

THE FOUNDATIONS AND NATURE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK: AN OVERVIEW

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The article provides the background for judging the current and future roles and functions of school social workers in South Africa. It covers the history and nature of South African school social work and the policy dictates that govern local practice, as well as the challenges faced by learners and the roles, tasks and functions practitioners could, and should, perform to address these challenges. Moreover, the article attempts to indicate the basis for the further development of this speciality within the local profession, as well as promote research in this field



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## **THE FOUNDATIONS AND NATURE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK: AN OVERVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Although in some countries school social work has been practised for over a hundred years, other countries have only recently given formal recognition to this field of social work. This trend was borne out by the results of a recent international survey by the International Network for School Social Work (Huxtable, 2016). It revealed a global increase in the number of school social workers, prompting Huxtable (2016:1) to conclude that “the value of school social work can no longer be ignored”.

A general increase in the number of school social workers is becoming evident also in South Africa. The number of workers appointed by provincial education departments grew:

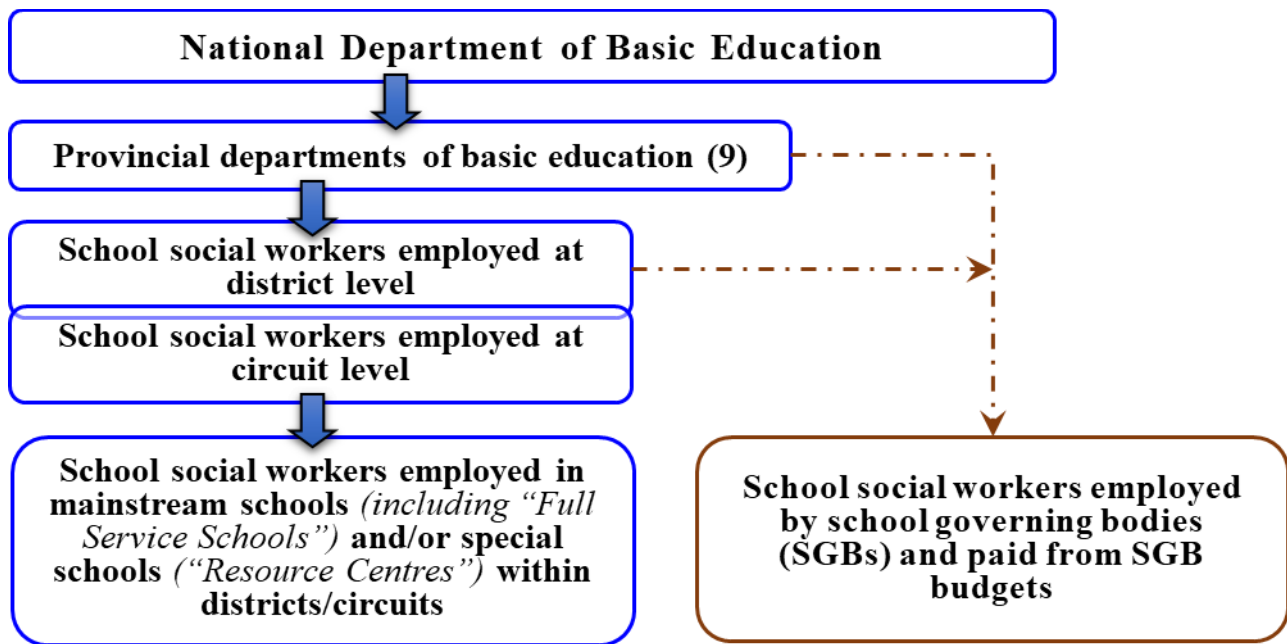
- in the Western Cape from 4 in 1982 to 166 in 2017;
- in the Free State from 4 in 2010 to 32 in 2017;
- in Gauteng from 4 in 2010 to 27 in 2015;
- in KwaZulu-Natal from 11 in 2010 to 25 in 2015; and
- in Limpopo from 0 in 2016 to 180 in 2017 (however, only on temporary contract basis appointments as learner support advisors) (Kemp, 2014; NACOSSWEP, 2015; SACSSP, 2017; Vergottini, 2019).

