.; 2007 Thomson Gale) Hence, it is clear that professional education of any discipline prepares manpower to directly address the problems of community in the various field of the profession.

In the contemporary era, which is marked by rapid transformation in social, political, economic, cultural and technological aspects, professional education responds to changing demands and prompts changes in the field

itself. Thus, professional education of every discipline plays a role of reactive as well as initiating. Therefore, professional education of all disciplines develops a professional curriculum and pedagogy to achieve its objectives, which is to address the demands of society effectively by expert and competent manpower called professionals.

The social work profession is also not an exception. The requirement to address society's demand is vital for the social work profession, as it directly deals with human issues (Vijayalaxmi 2004; Yip 2006). Thus, it is all the more essential to evaluate professional education of social work on the scale of needs of the contemporary era.

Education for Professional Social Work

The concept of professional social work education originated and gradually developed for many years and has been undergoing many changes. In the current scenario, the whole world, especially South Asian countries, is on a fast track of socio-economic, political and technological transformation, leading to the changing needs and demands of the people. To fulfil current demands, social work education and practices require newer approaches and techniques. Hence, it is time to relook at and understand the current status of professional education and practices of social work; to make it effective and efficient. This paper deals with the aspect of education for professional social work.

Overall, education is a complex dance between student, content, context, and educator. What information is covered, from what perspective, evaluated on what standards, and for what end are key questions that drive all educational interactions (Danhoff;2012). If we assess the process of education for professional social work, it faces three questions: What to teach or train? Why to train? and how to train? These three parts are the pillars of the evaluation of social work education.

The first part is What to teach or train, which deals with the content, curriculum and literature of social work education. The second question, i.e. Why to train, talks about the objectives of social work and includes the philosophy behind the social work profession. However, the third part, how to train, reflects the pedagogical aspect of education for social work.

As far as evaluation of education for social work is concerned, we have invested more in the part of what to teach. In social work, we can find sufficient literature on the question of 'What to teach?'. Therefore, this paper emphasises the concept of 'Why to train?' and 'How to train?'

Research Methodology

The ontological assumption of this paper is that the qualities of educators have an implication on the training and development of the trainee. Social work educators with a concrete base of knowledge, skills and attitude & value, ethics underlie the development of budding social work professionals. Positive attributes of social work educators positively affect the training and development of social work trainees.

The epistemological assumption is that the knowledge about contemporary status of attributes of social work educators can be obtained through (a) in-depth interaction with social work educators; (b) through analysis of secondary literature including research papers, reports, articles and books on social work as well as philosophy.

The logic emanating out of the theoretical framework is inductive in nature. The data generated from in-depth interviews of social work educators and analysis of secondary literature helped the researcher address the question of 'why' and 'how' in social work education and training.

This paper is divided into two parts; one is 'why to train?' and the other is on 'How to train?'. To explain both the parts, this paper has adopted different methods, which are as follows-

Part I - Why to train?

'Why to train', the phrase itself depicts its meaning, that it is why we should do social work and why we should train potential prospective social work professionals. Therefore, to answer, 'Why to train?' this paper delineates philosophical analysis of social work.

This research paper adopted the content analysis method to present a philosophical analysis of social work. For that, the researcher has explored, analysed and interpreted literature on Indian philosophy in the context of social work.

Part II - How to train?

In the part of 'How', this paper will explain the importance of teachers in the pedagogy of social work and portray the contemporary state of social work educators. It has adopted a qualitative research method for the same.

Based on the aforementioned ontological and epistemological assumptions, in-depth interviews were conducted with social work educators for data collection and collected data through observation methods regarding the educator's knowledge, skills and value, and ethics.

Purposive sampling was done to select educators of social work. The selection was based on two criteria; (a) teaching experience of the social work educators, (b) pre-eminence of the social work educator in developing the social work profession in the Gujarat state. Accordingly, seven social work educators that met the above criteria and were able to add diversity to the data were selected.

