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The Role of the School Social Worker

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> *School social work is a specialized area of practice within the broad field of the social work profession. School social workers bring unique knowledge and skills to the school system and the student services team. School social workers are instrumental in furthering the purpose of the schools: to provide a setting for teaching, learning, and for the attainment of competence and confidence. School social workers are hired by school districts to enhance the district's ability to meet its academic mission, especially where home, school and community collaboration is the key to achieving that mission.* (School Social Work Association of America, 2005)

The family and the school are the central places for the development of children. Herein can be found the hopes for the next generation. There are often gaps in this relationship, within the school, within the family, and in their relationships to each other and to the needs of students. There are gaps between aspirations and realities, between manifest need and available programs. In the dynamic multicultural world of the child today, there are gaps between particular cultures and what education may offer. Everywhere it is a top public priority that children develop well and that schools support that development. Nevertheless, aspirations are unfulfilled, policies fail, and otherwise effective programs fail with certain students. School
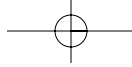
social workers practice in the space where children, families, schools, and communities encounter one another, where hopes can fail, where gaps exist, and where education can break down.

Throughout the world, schools are becoming the main public institution for social development. Schools are working to include those previously excluded from the opportunity of education. They are raising standards for educational outcomes to prepare citizens to participate in a multinational world, bound together by communication and by economic and social relations. The school social worker is becoming a useful professional to assist children who are marginalized—whether economically, socially, politically, or personally—to participate in this. Social workers work to make the education process effective. To do this, their central focus is working in partnership with parents on the pupil in transaction with a complex school and home environment. Education has become crucial, not only for each person to cope with the demands of modern living, but also for national economic survival (Friedman, 2005). It is very serious work. As a consequence of education's enhanced mission, an outcome-based education system is developing. This system is characterized by common standards, flexible notions of education to meet these standards, and higher standards for education professionals to deal differently with different levels of need. Because children begin school with different skills, abilities, and resources, they do not begin with a level playing field, and the imposition of uniform standards on all children logically leads to the need to shift resources to those who are more at risk for failure. While outcomes now drive all education law and policy, for children with disabilities in the United States outcome-driven, inclusive, and differentiated education has become established over thirty years.

The need for inclusion and differentiated assistance isn't just felt by children with disabilities. U.S. schools contain great diversity. Educators can no longer strive to teach to an imaginary grade norm at the middle of the class without taking into account the many different situations and capabilities of their students. The teacher's awareness of poverty and of differences in cultural understandings within the classroom sets the stage for a far more complex classroom reality. In Alabama, 43 percent of low-income students scored below basic, the lowest possible classification, on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress math test, compared with 14 percent of students with family incomes above $36,000 (Jonsson, 2007). With current demographic and economic shifts—the closing of marginal industries, for example—46 percent of current public school students in the United States now come from families earning less than $36,000 per year, the cutoff point for eligibility for free or reduced-cost lunch and a useful defining point for low-income students. In thirteen states, 54 percent of public school students come from families that earn less than this amount (Jonsson, 2007). As of 2005, 42 percent of public school children were nonwhite or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In some urban areas it is common to have students from thirty-five different linguistic groups in one elementary school.
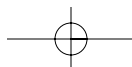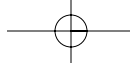
Mandated achievement testing has raised a national awareness of very many pupils falling far short of grade-level standards (Herbert, 2007; Schemo, 2007). While many educators believe that national standards should not be imposed on schools (they are generally locally governed), none question the fact that in many states only a minority of children come up to a recognized standard of proficiency. Rather they argue that the goals should be more realistic and achievable. In this regard, the state education agencies (SEAs) and school districts—which are closer to schools, teachers, and parents than the federal government—are more likely to be flexible and pragmatic about designing reforms to meet the needs of particular schools (Ravitch, 2007). Whatever balances ultimately emerge between federal, state, and local education policy making, no one disputes the need for school reforms. Because the individual situations of schoolchildren and their families must be taken into consideration in any successful reform, school social workers should expect their individualizing and family-centered roles to develop in general education in a manner similar to the development of their roles in regard to children with disabilities.

School social workers practice in the most vulnerable parts of the educational process, and so their roles can be as complex as the worlds they deal with. Practice rests on a wide range of skills that are defined and take shape through interactive teamwork. School social workers may work one-on-one with teachers, families, and children to address individual situations and needs. They become part of joint efforts to make schools safe for everyone. In preserving the dignity and respect due any one person, the school needs to become a community of belonging and respect. For example, social workers may work with a whole school on developing positive policies and educational programs dealing with harassment of students alleged to be gay or lesbian. When the school decides to implement a zero-tolerance policy, social workers are available to consult with teachers on implementation and to work with victims and perpetrators of harassment. They may help develop a crisis plan for the school with the principal, teachers' representatives, and the school nurse. They may work with that crisis team through a disturbing and violent incident, working in different ways with individual pupils and teachers experiencing crisis and with the broader school population. They may develop violence prevention programs in high schools experiencing confrontations between students. The list continues through many variations.

THE INTERTWINING PURPOSES OF
SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND EDUCATION

School social workers have long been concerned about children who are not able to use what education has to offer. Gradually these concerns are coming to be shared by others. Over the span of a century, schools have broadened their mission and scope toward becoming more inclusive and toward ensuring respect for the individual differences of all children.
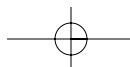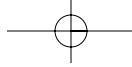
Consequently, social workers and many educators have come to share similar values. Each person possesses intrinsic worth. People have common needs. Schools and families are environments where children should develop, discover their own dignity and worth, and come to realize their potential. Unfortunately, the human potential of each person is often needlessly wasted. The worlds of young people, often so full of hope, can also be taken over by strange and distorted pictures of human worth and of social relations. School social workers work with young people and their school and family environments, assisting them to accomplish tasks associated with their learning, growth, and development, and thus to come to a fuller realization of their intrinsic dignity, capability, and potential. The school social work role is developed from this purpose and these values. It is not simply doing clinical social work in a school.