The increase in the number of appointees does not, however, constitute a nationwide trend. Some provincial departments still fail to make use of school social workers, while others employ only a few (Kemp, 2014; NACOSWEPP, 2015).

The current state of South African school social work is further complicated by the fact that appointees’ deployment and utilisation differ markedly from one province to the other (Kemp, 2014). Some provinces employ social workers only at provincial level, while others do so at district/circuit level and in special and/or mainstream schools. It should be noted, moreover, that although school social workers are predominantly employed by provincial education departments, individual school governing bodies (SGBs) of mainstream and special schools have the power to appoint social workers to non-subsidised posts and pay them from their own budgets (Kemp, 2014). This somewhat complicated structure is depicted in Figure 1.

### **FIGURE 1**

#### **THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK**



Derived from Vergottini (2019:35)

The diverse structures in which South African school social work is practised, coupled with a multiplicity of role and task expectations (Kemp, 2014) and a paucity of local research (Van Sittert, 2016), necessitate a wide-angle scan of the development and nature of local school social work.

### AIM AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim of this article is to provide a core body of knowledge against which the current nature and state of South African school social work may be judged. In order to attain this outcome, four specific objectives were pursued. These are:

- to provide a brief overview of the historical background of South African school social work;
- to describe and analyse the roles, tasks and functions that local school social workers currently perform;
- to describe the factors that place South African learners especially at risk and the current response to these challenges; and
- to explicate the trends that emerged from the overview.

The research took the form of a systematic literature review in which the steps proposed by Jesson (2011) and Booth, Popaioannou and Sutton (2012) were followed. The steps, as they apply specifically to this study, are summarised in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**EIGHT STEPS FOLLOWED IN THE SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**PROCESS**

Steps	Procedure
<b>Step 1:</b> <b>Define aim and scope</b>	Gain a broad understanding of the field of school social work. Produce a profile of standards for school social work services. Produce a profile/typology of the competencies/capabilities that school social workers should meet. Gain a broad understanding of the development and current nature of school social work in South Africa. Produce a profile of the legislation and macro policies that currently regulate this profession within the South African education system.
<b>Step 2:</b> <b>Plan and protocol</b>	Generate a list of key concepts. Utilise the assistance of the subject specialist at the library of the North-West University to identify appropriate search engines. Conduct a systematic search based on key concepts. Expand and/or adapt key concepts based on the results produced by initial literature search. Repeat the process until no new concepts are produced.
<b>Step 3:</b> <b>Produce preliminary documentation</b>	Generate publications/documents. Categorise publications/documents in terms of the themes covered by the research.
<b>Step 4:</b> <b>Decide on inclusion and exclusion criteria</b>	Do the first macro review of generated publications/documents Decide on criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of the data/documents that have been generated.
<b>Step 5:</b> <b>Select and produce final set of documents</b>	Select final set of publications/documents. Generate or acquire (full) publications/documents.
<b>Step 6:</b> <b>Conduct a suitability and quality appraisal</b>	Scan documents in order to ascertain their relevance to the study and discard those which are not applicable. Utilise the critical review checklist developed by Jesson (2011) to assess the quality of the publications/documents and discard those which do not make the grade.
<b>Step 7:</b> <b>Data extraction and synthesis</b>	Perform a meta-analysis of selected publications/documents. Extract relevant data/information from the publications/documents. Check for heterogeneity (diversity) and identify possible reasons in this regard. Synthesise all the selected data/information according to themes covered by the study. Tabulate summary data where applicable.
<b>Step 8:</b> <b>Report on findings</b>	Produce article based on the systematic literature review.

Based on: Jesson (2011) and Booth et al. (2012)

## DEFINITION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

In order to define the aim and scope of the literature review (see Table 1: Step 1), it was necessary to find or formulate a functional definition of 'school social work'. An analysis of sources indicated that there was no single, internationally accepted definition of school social work. One reason is that, in most instances, authors tend to emphasise the elements that best fit the context within which their publications are written. This context may include their theoretical point(s) of departure and the way in

which school social work is practised in specific countries or regions. The same principle would apply to South Africa.

