EMPOWERING STUDENTS; SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK- CASE STUDIES

KEYWORDS

G.Senthil Kumar	Ms. S.Roopika
Research scholar, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore	School Social Worker, Helikx Open School & Learning Centre, Salem.

Mr. Alen Kuriakose

Trainer, Helikx Open School & Learning Centre, Salem

ABSTRACT *The concept of empowerment is of increasing interest to researches, practitioners and citizens who are working in the field of child welfare. It focuses on creating a facilitative climate in which students can make maximum use of their opportunities. The school social worker is becoming a useful professional to assist children who are marginalized whether economically, socially, politically or personally, to participate in the educational process. Though professionals have used the empowerment approach in different fields of social work practice, we know little about empowerment practice in schools. This qualitative study explores the how school social worker engages in different dimensions of empowerment through different models. The clinical model focused mainly on changing pupils identified as having social or emotional difficulties. The school change model focused on changing the environment and conditions of the school. The community school model focused on the relationship of the school with its community, particularly deprived and disadvantaged communities. The social interaction model focus for practice based on systems theory would be on persons and environments, students, and schools in reciprocal interactions. The findings provide rich information for other social workers, in the field of School Social Work, as they apply the empowerment approach in daily practice.*

Introduction

Social workers often work with clients who struggle to maintain power over various aspects of their lives. In attempting to combat this lack of power, or the inability to obtain resources to meet one's wants and needs, social workers participate in the process of empowerment. Whereas power 'involves the capacity to influence for one's own benefit the forces that affect one's life space' (Hopps et al., 1995, p. 44), empowerment is a 'process involving the creative use of one's personal resources to gain and use power to control one's life circumstances, achieve personal goals and improve relational and communal good' (Greene et al., 2005, p. 268). While many practitioners adopt the empowerment approach in different fields, however, little attempt has been made to examine the concept of empowerment and its relevance to school social work. While education affects adolescents' future trajectory of life and school social work is a significant auxiliary service in the school setting, there is a need for practitioners to explore the possibilities for generating empowering practices.

Methods & Materials

The research design used in this study was case study. In this study the researcher has taken four cases and one focused group discussion.

Objectives of the Study
• To analyze the scope of Empowerment approach in schools
• To explore the transition from powerlessness to empowerment in students by applying the School Social Work Models

Case 1

Mr M is a 13 year old boy having round shaped face, whitish coloured with   pink lips and round eyes with thick eye lashes studying in 5thstandard. Social Skill Assessment found that he has difficulty in social skill and Social Workers classroom observations identified that he was avoided by peer which made him emotionally upset often. He can't accept failure while playing games. If things are not coming on his way he will suddenly withdraw from the situation and seems upset for a while and if we assign another task he will participate actively. He is not participating actively in classroom activities, seems to be uninterested, and likes to have snacks and other eatables from others. He doesn't share the playing materials with others so the others aren't willing to play with him. He repeat the others statement without thinking.

On Classroom observation Social Worker could able to find that, he likes if the teacher's praise, appreciate and get noticed all the time. On life skill session social worker helped him to learn the empathy skills by putting him in different scenarios and asked to identify how other students might fell when certain things happen and substitute these situations each time. In individual Counseling social worker explained about personal space and practiced the social overtures. A contract was made between the Social Worker and Mr.M that he will not repeat what others statements and recognized him in group sessions, when he expresses his own points. After one month of intervention, client started to be accepted in the peer group and found to be more cheerful.

Case 2

Mr X, Mr. Y, Ms. Z of H. O School always founds to be messy. They keep their book uncovered, misplace the things, damage the school properties and make the hostel premises untidy. Their messiness creates problems between the students and teacher. Social Worker on discussion with the Principal and Staff members introduced the 5S Work Place management system in

the school. Special Training by experts in the 5S practice organized in the school for the staff and students. A committee was formed in the school by assigning a teacher and Mr.Y & Mr.Z as the co-coordinators of 5S practice in the school. Mr. Y and Mr. Z, along with other selected students were given the charge for different zones in the schools. Social Worker worked along with Hostel Warden to establish 5S practice in the hostel. Each working day last five minutes and Wednesday afternoon time was allotted for the 5S implementation by the students. 5S practicing oath and recognizing the students who practices 5S were include in the School Morning Assembly. After one year of implementing the 5S system, evaluation of 5S system was conducted and found that students become more responsible and responsiveness on maintaining the practice in the school. Practice was able to bring down the expense in the school and reduced the hospital referrals. Mr.X and Ms Y under Social Workers supervision participated in the 5s competition along with other industries and secured the prize.