The basic focus of the school social worker is the constellation of teacher, parent, and child. The social worker must be able to relate to and work with all aspects of the child's situation, but the basic skill underlying all of this is *assessment*, a systematic way of understanding and communicating what is happening and what is possible. Building on assessment, the social worker develops a plan to assist the total constellation—teacher and students in the classroom, parents, and others—to work together to support the child in successfully completing the developmental steps that lie ahead. The basic questions are: What should the role of the school social worker be in a particular school community? and Where are the best places to intervene—the *units of attention*—in this particular situation? Guided by the purposes and needs of education and the learning process, an effective, focused, and comprehensive school social work role can be negotiated within a school community.

Role, the key to the understanding of what the school social worker does, is a set of expected behaviors constructed by school social workers together with their school communities. In each school, the school social worker's role is developed by social workers with others, such as the principal and the teachers. To do this, school social workers need to have a vision of what is possible, possess tools of analysis, be comfortable with the processes of negotiation, and coordinate their interventions with the life of the school. They can construct their role with others, assessing the needs and priorities of the school community and understanding what school social work can offer.

STORIES OF PRACTICE: MODELS OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

A Classic Example of Clinical School Social Work

A child who speaks mainly Spanish in her family has her first experience of kindergarten in a predominantly Anglo school and hides behind the piano
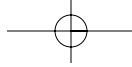
every school day. The more the teacher tries to move her from behind the piano, the more determined she becomes to remain hidden; it has now become a struggle of wills between child and teacher. The school social worker first assesses the situation in a consultation conference with the teacher, and they develop a few joint strategies focusing on the child's experience in the class. They might shorten the exposure of the youngster to the class or help the teacher modify the educational focus and expectations. The youngster might get started in school with a supportive person from her own community. The teacher might help the youngster work with another classmate who is less afraid and can be supportive. The teacher might invite the family to school to help them feel more comfortable. The family might convey that feeling of comfort to the child—the feeling that it's okay to be here. The social worker and teacher look for signs of the youngster's possible response. Chances are that the problem is at least partly one of language. Another possibility is that the youngster is not ready for kindergarten and should wait a bit. Or the youngster may need more detailed prekindergarten testing or a different placement in school that accommodates her special needs. The social worker will also assist the teacher in developing contacts with the parents, because in this case these contacts seem crucial.

So far the social worker has not seen the parents and may not need to. Perhaps with the social worker's consultation, the teacher can manage the situation. Consultation with the teacher is the first, most effective, least intrusive, and least costly use of the social worker's time. However, in many cases, and especially in the case of a child entering school, it may be necessary to confer with the parents. Parents, especially those from a different linguistic or cultural group, may be insecure and uncertain of their role in school. They may feel strange about being involved with the school. It is of course precisely these feelings that may be conveyed to the child, so that the child fears the school and can find no way to cope with it. The school social worker, aware of these fears, can take a normalizing approach toward them, with the intent of helping mother and father feel at ease. When the school social worker enters the home, he or she is entering the world of the family. In this story, the parents gradually feel comfortable and trusting enough to discuss their concerns. They are worried about letting their child go to school. They value education greatly but experience Anglo culture as distant, different, and threatening. Moreover, each parent has a different approach to discipline, and their difficulties with each other make them both feel helpless regarding some of the youngster's behavior. When the parents are in disagreement, the youngster always wins; this learned behavior is being carried into the school. The school social worker makes an assessment with the parents of how the child is responding, what the dynamics of the home are, and what type of agreement between parents, teacher, and child can be constructed. The school must support the child's first steps to adapt. The school social worker's work with the parents should parallel work already done with

the child's teacher. In this case, the work between the teacher and the parents may suffice. In other cases, the social worker may opt to work with the child also, building on the work already done with the teacher and parents.

A School Crisis

Another school itself is in crisis. When too many things are taking place at once for the school to manage and remain a safe environment for children, or when children are having great difficulty processing a situation, a crisis happens in a school. In this story, the school is in turmoil because of the violent death in a school bus accident of one of the children, an 8-year-old Korean girl. The school has a general plan for dealing with crises, as well as a detailed crisis manual that the school social worker, as a key member of the crisis team, helped create. On hearing about the death, the social worker makes an immediate assessment of the points of vulnerability in the school and meets with the school crisis team. They agree on a division of work. The principal works with the news media and community and makes an announcement to teachers and students as soon as there is a clear picture of what happened. The social worker has been in touch with the girl's family to learn what their wishes are and to assess how they are managing the crisis. The social worker agrees to work with the family, staying in touch throughout the crisis. She cancels appointments, except those that cannot be changed, and opens her office as a crisis center for students and teachers who want to talk about what has happened. She consults with the teacher of the student who died, and they discuss how the class is to be told. Later, people who knew the student or who feel the need attend a small Buddhist memorial service, and still later, students, teachers, and the family preserve her memory in a more permanent way with a small peace garden in the school courtyard. The school and community deal with the aftershocks of the death in a healing process that takes place over the next several years.

A Child with Special Needs

A child with a disability needs to be moved from one class to another. In the first class she is more protected but achieves less than she is capable of. She is mostly friends with other children with disabilities. She is moving to a class with a wide range of children with different levels of ability, where, if she feels safe and accepted, it is hoped she might achieve more. However, she will experience greater stress, whatever her level of achievement. The decision to move her is based on tests that indicate that the student will be able to achieve in this class with some special help, and the move is carefully planned. The new teacher and the former teacher are fully involved in the process. The student is also fully involved, and the social worker has developed a supportive relationship with the student and with the parents. When
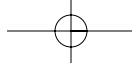
the day for the move comes, the social worker is there in case of unforeseen difficulties. The social worker works with the teacher, parent, and child in the months following the move until it is clear that his services are no longer needed (Welsh & Goldberg, 1979).