Initially, in a bid to formulate an indigenous definition that would best suit the context and the unique nature of local school social work, a critical analysis was conducted of several international (e.g. National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 2012; Australian Association for Social Workers (AASW), 2008) and locally produced definitions (e.g. Avenant, Kemp, Kemp & Pretorius, 2015; Terminology Committee for Social Work (TCSM), 1995). The components of school social work that emerged from this analysis were then compared with the policy dictates and theoretical foundations that govern current South African school social work. The following definition was formulated from this process:

*School social work is the application of social work principles and methods within the education system in order to render holistic social work services to learners, parents, educators and the school as community, with the main goal of addressing personal, emotional, socioeconomic and behavioural barriers to learning and create an environment where the learner can reach his or her full potential (Vergottini, 2019:37-8).*

This definition implies that the full range of social work methods may be used in the education context, but that they must be tailored primarily to address the various barriers to learning. These barriers may lie with learners as individuals, but are also found within their environment. This is one reason, among others, why parents, educators and the school are targeted in service delivery.

The newly formulated definition and its constituent parts were used as some of the key concepts (see Table 1: Step 2) in the review of the history and present state of South African school social work.

## **SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK: AN OVERVIEW**

In order to explore the current structural-functional positioning of the social work profession within the South African educational system, cognisance must be taken of the historical development of the system as well as its current nature.

### **History of school social work in South Africa**

Du Toit (1996) identified four time-frames in the development of the South African education system. These are the “early years”, the “colonial era”, the “apartheid era” and the “democratic era”. This demarcation will be used as an organising principle in a brief overview of the historical background of current school social work.

As was the case in most other countries, the prevailing political and philosophical-cultural influences of the day had an impact on the development of education in South Africa (Naicker, 1999). From the early years various tribes in South Africa practised tribal customs that were transferred to succeeding generations through non-formal channels of education (Seroto, 2011). In the beginning of the colonial era (1652 – 1948), Dutch and other missionaries established the first schools, with separate schools for whites and slave learners (Le Roux, 2011). It was only when the British arrived in 1806 that a formal secular education system was introduced. (Du Toit, 1996).

Initially, disabled learners were not included in formal education (Du Toit, 1996). In 1863 the Roman Catholic Dominican Order founded the first school for white deaf learners. Soon after, another was established for coloured deaf learners (Du Toit, 1996). As the need grew, the Dutch Reformed Church established the “Doofstommen en Blinden Instituut” at Worcester in 1881. Several other schools for the deaf and blind followed, none of which was funded by government (Du Toit, 1996). According to Du Toit (1996), the then Department of Education first became involved in specialised education in 1900. The Department began to recognise special schools and offered to pay half of the educators’ salaries. With the introduction of the Vocational Education and Special Education Act (Act 29 of

1928), the special schools became the full responsibility of the then Department of Education. Since black disabled learners were not covered, the churches were forced to establish and fund new schools for this group (Naicker, 1999). In 1937 the Special Schools Amendment Act was passed. This made it compulsory for all white learners with disabilities to attend existing special schools (Du Toit, 1996). No provision was made, however, for African or other disabled learners (Clark, 2007).

According to Naicker (1999), 1948 marked the beginning of the apartheid era. During this era, the National Party utilised the Population Registration Act (1950) to classify the population into four racial groups which, in turn, formed the basis for segregation within the education system (Du Toit, 1996). In the 1960s special schools for so-called ‘non-white’ learners were transferred from the missions to the separate education departments created for each group (Du Toit, 1996). Thus, a fragmented education system, based on ethnic separation, was created.