The data was collected through in-depth and unstructured interviews. It studies the profile of social work educators and aspects of knowledge, skills and attitude (including values & ethics) of the educators.

Further, based on philosophical analysis, it will discuss the prerequisites and roles of social work educators to make social work pedagogy more effective and efficient.

Part I - Why to train?

In the social work discipline, 'what to teach' is a very crucial aspect. Similarly, 'why to train' also plays a very significant role in the process of professional socialisation of the trainee. As, one will explain about the content, while later one talks about its objectives. In social work, the social work practitioners need to understand why they (social workers) have to do this.

The objective of education for professional social work is to incorporate the knowledge, skills and attitudes, which will reflect the professional ideal (UGC Report; 1978). 'What to teach' aspects in social work provides knowledge and expertise or skills, which are two pillars of the social work, while 'why' develops the third pillar, i.e., attitude, which draws intrinsic components of the social work practice such as values, ethics, motivation and commitment of the social worker and with this, it also develops social awareness and responsiveness to the human condition. Therefore, this paper attempts to answer the question of 'why' through the Indian philosophy of self-realisation through the perception that the same element (*Tatva*) resides in everyone.

Vivekanand explained it as, "After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth: God is present in every Jiva (creature); there is no other God besides that, whoever serves jiva (creature) serves God".

Vivekananda's philosophy makes Indian philosophical ideas explicit about answering 'why social work'. Moorthy (2012) mentioned that desire to serve humanity does not only depend on perceiving or believing God in everyone but also on 'affective affinity', i.e., emotional identity or empathy. "Feel like Christ, and you will be a Christ," says Vivekananda. Feel like Buddha, and you will become one. It feels that gives us life, strength, and vitality; without it, no amount of intellectual activity can bring us closer to God." Vivekananda realised that by serving others, one becomes pure, gains soul strength, and attains supreme peace.

According to Vivekananda, the prime of social work and services is to love people and purify, enhance, and realise oneself. The social worker should not wait for that problem affected people will come to them, but they should go to them. This philosophy of social service work as a means for self-realisation provides strong motivation for the helping profession.

If social workers understand this principle, it will enlighten the social workers why they have to do social work. Once they would be clear with 'why', they will find a way to achieve decided objectives.

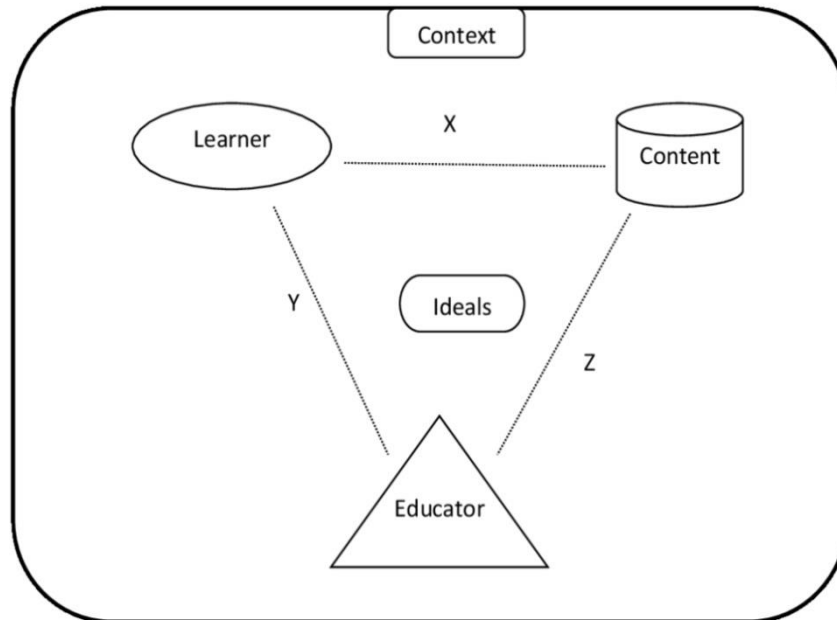
However, emphasising the spiritual dimension in philosophy does not overlook its practice dimension. It considers social work as a profession in which practitioners earn their living by helping clients, demands moral obligations. It does not mean practitioners should not be paid. By emphasising this philosophy, the researcher highlights the motives and moral obligations of the practitioner.