Consultation and Placement of Students

The social worker at a junior high school develops an active prevention program. One problem the school faces is that children are coming to the junior high school (where classes are taught in different rooms by subject-oriented teachers) from self-contained sixth-grade classes in schools close to their homes. It is not unusual for such children to regress for a semester or more. Some never recover the level of achievement and feeling of safety they experienced when they had one teacher and knew the teacher and their classmates well. Through the classroom observation that is a normal part of her work in the school, the social worker gets to know the teaching styles of each of the teachers and the range of strengths each brings to his or her work with children. Before the four hundred new students from feeder schools come to the junior high school in September, she reviews their records from elementary school. She places each at-risk child with a home-room teacher who fits well with that child's needs, making certain that there are only a few children with serious problems in each classroom, and a balance of children with positive social adjustment and learning skills. Referrals of children for help the following year amount to about half the normal rate, and children who need more intensive help are helped earlier.

Group Work in a School

In another school, seven 12-year-old boys decide in their discussions with each other that they all have problems with their fathers. They appear at the social worker's door, asking to form a group to discuss their concerns. The social worker, who is male, calls each of the parents for permission and invites them to come in to discuss the situation. The parents come in, some individually, some in a group, and the boys are seen in a group with some individual follow-up. The result in each boy is a lowering of tension in his relations with his father and a measurable academic and social improvement. No boy needs to be seen longer than three months.

Violence Prevention

A high school is experiencing a large number of fights between groups of students of different ethnicities over insulting language, opposite-sex relationships, and accusations of stealing, among other things. There is a particularly high level of tension around allegations of being gay or lesbian.
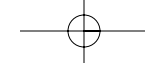
Fights have usually been handled through the intervention of the vice principal, but this has not been well accepted by the students and has resulted in escalations of punishment and students experiencing shame and wishing revenge on the students who have shamed them and on the vice principal. The school unites around the use of a violence prevention strategy to create a more positive school culture. Students, teachers, social workers, and administrators adopt the principles of recognizing others' contributions and successes, acting with respect toward others, sharing power to build community, and making peace (Peace Power, 2007). As a part of this they develop a voluntary mediation program. Some disputes between individual students are subject to mediation by a panel of specially trained students, who are selected by other students for their leadership ability. These programs lower tensions in the school as the entire school culture is improved and the dignity of each student is respected. The education program enables and encourages youngsters to deal with differences, including their own, by making peace with each other in a safe atmosphere. Different coalesced groups of Hispanic, white, and African American students adopt these principles and develop ways of expressing them.

Policy Practice

The school social worker in an urban high school becomes aware that the majority of parents in her school are native Spanish speakers. There is no translator available in the school, and communication with these parents has become very limited. The school social worker analyzes her school organization, using the framework for organizational analysis introduced in chapter 9. She learns from her analysis that power in the school tends to be highly centralized, and that certain key figures tend to be very important in both formal and informal power structures. These include the principal, the assistant principal, the school secretary, the head of the English department, the head of the physical education department, the custodian, the head of the student council, the head of the parent-teacher organization, the pastor of a local church, and the head of a community group that advocates on behalf of Latino families. The school social worker uses the policy practice skills described in chapter 10 to analyze the problem. She uses interactional skills to contact these power players in the school community to develop a coalition interested in addressing this issue. The group decides to carry out a needs assessment (see chapter 11). Surveys of parents, students, and teachers and existing school data overwhelmingly support the need for a translator on site. Using the framework for policy analysis discussed in chapter 10, the group develops a proposal for a new position of a part-time translator. Using their agenda-setting policy practice skills, the group works together to place this proposal on the school board agenda. Using their analytic policy practice skills, they anticipate that funding will be the primary obstacle, so

they include plans for funding in their proposal. With widespread support, the proposal is passed by the school board.

The work of the social worker is the work of the school, and the effectiveness of the school social worker becomes the effectiveness of education. In each example of the role of the social worker, the social worker applies the basics of the school social work role to a different set of circumstances in concert with other members of the school team, finding collaborative ways for the school and its membership to solve problems.

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

The focus of school social work has followed the historic concerns of education. The problems confronted by the education institution over its long history have ranged from accommodating immigrant populations, discrimination against particular groups, truancy, and the tragic waste of human potential in emotional disturbances of childhood to problems regarding school disruption and safety, homelessness, drugs, and AIDS. The first social workers in schools were hired in recognition of the fact that conditions, whether in the family, the neighborhood, or the school itself, that prevent children from learning and the school from carrying out its mandate were the school's concern (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 2000; Costin, 1978). School social work would draw its legitimacy and its function from its ability to make education work for groups of children who could not otherwise participate. Its history reflects the evolving awareness in education, and in society, of groups of children for whom education has not been effective: immigrants, the impoverished, the economically and socially oppressed, the delinquent, the disturbed, and those with disabilities. It drew its function from the needs and eventually the rights of these groups as they interfaced with the institution of education and confronted the expectation that they should achieve their fullest potential. In each situation, as school social workers defined their roles, there was a match of the social work perspective—its knowledge, values, and skills—with the missions and mandates of the school.

Inclusion of All Children. During the twentieth century, schools broadened their mission and scope toward greater inclusion and respect for the individual differences of all children. The passage of compulsory school attendance laws, roughly from 1895 through 1918, marked a major shift in philosophies and policies governing American education. This would eventually become a philosophy of inclusion. Education, no longer for the elite, was for everyone a necessary part of preparation for modern life. A half century later, the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed that education is a constitutional right, which, if available to any, must be available to all on an equal basis. The profundity of the change in access to education in our society is

succinctly expressed in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954): "If education is a principal instrument in helping the child to adjust normally to this environment, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. The opportunity of an education, where the state has undertaken to provide it to any, is a right, which must be made available to all on equal terms." This belief, inherent in the passage of compulsory attendance laws, has become the basis for an ever-growing extension of education to all children at risk, most recently to those with disabilities.