In 1948 the then Transvaal and Natal education departments began appointing so-called “*special teachers*” or “*visiting teachers*” to address some of the welfare needs of the school population (Kemp, 2014:11-12). By 1955 these teachers were required to have a teaching diploma plus a social work, sociology or psychology qualification (Kemp & Kemp, 2017). The need to incorporate social work services into the primary education system was first formally recognised in 1973 by the De Lange Commission (Collins & Gillespie, 1984), which recommended the development of school social work with particular reference to ‘children with special needs’, guidance and parental involvement. The De Lange Commission’s encouragement, among other things, prompted the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) in 1984 to transfer all its social-pedagogic and truant officer posts to its Welfare Department in order to establish a school social work service (Kemp, 2014). The first school social worker without a double qualification was appointed in 1987 (Kemp & Kemp, 2017).

Although some of the other provinces soon followed (Kemp, 2013), and despite various recommendations and pleas, the appointment of school social workers did not gain any real momentum after 1983 (Van Tonder, 1994).

Since the dawn of the Democratic era (1994 onwards), the South African education system has changed in certain fundamental ways (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2008). The Bill of Rights in the new Constitution declared that all learners, including those with disabilities, had the right to basic education and equal access to educational institutions (Constitution of South Africa, 1996).

In 1996 the then President and Minister of Education (Sibusiso Bengu) appointed the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) 1997, and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) 1997. These bodies were tasked with investigating and making recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in education. The NCSNET (1997) and NCESS (1997) reports were published during the course of 1997. They promoted the development of inclusive education and support centres that would enable all learners to participate in the mainstream education process. In these reports, “inclusive education” was seen as a system which promotes the “total personal, academic and professional development of all learners, irrespective of race, sex, ability, religion, culture, sexual orientation, style of learning and language” Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2001:16.

The concept of ‘inclusive education’ emanated from the 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand WCEFA INTER-AGENCY COMMISSION (WCEFA, 1990). The conference focused on learners worldwide – including those with disabilities – who were not receiving adequate education. It culminated in the *World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs* (WCEFA, 1990:153-164). This declaration gave substance to the basic human right that “everyone has a right to education” (WCEFA, 1990:153).



The ideal of inclusive education was further promoted during the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The conference produced the *Salamanca Statement on Principles and Practice in Special Needs Education*, which promoted the principle that all schools should accommodate learners, regardless of their special needs United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1994).

The two conferences assisted in entrenching the ideal and principle of inclusive education globally and, for the first time, provided a widely accepted conceptual framework that would accommodate and justify the social work profession's presence within the education system (Naicker, 1999:14). The ideal and principle were also advocated in the NCSNET (1997) and NCESS (1997) reports.

One of the most influential policy documents that flowed from the commissions' reports was the Education White Paper 6, (DBE, 2001). According to this White Paper, there is a broad range of learning needs among learners. These arise from a range of factors that include physical, mental, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, as well as psychosocial disturbances, differences in intellectual ability, particular life experiences and socio-economic deprivation, (DBE, 2001). It states that educational support services are required to support the education system in its response to these needs. These include the professional psychosocial services provided by educational and other psychologists, as well as social workers, (DBE, 2018; DBE, 2014b).

Interest in the field of school social work has generally grown along with the increase in the number of new appointments in the Western Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng (Kemp, 2014; Van Sittert, 2016). In July 2010 an Indaba (a Zulu term for conference) on specialisation in school social work found that there was a need for such a speciality within South African social work and made a recommendation in this regard to the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2017; Kemp, 2017). This led to the establishment of the National Committee for School Social Work Education and Practice (NACOSSWEP, 2015; Kemp, 2017). This body was tasked with drawing up a full proposal. The SACSSP accepted the National Committee's proposal in 2017 (NACOSSWEP, 2017). It included the recommendation that school social work should become a field of speciality within the profession. A process was set in motion which would ultimately culminate in the drafting and establishment of regulations in terms of the Social Service Professions Act, 1978 (NACOSSWEP, 2017). At the time of writing this process was still on-going. However, a number of important milestones have already been achieved.