Case 3
The School Social Worker of H.O School has found the interest of students in technology and business. As school has limited resource in technical knowledge and robotics, social worker introduced a community volunteering programme. Engineering students of the community are given opportunity to offer robotics training and Management students to guide school students in preparing a business plan for International Competition named School Enterprise Challenge. School Students in the rural community was also given chance to attend the sessions along with students. Social Worker organized the students in the school to initiate   the medical camp with support of JCI for the rural community. Students attended the robotics training secured the second prize in IIT Mumbai and their business idea was accepted in the International Competition. In schools community awareness programmes, social worker trained the students to share their success stories to the parents and teachers in the community.

Case 4
Mr. NJ with round head, thin lips and whitish brown who speaks mainly Prakrit (language of Jain Community) in his family has her first experience of middle school in a predominantly Tamil school and hides behind the bench in every school day and avoids the hostel food. The more the teacher tries to move him from behind the bench, the more determined he becomes to remain hidden; it has now become a struggle of wills between child and teacher. The school social worker first assesses the situation in a consultation conference with the teacher, and they develop a few joint strategies focusing on the child's experience in the class. The social worker informed the parents about the issue and made a contract to use more of Tamil language in their home and still preserving or valuing their mother tongue. Student was motivated to speak his Prakrit language inside the class and train it to the other students. When other students and teachers accepted his uniqueness, student started participating in the classroom sessions. Another student of same community was assigned as peer a tutor in teaching the new language. Social Worker worked along with the kitchen staff and hostel warden to prepare special food belongs to his community culture.

Report of Focused Group Discussion
Social Work department of H.O School has organized a monthly focused group discussion on application of empowering approach in School Social Work. Through the FGD department gathered information on various practices in different schools in empowering students. The discussion included 5 School Social Workers of different schools, Social Work Academicians, Experts in the field of Psychology, Teachers and an expert in disabilities.

Discussion stated by the statement by the academician that " School Social Workers practice in the most vulnerable parts of education, so their roles can be complex". The basic focus of School Social Worker is the constellation of teacher, parent & child. The Social Worker must be able to relate and work with all aspects of child's situation. Psychologists pointed out the basic skill underlying is assessment. Expert in disability express the concern over physically challenged in the classroom and said that education need to change to help children who were having difficult in participating beneficially in school experience. School social worker would be essential to the schools ability to accomplish this purpose. Social workers form different schools explained the different roles they handle in the school such counseling, advocacy, consultation, community linkages, interdisciplinary team, assessment and research. Teachers expressed their difficulties in handling the behaviour issues inside the classrooms. Academician suggested applying a system approach in handling such issues. Behavior in classroom can be better understood if one has and understanding of relation between other settings and it relation to the child. FGD concluded by stating the importance of more research studies and setting standard for highly qualified school social work practice. Major Findings of the Study

- Successful empowerment occurs when School Social Workers collaborates with the different systems involved in the life of the student.
- School Social Worker can act as a liaison agent between the student, teacher, parent for empowerment practice
- School Social Workers can introduce innovative practices in the school and can use the community for finding the resources
- More focus should be given to abilities of the students rather than the problems
- More opportunities should be given to participation in school activities which had improved their self efficiency, trust , belongingness and responsibility of the students
- Exerting a positive influence on School personal and engaging them in working together can change the conventional approaches to innovative practices
- Successful empowerment needs continuous conversation and collaboration between school social workers and different parties
- School Social Workers are alert towards the feelings, thoughts and subjective experiences of the students
- The different models of School Social Work can be used as a method for empowerment practice in schools.
- The clinical model in regards to how young people recapture a sense of competence to meet life challenges and fight for their benefits.
- The School Change model in regard to how social workers collaborate with school personnel to bring a positive change in students.
- The school community model look on how practitioners mobilize service users and partners to create a social environment in which young people can maximize the opportunity to learn and grow; and final model on the reciprocal alliance between the   practitioner and different levels of social system

Conclusion
The findings show that the goal of a school social worker is to establish a constructive climate for service users to co-create different identities in non-oppositional terms like companions or collaborators, which can facilitate them to seek alternatives to their modes of practices, co-invent new discourses, and co-construct the social context that allows new identities, practices, and discourses to emerge (Fook, 2000; Greene& Lee, 2002). The ultimate goals of empowerment in school social work service are to collaborate with service users and service

partners to initiate positive changes in the school system so as to cultivate different domains of young people, create a facilitative teaching and learning environment, and enhance student participation in school affairs and contribution to social reform. School social workers can play an important role in accomplishing the ultimate goals, but their realization relies on factors, such as the organization culture and structure, not totally controlled in their hands,. What they can do is to make small gains in local situations while working toward the subversion of oppressive conditions in general (Dupper, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2004; Lee, 1983).

The case studies of the research participants demonstrate school social workers abilities to use different strategies to wrestle with the power structure and generate empowering practices. It also gives directions for organizing continuing education for current practitioners in order to provide them with new knowledge and techniques as well as the opportunity to share their field experiences.

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