Respect for Individual Differences. The belief that education, if available to any, should be available equally to all was also energized by the emergent awareness of individual differences among students and the need, indeed the responsibility of the school, to adapt curricula to these differences. The initial thrust of education in a modernizing society would be to standardize curriculum, and thus the learning process, into one best way to learn and one set of subjects to be learned. The modern school was organized by a prescribed curriculum, standardized testing, and the grade system. Students had to fit into this prescribed curriculum and learning process. Their ability to do this was measured. The problem is that none of this standardization of learners, knowledge, and the learning process matches the real world. Learners are different. Learning is both an individual process and a relational process. Any curriculum is potentially diverse: it changes as knowledge changes. For students to learn optimally, the implications of these differences must be recognized. Testing and education research recognized these differences, but real change would come slowly. The system of learning within the norms of the grade system eventually became somewhat more individualized. Children with disabilities received individualized education programs with goals, expected learning processes, and educational resources tailored to their needs. The movement to individualize education for all children in the context of standards of achievement continues to be one of the central issues in education.

Philosophies of inclusion and respect for individual differences continue to shape profoundly the practice of education and provide the basis for the role of the school social worker. The correspondence between social work values, the emergent mission of education, and the role of the school social worker is illustrated by Allen-Meares (1999) in table 1.1. The mission of education, implicit in these values, became the basis for school social work as it emerged in the twentieth century.

The Beginnings of School Social Work

School social work began during the school year 1906–1907 simultaneously in New York, Boston, Hartford (Costin, 1969a), and Chicago (McCullagh, 2000). These workers were not hired by the school system but worked

TABLE 1.1   Social Work Values

Social Work Values	*Applications to Social Work in Schools*
1. Recognition of the worth and dignity of each human being	1. Each pupil is valued as an individual regardless of any unique characteristic.
2. The right to self-determination or self-realization	2. Each pupil should be allowed to share in the learning process.
3. Respect for individual potential and support for an individual's aspirations to attain it	3. Individual differences (including differences in rate of learning) should be recognized; intervention should be aimed at supporting pupils' education goals.
4. The right of each individual to be different from every other and to be accorded respect for those differences	4. Each child, regardless of race and socioeconomic characteristics, has a right to equal treatment in the school.

in the school under the sponsorship of other agencies and civic groups. In New York, it was a settlement house that sponsored the workers. Their purpose was to work in various projects between the school and communities of new immigrants, promoting understanding and communication (Lide, 1959). In Boston, the Women's Education Association sponsored "visiting teachers" who would work between the home and the school. In Hartford, Connecticut, a psychology clinic developed a program of visiting teachers to assist the psychologist in securing social histories of children and implementing the clinic's treatment plans and recommendations (Lide, 1959). In Chicago, Louise Montgomery developed a social settlement type of program at the Hamline School that offered a wide range of services to the Stockyards District community (McCullagh, 2000). This unheralded experiment anticipated the much later development of school-based services for the entire community. In many ways these diverse early programs contained in rough and in seminal form all the elements of later school social work practice. Over the following century, the concerns of inclusion and recognition of individual differences, the concept of education as a relational process, and the developing mission of the schools would shape the role of the school social worker.

The First Role Definition by a School System: The Rochester Schools

In 1913 in Rochester, New York, the Board of Education hired visiting teachers for the first time. The school's commitment to hire visiting teachers was an acknowledgment of both the broadening mission of education and the possibility that social workers could be part of that mission. In justifying

the appointments, the Rochester Board of Education noted that in the child's environment outside the school there are forces that often thwart the school in its endeavors to educate. The school was now broadening and individualizing its mission, attempting to meet its responsibilities for the "whole welfare of the child," and maximizing "cooperation between the home and the school" (Julius Oppenheimer, qtd. in Lide, 1959).

Between School and Community: Jane Culbert

Only three years later in 1916 at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, a definition of school social work emerged in the presentation of Jane Culbert. The definition would focus on the environment of the child and the school, rather than on the individual child. The school social worker's role was "interpreting to the school the child's out-of-school life; supplementing the teacher's knowledge of the child . . . so that she may be able to teach the whole child[;] . . . assisting the school to know the life of the neighborhood, in order that it may train the children to the life to which they look forward. Secondly the visiting teacher interprets to parents the demands of the school and explains the particular demands and needs of the child" (Culbert, 1916, p. 595). The definition is replete with concepts of education as a complex, relational process in the school community—a process school social workers could professionally support in the interests of children. Many of these concepts would find further development in education over the century: inclusion, respect for individual differences, and education as a process taking place in the classroom, in the family and in the community.

Culbert's statement of role would be developed and typified by Julius Oppenheimer in the school-family-community liaison (Lide, 1959). From his study of 300 case reports made by school social workers and visiting teachers, he drew thirty-two core functions that he considered to be primary to the role of the school social worker. School social workers would aid in the reorganization of school administration and practices by supplying evidence of unfavorable conditions underlying pupils' school difficulties and by pointing out where changes were needed (Allen-Meares, 2006; Allen-Meares et al., 2000).

From a Focus on the Environment to the "Maladjusted" Child: The Early Years

In 1920, the National Association of Visiting Teachers was organized and held its first meeting in New York City (McCullagh, 2000). Concern was expressed about the organization, administration, and role definition of visiting teachers (Allen-Meares, 2000). This organization, which later became the American Association of Visiting Teachers, would publish a journal, the

Bulletin, until 1955. In 1955 it was merged with the newly established National Association of Social Workers. The *Bulletin* was the place in which the writing and the thinking of this emergent field of practice appeared during these years. As a result of the influence of the mental hygiene movement of the day, there was a gradual shift in focus from the home and school environment to the individual schoolchild and that child's needs. Casework then became the preferred vehicle for working with the individual child. The shift toward casework is reflected in the Milford Conference Report in 1929 (American Association of Social Workers, 1929/1974). For the social work field as a whole, the shift was later crystallized by the work of Edith Abbott (1942) on social work and professional education.