This should be the philosophy behind social work. It will enhance social work practices in the Indian context. With this, a competent social worker, who is fully equipped with theoretical knowledge and skills, would be able to realise self-conscience. It would make their practice more facile.

Part II - How to train?

In the overall education process, part of 'How to Train' plays a very significant role. As mentioned above, the question of 'How' deals with the pedagogical aspect of education. In higher education, the pedagogical aspect is concerned with various factors like adult education, cognitive development etc. Social work education is part and parcel of higher education. These aspects, therefore, of pedagogy is related to education for professional social work too.

This study is concerned with Pratt and Associates (2005) work and their model for understanding teaching philosophies.



The General Model of Teaching Adapted from Pratt & Associates, 2005

The above model contains five elements (e.g., context, learners, content, educator, ideals) and three relationships (lines X, Y, Z). The relationships indicated the use of different means to engage learners with the content (line X), preferred relationship with learners (line Y), and about an educator's credibility with the content (line Z) (Pratt, 2005). Based on this, Pratt & Associates developed five teaching perspectives: transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and social reform.

Overall, in the whole pedagogical process, three agents play a significant role: content (answer of 'What'), educator and learner. In this paper, the researcher emphasised an element of 'educator' in the general model of teaching and two relationships, i.e., the relationship between educator and content (line Z) and the preferred relationship of educator with the learner (line Y).

According to Pratt, Brookfield, and various others, educators' actions, intentions, and beliefs play a vital role in the entire teaching process. What educators believe about teaching is essential and can positively shape the profession's future, a future that has veteran scholars in social work concerned (Stoesz & Karger, 2009). Reflection upon the beliefs that underlie what, why, and how we teach is valuable. "Just as our life journey is one of a growing perspective in our relationships to the world, its peoples, cultures, and societies, our study of philosophy, ideology, and theory of education challenge us to develop our own answers to these questions and to create our own philosophies" (Guttek, 2004, p. 2).

From the glass of this model, social work educator is a significant element in the system of social work education. Social work educators have the challenging task of preparing students to be ethically and socially responsible professionals who will face increasing complexity and change in society. (E. Youngusband)

Therefore, this study aims to explore the action, intention, and belief of contemporary social work educators and discover the philosophies of social work educators, which drives how an educator sees teaching and learning.

Data Discussion on Social Work Educator

The social work educator or teacher in education for professional social work, which is the centre of the pedagogy, is shaped at three ends; a) at one end there is knowledge, b) at the second end it is the set of skills required for social work practice and, c) at the third end, it is the attitudinal aspect, which includes intentions, values & ethics of the educator.

Knowledge of the contemporary social work educators

Knowledge of the content of the field is a peculiar feature of the educator. Knowledge, hereby, reflects the familiarity of educators with the content of the field. Figure 1 mentioned above is marked b line Z, which indicates an educator's credibility about the content. The data shows that social work educators possess sound knowledge of methodology courses, field courses, and background courses.

Few points related to the knowledge of the educator emerged out from the interview of the educator. The first one is that contemporary educators possess expertise on content on the macro-level practice of social work and emphasised the field of industrial social work, which includes personnel management and industrial relations. For example, in an interview, an educator pointed out that,

I have expertise in industrial social work, which is my area of specialisation. I used to motivate students to pursue their careers in this field. It is a need of the profession in India. As if we want to survive in a market-oriented society, we must focus on this field of the social work profession and develop budding professionals accordingly.