### **Present structure and state of South African school social work**

Local school social work should be seen against the backdrop of the structure of the South African basic educational system. The National Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2001 functions as the umbrella body responsible for, among other things, the development of policies, strategies and white papers, the promulgation of legislation, the enforcement of policies and practices, as well as the development of systems and structures for mainstreaming school social work, (DBE, 2014a). Its function of appointing school social workers, however, has been delegated to the nine provincial departments of education. These departments could, *inter alia*, appoint social workers in specific schools or at district level (Morgan, 2017). District offices are sometimes divided into circuits that render direct services to schools (see Figure 1 for details).

The deployment, operation, supervision and management of school social workers within the various provinces are currently determined by each province's perceived needs and available resources (Kemp, 2014; Morgan, 2017). School social work, consequently, differs markedly from one province to the next (Kemp, 2014). In the Western Cape, for example, most school social workers are employed at district and/or circuit level (Kemp, 2014). In the Free State, however, the school social work system can be divided into three basic categories. The first consists of school social workers who have been

deployed to special schools, including the two schools of industry. They have all been appointed in terms of the Public Service Act (103 of 1994). The second category encompasses those functionaries who have been appointed in terms of the Employment of Educators Act (76 of 1998). They are based at the department's five district offices. Although they are school social workers and carry out school social work, they are not called 'school social workers' per se, but rather officially referred to as "senior education specialists" and "socio-pedagogues" (Voster, 2014). The third category, found in the Western Cape, the Free State and elsewhere, consists of those school social workers who are appointed to non-subsidised posts by the school governing bodies (SGBs) of mainstream and special schools. They are appointed privately and mostly employed under the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997).

The structure within which a school social worker has been employed exerts a direct influence on the specific roles, tasks and functions which he or she is expected to perform. These will now be explored.

## **ROLES, TASKS AND FUNCTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS**

Working within the education system places special demands on social workers. Not only do they have to function effectively within so-called 'host settings' (i.e. "arenas in which social workers practise that are defined and dominated by people who are not social workers") (Dane & Simon, 1991:208), but they also deal predominantly with children who are viewed as a "vulnerable group" (Statistics South Africa, 2013:ii-iii). This context and specialisation have a direct influence on the specific roles, tasks and functions that school social workers would have to perform (Costin, 1969).

An analysis of the local literature indicates that the roles, tasks and functions of South African school social workers are largely determined by where they are employed within the education system and the level of authority associated with their posts (Kemp, 2014; NACOSSWEP, 2015).

Social workers employed at *national level* perform more managerial and administrative roles and tasks, such as the development of policies, strategies, norms, standards, systems and structures, as well as monitoring and evaluation (NACOSSWEP, 2015). At *provincial level* the roles are coupled with other tasks. These include the management and support of district social workers, the coordination of school social work services, the organising of seminars and training, networking and mediation, the screening of programmes, as well as functioning as a liaison between systems (Morgan, 2017; NACOSSWEP, 2015). At *district level* direct support is provided to learners, parents, care-givers, educators, school-based support teams, school management teams and school governing bodies. At this level, a functionary's tasks could also include screening, the development and implementation of projects, the development of supportive infrastructure within schools, networking and remaining abreast of policies (NACOSSWEP, 2015).

The functions of social workers in a 'typical' South African school setting, be it as a provincial or school governing body appointee, can take on a variety of forms. These include the following:

- the screening, identification and assessment of learners in need of social work services;
- the interpretation and assessment of identified needs and problems;
- the provision of direct intervention services;
- the promotion of parental and community involvement;
- consultation with parents, educators, support staff and other professionals;
- collaboration with other role-players and the coordination of services in order to ensure that a holistic approach is followed;
- liaison with resource persons within other departments and organisations;

- the development of inter-professional teams through, for example, the use of case conferences;
- writing reports on request, and
- developing and maintaining a workable, effective administrative system (Kemp, 2014, Free State Department of Education, 2017).

An analysis of various South African sources (e.g. Kemp, 2014; Free State Department of Education, 2017; NACOSSWEP, 2015) indicates that the social work methods of case work, group work, community work, administration and research are used in local practice. These methods, among others, take the form of crisis intervention, counselling and support services to learners and their families, the referral of persons to outside service providers, the establishment of support groups, providing training in respect of social concerns to educators and others, sharing information with role players, and initiating programmes that would assist the Department of Basic Education in achieving its strategic goals (Van Sittert, 2016).