Fields of Practice with Casework in Common: The Milford Conference

The basic issues in the maturation of social work practice and theory, and a possible future direction, were laid out in the Milford Conference Report. By the end of the 1920s, a wide range of fields of practice had organized themselves around the different settings of school, hospital, court, settlement house, child welfare agency, family service agency, and so forth. Social work education followed an apprenticeship model, in which students learned what were perceived to be highly specialized and segmented fields of practice. The question of what all these fields had in common became extremely important. In 1929, at the Milford Conference, the basic distinction between fields of practice, the specific practice that emerged from these fields, and the generic base for practice in these fields—that is, the knowledge, values, and skills of casework—was established. This distinction was extremely important for social work education and for the field of school social work in that it allowed each field of practice to flourish and develop on a common foundation of casework. The emergent profession of social work was indeed broad and diverse. Furthermore, no theory had emerged that could do more than offer a general orientation to helping. It still was up to the learner-practitioner and supervisor to find a way to relate theory to practice. This situation would remain the same, with various permutations, for more than a half century. The casework theory identified as generic would not refer to a concrete practice separable from its manifestation in different fields. There was no "generic" practice, but generic knowledge, values, and skills would be a foundation for a further differentiation of practice within fields of practice.

The Distinction between Generic and Specific Knowledge: Grace Marcus

The casework foundation of the 1920s and 1930s did not focus simply on individuals, as did later versions, but on individuals and family units
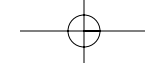
together. It was much more than a simple methodological base because it included knowledge and values. It became a conceptual foundation for practice that was specific to a field. Practice differentiation took place in relation to specific identified fields, such as school social work, medical social work, psychiatric social work, child welfare, and family services. Grace Marcus (1938–1939) clarified the distinction between the concepts "generic" and "specific":

> The term generic does not apply to any actual, concrete practice of an agency or field but refers to an essential, common property of casework knowledge, ideas and skills which caseworkers of every field must command if they are to perform adequately their specific jobs. As for our other troublemaking word, "specific," it refers to the form casework takes within the particular administrative setting; it is the manifest use to which the generic store of knowledge has been put in meeting the particular purposes, problems, and conditions of the agency in dispensing its particular resources.

The distinction was important in that it allowed for professional differentiation on a common foundation and specified the relationship of method theory, such as casework, to its manifestation in fields of practice.

A Rationale for School Social Work Practice: Florence Poole

In 1949, Florence Poole described a more developed rationale for school social work practice derived from the right of every child to an education. Pupils who could not use what the school had to offer were "children who are being denied, obscure though the cause may be, nevertheless denied because they are unable to use fully their right to an education" (Poole, 1959, p. 357). It was the school's responsibility to offer them something that would help them to benefit from an education. Education would need to change to help children who were "having some particular difficulty in participating beneficially in a school experience" (Poole, 1959, p. 357). Her rationale would eventually mark a shift in the discussion of the school social work role. School social work would be essential to the schools' ability to accomplish their purpose: "At the present time we no longer see social work as a service appended to the schools. We see one of our most significant social institutions establishing social work as an integral part of its service, essential to the carrying out of its purpose. We recognize a clarity in the definition of the services as a social work service" (Poole, 1949, p. 454). She saw the clarity and uniqueness of social work service as coming from the societal function of the school. The worker "must be able to determine which needs within the school can be appropriately met through school social work service. She must be able to develop a method of offering the service which will fit in with the general organization and structure of the school, but which is identifiable as one requiring social work knowledge and

skill. She must be able to define the service and her contribution in such a way that the school personnel can accept it as a service, which contributes to the major purpose of the school" (Poole, 1949, p. 455). Florence Poole's approach to practice was built on the parameters of the mission of the school, the knowledge and skill of social work, and the worker's professional responsibility to determine what needs to be done and to develop an appropriate program for doing it. Her conception, focused on the potentially rich interaction of social work methods and the mission of the school, was simultaneously freer to use a variety of methods to achieve complex personal, familial, and institutional goals. The effect of this shift in emphasis from casework to school social work, although unnoticed at the time, was enormous. A variety of social work methods, geared to the complex missions and societal functions of the school, was now possible. The ensuing discussion of theory for school social work would develop the relation of methods to the needs of children and schools in the education process. It would be the basis for an emergent theoretical literature and a diversified practice.

Poole ultimately shifted the focus from the problem pupil who could not adjust and adapt to the school to pupils and schools adapting to each other in the context of every child's right to an education. The conditions that interfere with the student's ability to connect with the educational system are diverse. Therefore, the functions of the school social worker would be flexible and wide ranging, developed in each school by encounters with the concrete problems and needs of the school community. The elements of this encounter have remained the same over many years, while the role has developed and school social workers have responded to changing conditions. New functions would emerge on the common parameters sketched out by Florence Poole's vision and contribution.

A Period of Professional Centralization

During the late 1950s and the 1960s, the major concern in the professional literature, in the profession, and in social work education had to do with what social workers from different fields of practice had in common, not what made them different. Considerable development of school social work as a field of practice had already taken place from the mid-1920s through 1955 and was the basis for the classic definitional work of Florence Poole. This growth trailed off by 1955 with the consolidation of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). National organizations of social workers representing different fields of practice were merged into one single professional association. *The Bulletin* of the American Association of Visiting Teachers was merged into the new journal of the united social work profession, *Social Work*. With the loss of the *Bulletin*, school social work literature dropped off for a time.