The second point, which emerges from the data, is that educators with an age of more than fifty years have an excellent grip on the theory aspect but are not well-versed with audio-video and information technological instruments as a medium of the teaching-learning process. Educators consider it as one of the very effective mediums to connect with the student in adult teaching.

Skills of the contemporary social work educators

Skill is the capacity to achieve the desired task within a particular timeframe. To move the profession continually forward, meet the ever-changing landscape of globalisation, and provide best practices for our clients, the profession's educators need consistent critical reflection and thinking about what and how the students are taught (Danhoff; 2002). For this, the educator must have on field practice experience, and the educator should continue

to practice social work on the micro and macro levels to stay updated with current scenarios, like medicine profession, law, etc.

The interview revealed that most educators have prior experience of the on-field practice before joining as educators; currently, they are not practising social work. An educator in the interview said,

I have four years of experience working as a social work practitioner in an NGO in the 1990s. After that, I joined the academic field and engaged in the teaching-learning process and various research projects, working as a member of various committees at the macro level for various issues, board member, advisor or consultant of civil organisations, etc. With this, I keep myself updated with current social trends and demands.

Further, in reply to the question on pedagogy adopted for teaching-learning, most educators said lecture (one way), participative discussion, and self-study. In the observation of various classroom teaching, it was evident that the teaching process is grade oriented. An educator said in response to the limitations he experienced in social work teaching,

We teach students various theories, principles, values of social work, methodology courses, background courses in social work. But, we just explain, instead of making students learn it. For example, in the concept of the psychosocial study, we teach what it is, its significance, characteristics, and the content we collect in the study, but how to collect is left out somewhere. Similarly, when we say, reflect compassion towards your client to establish a relationship. At that time, students may know the word meaning of compassion but may not know how to develop compassion, why to create it, and how to make it reach the client. To make students learn these techniques with demonstration and various other methods is necessary, and that's the role of social work educators. In short, along with methodology, we should include the ways to execute methods into practice.

The attitudinal aspect of the social work educator

The attitudinal aspect contains elements related to how a person see, think and interpret. In this research, the term 'attitudinal aspect' reflects an umbrella meaning. This domain contains values & ethics, attitudes and perceptions of the social work educator. In the teaching model, this aspect depicts the 'intention' of the educator, which creates line Y (relationship between educator and learner) mentioned in fig. 1.

In the interview and observation of the social work educator, most people emphasised practicality over value system in decision making. Educators concentrate on developing knowledge and skill domains in trainees and value addition domains which is not covered in classroom teaching.

Suggestions

Based on data collected through interviews and observation of social work educators, this research paper proposes certain suggestions to strengthen the pedagogy of social work education more effective, which are as following:

In the domain of skill, like other professions, specific hours and teaching practices should be mandatory criteria for social work educators. In addition to this, two years of full-time social work practices on the field would be added to the minimum requirement for the post of social work educator, along with another requirement. Years of experience should be varied, as per the seniority of the position.

Social work educators should have to promote micro and macro level practices in the development sector, which is core, as well s thrust area of the social work profession.

In the domain of value & ethics, we require effective training at the educator level to effectively develop budding professionals.

In this domain, every social work professional should understand and follow the philosophy of social work, i.e., the answer of 'why social work?', as it shapes the action and intention of the professional. To understand the philosophy behind the social work profession, one should understand the philosophy mentioned above

propounded by the Indian philosopher. Thus, social work educators should understand and implement it and provide this vision to the social work trainee.

Conclusion

In the education process, the educator's knowledge, skills, and attitude significantly impact the learning of social work trainees. Therefore, in the first part, this paper concludes the answer of 'why social work' through analysis of Indian philosophy in the context of social work.

In the second part, this paper portrayed the contemporary status of knowledge, attitude and skills among social work educators and emphasis on its impact on the learning of students through the teaching model. This paper proposes to enhance educator efficiency in all three domains by developing an understanding of the philosophy as mentioned in previous part 1, which will improve the efficiency of social work pedagogy.

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