Two trends emerge from the analysis of South African school social workers' roles, tasks and functions. The first is that they are context-specific and primarily determined by the setting within which a practitioner operates. The second is that they tend to be extremely wide-ranging, covering the whole spectrum from individual therapeutic interventions, on the one hand, to research, management and policy development, on the other. This would indicate that there is a need for a mechanism that could be used to systemise the different roles, tasks and functions into a context-relevant framework. Such a mechanism could take the form of a set of practice standards. This need was addressed in another component of the research project on which this article is based.

The two trends give rise to the question of why there is currently such a diversity of expectations. Part of the answer lies in the factors that place South African learners at particular risk. It is these factors that school social workers ultimately need to address.

## **FACTORS PLACING SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS AT RISK**

There is a general view that schools are a microcosm of the society in which they operate and that the changes and ills that beset these environments also spill over into or are manifested in the school system (Savage & Schanding, 2013). This implies that South African learners face the same challenges and experience the same social problems as those that are generally prevalent in their communities.

### **Challenges that impact on learners' performance**

Van Wyk (1989) found that learners' functioning and progress is negatively affected by the biopsychosocial and financial problems which they experience at home or have to face in the community. Only some of the problems typically found in South African communities are highlighted below.

Every child has the right to education and the South African government has the responsibility to ensure quality education for all learners (Madonsela, 2017). The former Public Protector states, however, that this is not the case in many South African schools, where learners attend schools without running water, electricity or basic infrastructure (Madonsela, 2017).

Statistics indicate that more than 30.4 million people in South Africa live in poverty. This represents over half of the estimated 55 million total population (Madonsela, 2017). Learners comprise the majority of this group. Apart from being beset by poverty, many are also orphans and live in youth-headed households, (DBE, 2016; Free State Department of Education, 2017). Learners' functioning and progress may, moreover, be detrimentally affected by further social problems such as violence, alcoholism and drug use, different types of abuse and rejection, as well as phenomena such as teenage pregnancy and living with step-, single or foster-parents (Van Wyk, 1989).

It is generally accepted that South Africa is a violent society and that this factor impacts on learners (Grobler, 2019). In this regard, a study by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention found that there is a direct link between the violence that learners experience in their homes and communities, and the violence they face or perpetrate in school (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). It was also found that violence has a profoundly negative impact on learners' everyday functioning.

A second negative environmental factor is the abuse of alcohol and drugs. The National Policy on Management of Drug Use by Learners (South Africa, 2002), for example, indicates that the increased abuse of drugs in all South African communities has a negative effect on learners and that this should be addressed in the school context.

The emotional and behavioural problems experienced by South African learners are highlighted by various studies (Swanepoel, 2007). A report by the National Department of Basic Education (2006), for example, indicates that one out of every hundred primary school learners reported for emotional support in 2005. The Department also found that learners' individual and family problems can manifest at school and, among other things, impede learning (DBE, 2016). There is also concern that the thousands of learners infected with or affected by HIV and Aids may develop psychosocial or behavioural disorders unless prevention or intervention programmes are in place (Sharp, 2014).

Another common trend is that of learners dropping out of school before completing their education. Küsel (2018) reported that out of 1,186,011 learners who started Grade 1 in 2006, only 401,435 (33.85%) successfully completed Grade 12 in 2017. A study on street children found that factors contributing to their leaving school and their homes and ending up living on the street are poverty, family conflict, child-headed households, abuse, anxiety, anger or insecurity about their own abilities (Hajane, 2006). Another common challenge facing schools is absenteeism. This phenomenon can be viewed as evidence that a learner is experiencing problems (Robinson, 1978) that should be addressed.

This brief overview of the challenges faced by learners have their roots in their families or communities, and that this has a direct impact on their ability to make progress at school. The next question, therefore, concerns the policies and structures which are currently in place, particularly within the education system, to address these challenges.