The Transaction between Persons and Environments:
Harriett Bartlett and William E. Gordon

During the late 1950s, and through the following decade, important work was done to clarify the common base of social work practice (Bartlett, 1971). The work of Harriett Bartlett and others built the foundation for a reorientation of methods and skills to a clarified professional perspective of the social worker. Bartlett (1959, 1971) worked with William E. Gordon (1969) to develop the concept of the transactions between individuals and their social environments into a common base and a fundamental beginning point for social work. As the focus shifted to the person-environment transaction, it was no longer assumed that the individual was the primary object of help. The development and diffusion of group and environmental interventions and the use of a range of helping modalities in richly differentiated areas of practice would make Gordon's and Bartlett's work useful. The best summary of this work appeared in the 1979 report of the Joint NASW-CSWE Task Force on Specialization, of which Gordon was a member:
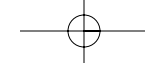
> The fundamental zone of social work is where people and their environment are in exchange with each other. Social work historically has focused on the transaction zone where the exchange between people and the environment which impinge on them results in changes in both. Social work intervention aims at the coping capabilities of people and the demands and resources of their environment so that the transactions between them are helpful to both. Social work's concern extends to both the dysfunctional and deficient conditions at the juncture between people and their environment, and to the opportunities there for producing growth and improving the environment. It is the duality of focus on people and their environments that distinguishes social work from other professions. (Joint NASW-CSWE Task Force on Specialization, 1979)

The Beginnings of Specialization

During the late 1960s and following years there arose a renewed interest in developing theory and practice in areas such as school social work. The use of "generic" approaches to practice in each field was no longer an adequate base for the complex practice that was emerging. Various fields, such as education and health, were demanding accountability to their goals. The survival of social work in different fields would demand this accountability. There was a gradual redevelopment of literature, journals, and regional associations of social workers in different fields of practice.

The interest in specialization led to a profession-wide discussion of this issue and the report of the Joint Task Force in 1979. The Joint Task Force developed a classic formulation: fields of practice in social work grow from the need for mediation between persons and social institutions in order to meet common human needs. Practice within each field is defined by 1) a

clientele, 2) a point of entry, 3) a social institution with its institutional purposes, and 4) the contribution of social work practice, its knowledge, values, and appropriateness to the institutional purpose and to common human needs. According to the Joint Task Force (1979), these needs and their respective institutions would include:

◆ The need for physical and mental well-being (health system)
◆ The need to know and to learn (education system)
◆ The need for justice (justice system)
◆ The need for economic security (work/public assistance systems)
◆ The need for self-realization, intimacy, and relationships (family and child welfare systems)

In each area, the social worker works as a professional and mediates a relationship between persons and institutions.

At this time, school social work was developing its own distinct identity, methodology, theory, and organization. It had large numbers of experienced practitioners, who were encouraged to remain in direct practice by the structure and incentives of the school field as it had developed. These were some of the first and strongest advocates of a movement in the mid- to late 1970s to develop practice and theory. With the development of state school social work associations, and then school social work journals, the search for some balance between what was common to all fields and what was specific to school social work began again. The issues were not always clear. Students would struggle with finding this balance in their attempts to match classroom theory with fieldwork.

Rethinking Casework in the Schools

During the 1960s, the school social work literature reflected a broadened use of helping methods in schools and a developing interest in broader concerns affecting particular populations of students in schools. At the same time, the social work profession experienced a renewed focus on social reform. The education literature, critical of the current organization of schooling and of the effectiveness of education, was preparing the way for school reform. Lela Costin (1969b) published a study of the importance school social workers attached to specific tasks, using a sample mainly derived from NASW members. Her findings showed a group of social workers whose descriptions of social work mainly reflected the clinical orientation of the social work literature of the 1940s and the 1950s. Reflecting on these findings, Costin (1972) showed disappointment at what she believed was an excessively narrow conception of role, given the changing mission of schools and the potential of practice to assist that mission. Her next step would be to develop a picture of what the school social work role should be.

Four Models for Practice: John Alderson

Following Costin's research, John Alderson used a similar instrument to study school social workers with a variety of levels of professional training in Florida. In his sampling, he found a much broader orientation than did Costin. The workers ranked leadership and policy making either first or second in importance. Subsequently, Alderson attempted a theoretical reconciliation of these findings with Costin's findings, and with the apparent clinical emphasis of many established school social work programs. He described four different models of school social work practice (Alderson, 1974). The first three of these were governed by particular intervention methods, whether by clinical theory, social change theory, or community school organization. In the first three models, one method would tend to exclude the others. 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. His final model, the *social interaction* model, was of a very different order. This model utilized a more dynamic, flexible, and changing concept of role. The focus for practice based on systems theory would be on persons and environments, students (in families), and schools in reciprocal interactions. Social workers would adapt their roles to this interaction. Alderson's social interaction model followed two decades of the work of William E. Gordon, Harriett Bartlett, and the Committee on Social Work Practice, and the definition of a transactional systems perspective in social work.

Seven Clusters of School Social Work Functions: Lela Costin

At about the same time, Lela Costin (1973) developed the *school-community-pupil relations* model, which focused on "school and community deficiencies and specific system characteristics as these interact with characteristics of pupils at various stress points in their life cycles" (p. 137). She outlined seven broad groups of functions in the school social worker's role. School social workers do 1) direct counseling with individuals, groups, and families, 2) advocacy, 3) consultation, 4) community linkage, 5) interdisciplinary team coordination, 6) needs assessment, and 7) program and policy development (Costin, 1973). With its constant relation of a diverse professional methodology to a developing school purpose, the model hearkened back to the beginnings of school social work.

Broadening Approaches to Practice

Later research in school social work (Allen-Meares, 1977) showed movement toward a model emphasizing home-school-community relations with a

major focus still on problems faced by individual students. Other studies showed this broadening taking place as well (Anlauf-Sabatino, 1982; Chavkin, 1993; Constable, Kuzmickaite, Harrison, & Volkmann, 1999; Constable & Montgomery, 1985; Dennison, 1998; Lambert & Mullally, 1982; Timberlake, Sabatino, & Hooper, 1982). This finding can be characterized by Lambert and Mullally's (1982) pithy comment, "School social workers, at least in Ontario, do not place importance on one focus—individual change or systems change—to the exclusion of the other, but recognize the importance of both" (p. 81). The conceptual problem was not a question of individual change or systems change, but of how to organize the methodological diversity inherent in the role. Method theories taught outside the dynamic context of a field of practice often tended to focus either on individual change or systems change. Frey and Dupper (2005) developed a clinical quadrant (figure 1.1) to bring together clinical and environmental interventions in school social work. The most recent of a number of integrational methods approaches, their quadrant is an attempt to describe and encompass the method content of school social work practice, and in a very broad sense their interrelations.

In this context the ecological systems model became a useful theoretical model for understanding the school social worker's role. Ecology is the science of organism-environment interaction. A system is an organized holistic unit of interdependent, transacting, and mutually influencing parts (individuals or collectivities and their units) within an identifiable (social-ecological) environment (Siporin, 1975). The model leads to a view of person and environment as a unitary interacting system in which each constantly affects and

FIGURE 1.1   Clinical Quadrant
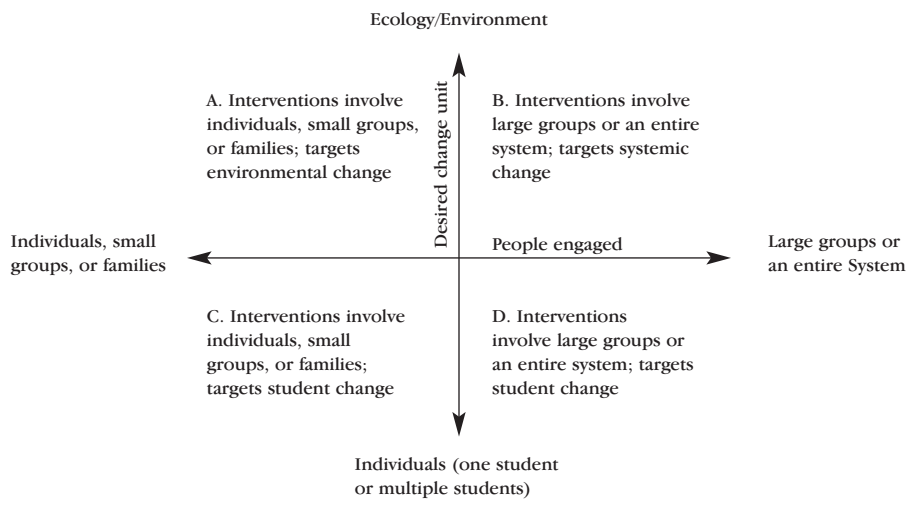
shapes the other. It allows for an understanding of the relationship between different methods of intervention and their theoretical bases. Behavior in the classroom may be understood better if one has an understanding of its context, its relations to other settings, and the relation of these settings to each other. As one learns to analyze the relations between systems, practice may build on this understanding. Choice of method(s) one may use depends on an understanding of the complex interaction of the systems involved. The model leads to clearer choices of where to intervene in a complex system and when an intervention may be most effective.

Germain (2006) uses ecological systems theory to clarify the dual function of social work: to "attend to the complexities of the environment, just as we attend to the complexities of the person" (p. 30). She moves to a health orientation from a medical-disease metaphor and to "engaging the progressive forces in people and situational assets, and effecting the removal of environmental obstacles to growth and adaptive functioning" (p. 30).

In the next chapter, Monkman offers a parsimonious analysis of school social work practice from the nature of schooling itself. Following the lead of her teacher, William E. Gordon, she defines a transaction as the relation between a person's coping behavior and the impinging environment. The social worker assists individuals and environments to cope with and become resources for each other. When this transaction is in danger of breakdown, the social worker intervenes with a wide range of situationally appropriate methods to create a better match. She defines this transaction, making it more operational, and more specific for both the purposes of practice and research.

These models provide a conceptual base for understanding and analyzing practice without allowing a narrowly preconceived method to dictate intervention. They allow for a set of dynamic relations in the school, with a clientele coping with maturational and educational goals and their integration. They are platforms or springboards for further development of school social work practice. Practice, policy, and research methodologies can be related to each other. They become more focused when they are applied to dynamic and complex transactions within the school community.

Emergent Issues and the Emergent Role

During the final three decades of the twentieth century, the inclusive and individualizing missions of the schools were expanded in response to the recognition of the right of children with disabilities to a free appropriate public education; the school reform movement; and recent concerns around violence, sexual harassment, and bullying in schools. Education is becoming outcome and evidence based (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2003). There is a public policy emphasis on high professional qualifications that is meshing with movements toward specialization in school social work. In accordance with
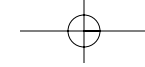
national legislation, states are setting standards for "highly qualified" school social workers and introducing post-masters mentorships for more permanent certification for highly qualified school professionals (Constable & Alvarez, 2006).

WHOM DOES THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER SERVE?

Society places a heavy responsibility on schools and families. Schooling is not simply a process of teaching and learning, but of preparing children for the future. Schools are the vehicle for aspirations, not only for children who may conform easily to external expectations, but for every child. Responsibilities are placed on the school, on the parent, and on the child to make the educational process work so that each child who goes to school may fulfill his or her potential for growth. Schools need to be concerned for every child whose coping capacity is not well matched with the demands and resources of the educational institution. At one time or other, any person could be vulnerable. In addition, particular groups have borne certain burdens within society. Children come to school with messages from society, and sometimes from the school itself. Perhaps they feel that because of certain defining characteristics, such as gender, race, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, they cannot have the same aspirations as others, or that objective conditions, such as poverty, will surely prevent them from achieving their aspirations. The power of education, and many of the values that drive it, can refute these messages. School social workers with their central access to teachers, children and families in the school community can refute these messages as well.

WHERE DOES SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK TAKE PLACE?