### **The response to the challenges**

Several educational policies have been developed to assist in dealing with barriers to learning. These include White Paper 6 (2001), the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Conceptual Framework (2010) and the Psychosocial Support Strategy for Learners in the Educational System of South Africa 2015-2020 (DBE, 2016). The main purpose of the strategy was to define the scope of psychosocial support in the education sector, to assist in the identification of learners' psychosocial needs and to indicate how existing resources and structures may be utilised to help these learners effectively access the support they needed (DBE, 2016).

All the policy documents subscribe to the view that there are three types of barriers which affect learning negatively. These are intrinsic barriers, systemic barriers and societal barriers (DBE, 2016). Research has produced two more, namely pedagogical and extrinsic barriers (Van Sittert, 2016). School social work has an important role to play in addressing each of these types of barriers.

The Department of Basic Education also aims to improve learner wellbeing and academic achievement in other ways. These, among others, are epitomised in the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS). The policy indicates how schools could and should be used as a mechanism by means of which learners may gain access to a variety of public services such as health, poverty alleviation and psychosocial support (DBE, 2014b).

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) stipulates that school attendance is compulsory for learners from the first day of the year in which they turn 7 years until the last school day in the year in which they turn 15 years or complete Grade 9, depending on whichever happens first. The high dropout and absenteeism rates are indicative of the fact that this requirement is often not met (Küsel, 2018). The Department has responded by publishing the policy on learner attendance in order to regulate and address this problem (DBE, 2010b). The policy, among other things, addresses factors contributing to the absenteeism of learners, as well as ways in which this may be prevented and controlled.

The brief overview of the government's response to the challenges faced by learners has indicated that various policy documents are already in place. Particularly since the early 2010s, school social work has begun to play an increasingly larger role in the implementation of these policies. Until now, however, the deployment and utilisation of school social workers have not been the same in all nine provinces, with some having a relatively comprehensive school social work service, while others have almost none. This somewhat patchy response to the myriad of challenges that South African learners face may be viewed as an indicator of a need for the expansion of local school social work services.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article covered the background, development and current state of South African school social work and the typical roles, tasks and functions performed by practitioners in this field. It includes a summary of the specific factors that place South African learners at risk and the core ways in which these have thus far been addressed. This overview brought to the fore several trends of which the local school social work fraternity should take cognisance.

The roots of South African school social work may be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s, while the profession gained some formal recognition in the education system in the 1980s. Since then and despite various recommendations from a variety of bodies, the appointment process has not really gained any momentum to speak of, except in the case of the Western Cape Province. This started to change around 2010 with the appointment of more school social workers by a select few provincial education departments. To date, however, these services are still unevenly spread across the country.

A second trend is the diversity of appointment requirements and expectations between provinces. This is somewhat perplexing on account of the fact that it occurs in a country with a single set of policies and legislation. This can only be attributed to the fact that provinces enjoy a fairly large amount of autonomy in respect of the way in which they run their educational services.

There is also no single core professional title such as, for example 'school social worker', used locally. Titles such as 'senior education specialists' or 'socio-pedagogues' are sometimes conferred on such functionaries. This trend undermines the establishment of a single, strong professional profile for social work in the education system.

Although internationally the utilisation of school social work differs markedly from one country to the next, most share the same foundation and rationale for their existence. This is the principle of inclusive education which emerged from the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, and the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994. This principle is currently supported by most countries, including South Africa, although not all have given practical substance to its implementation.

From the review of the factors that place South African learners at risk, it has become evident that they need the services that can only be provided by school social workers. Thus far, however, the local response to this need has been insufficient. At risk learners simply cannot be sufficiently serviced by the number of the school social workers that have been appointed to date. The study indicates that the

policies that would justify the expansion of such a service are already in place, but that substance still needs to be given to these policies.

The social work profession in South Africa, however, cannot simply wait for ‘others’, including government, to define and to expand its role within the education system. Proactive steps are required. One of these is to increase research into *how* school social work could and should be implemented to meet local indigenous needs and circumstances. Another is to formally establish school social work as a speciality within the local profession. This step would undoubtedly enhance the standing of the profession within the education system.

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