The School Community Context

School is conceptualized as a community of families and school personnel engaged in the educational process. The educational process is dynamic and wide ranging and involves children, their families, and an institution called school. It is the context for school social work. School is no longer viewed as a building or a collection of classrooms in which teachers and pupils work together. The school community, no longer simply bounded by geography, comprises all those who engage in the educational process. As in any community, there are varied concrete roles. People fit into these communities in very different ways. Parents and families have membership through their children. Teachers and other school personnel are members with accountability to parents, children, and the broader community. Drawing on each person's capacities, the school social worker focuses on making the educational process work to the fullest extent. Therefore, school social workers work with parents, teachers, pupils, and administrators on behalf of
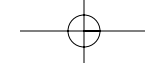
vulnerable children or groups of children. The success of the process depends on the collective and individual involvement of everyone. The social worker helps the school community operate as a real community so that personal, familial, and community resources can be discovered and used to meet children's developmental needs.

The school is rapidly becoming the place of organization of all services to children and families. As long as it had been taken for granted that school would be isolated from the home, one part of the role of the school social worker has been to span the boundary between home and school. This has taken place since the origin of school social work in the early twentieth century (Litwak & Meyer, 1966). Schools have generally operated in relative isolation from their constituent families, each protecting its functioning from "interference" from the other. This isolation is, of course, counterproductive in situations of vulnerability or difficulty. There is a need for someone like the school social worker to span, and even challenge, these boundaries. The traditional approach of connecting children with networks of community services has been evident from the earliest years of social work in schools. Beginning in the late 1960s, the intensified parent involvement of Project Head Start and the war on poverty and, more recently, parent-sponsored schools have allowed for the development of models of empowerment and partnership.

The Societal Context

The connection of school social work to its school and community context is essential for the development of practice. The current legal and social policy context for school social work and the role of the school social worker in school policy development are discussed more fully in section II. In the United States and in certain Western European countries, there has been an erosion of state welfare systems and the supports they provide to families. As national government policies shift toward "market" approaches, it seems that the societal protections normally associated with childhood are declining. Many families are weakening while risks to children are increasing. High rates of suicide, addiction, violence toward and among children, teen pregnancy, AIDS, and early exposure to the job market through economic necessity are among these risks, to some extent created and in any case sustained by a laissez-faire attitude associated with the reigning free market philosophy.

Some of the risks generated by the market and the broader societal system may be buffered through strengthening institutions at the local level—through schools and homes that work and that respect human dignity and worth. In the face of these problems (or perhaps because of them) schools have continued their century-old quests, such as for greater inclusion in the educational mainstream of previously excluded groups of youngsters. The changes that have taken place in special education over the past thirty years are particularly important and reflect the possible relations between school

policy and the school social worker's role. More recently, school reform experience in the United States has been bringing with it increased expectations for children. Yet no progress can be made on school reform if the problems that accompany poverty and socioeconomic class—that children are at risk and will not fulfill their potential without institutional, community, and family supports—are not dealt with (Mintzies & Hare, 1985). Impoverished school districts working with impoverished families generally achieve at rates considerably lower than their more privileged neighbors (Biddle, 1997).

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER DO?

The school social worker's role is multifaceted. There is assessment and consultation within the school team. There is direct work with children and parents individually and in groups. There is program and policy development. In 1989 a group of nineteen nationally recognized experts in school social work was asked to develop a list of the tasks that entry-level school social workers perform in their day-to-day professional roles. The result was a list of 104 tasks, evidence of the complexity of school social work. These tasks fell along five job dimensions:

1. Relationships with and services to children and families
2. Relationships with and services to teachers and school staff
3. Services to other school personnel
4. Community services
5. Administrative and professional tasks (Nelson, 1990)

Further research on these roles, tasks, and skills found four areas of school social work to be both very important and frequently addressed:

1. Consultation with others in the school system and the teamwork relationships that make consultation possible
2. Assessment applied to a variety of different roles in direct service, in consultation, and in program development
3. Direct work with children and parents in individual, group, and family modalities
4. Assistance with program development in schools (Constable et al., 1999)

A key skill, the foundation of all other areas, is assessment. Assessment is a systematic way of understanding what is taking place in relationships in the classroom, within the family, and between the family and the school. The social worker looks for units of attention—places where intervention will be most effective. *Needs assessment*, a broader process, provides a basis for program development and policy formation in a school. It is often a more formal process that utilizes many of the tools of research and is geared toward the development of programs and policies that meet the needs of children in school.

ROLE DEVELOPMENT

Role development is the product of the interactions between what the school social worker brings to the situation, the perceptions of others, and the actual conditions of the school community. Role definitions are the joint and continuing construction of school social workers, education administrators, and others. They become reference points for practice, for policy, and for theory development, and they serve as a conceptual bridge between policy and practice. Where social workers are not the dominant profession, these conceptions interpret and validate their contributions. They regulate teamwork. General reference points for role can be found in the literature of school social work, in local education agency expectations, and state education agency standards. They can be found in standards developed by the NASW, the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), and other state and national associations. When these expectations are found repeatedly in practice, they set standards for professional performance. It is not usual for beginning school social workers to have a great deal of influence in the initial development of their roles. Indeed, the idea that they will ever influence the development of their roles in particular schools may seem foreign to their experience. Over a period of time, however, as they learn to respond in a more differentiated way to the needs of the school community, school social workers can influence the development of their roles in particular schools. People's perceptions of a role are tested and evaluated in relation to the needs, capabilities, and social networks of a particular school and the outcome—the product that results and its influence on students' experience of education.

It is important to understand the nature of education policy as it applies to school social work practice. The involvement with education and schooling creates a natural focus on research, policy, and program development as practice. From basic practice skills of assessment and consultation in the framework of ecological systems theory flow a wide range of possible interventions. These are developed with teachers, pupils, families, and groups. They involve clinical practice, consultation and teamwork, coordinating and integrating services, developing inclusion plans, dealing with crisis and safety issues in the school, and developing mediation and conflict resolution, each with its own sources of theory. These and other parts of the school social work role are developed systematically throughout this book.

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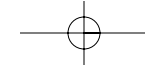
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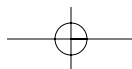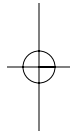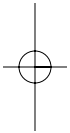
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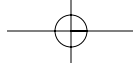
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