CONFIGURING FIELD, PRACTICE AND FIELD EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

Several inter-related terms, such as field, practice, field education, field work and practical training are used by social philosophers, scientists, educators and practitioners of human service professions. They have specific meanings in the context of their application. This paper explains the meanings of these terms and discusses their application in the context of professional training in social work. It also brings out the interrelationship between practice and theory, or the dialectical relationship and unity of theory and practice. The paper is based on a review of literature and also author's own experience as social work educator.

Introduction

> "Science deals with facts, philosophy with speculation…. The only way to find out what philosophy is, is to do philosophy" (Bertrand Russell).
> "From sciences comes prevision; from pre-vision comes action" (Auguste Comte).

The observations made above - one by the philosopher-mathematician and pacifist, and the other by the visionary social scientist - are most apt for the pursuit of any practice endeavour. Reminiscing on her rich experience in the profession, Nellie M. Hartman, a senior social work practitioner-educator in conversation with the author recently stated that "social work is what social work does." To adapt them for social work, one can say: do, speculate, deal both with feelings and facts, and re-do after reflection. These, in a way, delineate the boundary of the present theme.

Configuring Field, Practice and Field Education in Social Work

Field work, field practicum, laboratory experiment or practical work is central to quality education for human services and applied sciences. Its relation with course work is considered reciprocal. Field work provides opportunity for the application, discovery, extension, integration or modification of theory or a group of concepts. Both experiential and experimental learning feed into the class and help formulate questions, appreciate relationships, review theory, examine application and relevance, and also introduce innovations. Field work in human services focuses on values, attitudes, perspectives and application of skills to bring about change in a given situation and, in this process, effect change in the repertoire of the educatees' skills, and their level of competence and confidence.

Field work is also done by social scientists, behavioural scientists, archaeologists, life scientists, space scientists, and earth scientists for the advancement of knowledge and the development of appropriate intervention technology. The nature of field work or experimental work however varies from discipline to discipline, although there is some commonality in the process of education, research and intervention. Field learning in human services, and natural or socio-behavioural sciences may be properly structured for optimum results or haphazardly organised to complete a formality. The latter is against the spirit and ethics of science and profession. Field learning or an experiment may run concurrently or parallel to course work, be related to or integrated with it, or isolated from it as an assignment or project requiring completion. Social philosophers, scientists, human service professionals and educators have reflected upon various aspects of field, practice, field education and other allied concepts. An attempt is made in this paper to look at some of them with special reference to social work education. This is based on a review of literature and also author's own experience as social work educator.

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In the literature on social work, one comes across such statements as field work is core of professional education, and that it provides opportunity for integrating theory with practice. These statements raise the question whether such a 'core' is reflected in the curriculum, and the organisation of teaching-learning programme. Is field work structured as a core activity, extension activity, marginal activity or isolated activity? Furthermore, is it conceptualised as 'core' but operationally does it turn out to be peripheral? Or, is it operationalised as such? Is integration between course work and field work assumed or consciously worked upon and updated? Is it an ornamental activity (an add-on) with unique sale potential, or an essential engagement designed with due regard to professional values and ethics in order to facilitate acquisition of skills, integration with theory, observation and testing of a variety of approaches, work with real role models and, in the process, enhance professional development? These questions are important because until the beginning of 'free-floating' community placements or unstructured placements in the seventies, social work educators in India used to complain (and they do even now) about the dearth of "good agencies" which resulted in a weak field work base. This also implied that "good agencies" can be identified only in large urban centres or metropolises. Such complaints however used to ignore the fact that even in major cities, spaces for field learning in organised settings were <u>created</u> through pioneering, piloting and, in fact, <u>ploughing</u> the field(s). And new opportunities for intervention in human or social situations continue to be explored.

The data on the decadal growth of field action projects at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, and the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamssery (Kerala), to name but a few, as organised responses to emerging human needs or problems, adequately point to this continuing endeavour. Moreover, if the concept of 'good agency' is pursued logically, then the obvious conclusion would be of a remote possibility of providing good social work education in rural, tribal and town areas. And urban location of most schools of social work is what is always criticised at different fora. Such thinking often ignores the

fact that in the metropolises also new problems and possibilities are arising. With the expansion of managed care in the health sector (Raskin and Blome 1998), emergence of fee-charging field work placements, relocation of industrial complexes in non-metropolitan areas to save cost, decentralisation of production function, right or down-sizing, and private placements (Manthrope and Stanley 1997), established 'good agencies' of one time are moving or slipping away from the schools of social work. Community profiles are changing. Therefore, creation of new spaces and fields as responses to changing educational and societal or community needs remains a challenge for human service professions which can be met only by commitment, networking, imagination, resource mobilisation, pioneering and innovation.

A discipline, for example, is not a subject out there, which is to be mastered; it is a discipline of the mind in that subject and other allied subjects. Therefore concentration in a subject or sub-area - whether general, scientific or professional - requires a disciplined mind. In order to make social work education diverse, vibrant and rich, emerging societal challenges and changing perspectives on professional social work need to be appreciated and suitably incorporated in designing the course work and field work. Integration between the two is not automatic; it is to be worked upon and worked out, for it is a universal area of concern. Critical theory and practice demand, among others, reflectivity, reflexivity, critical thinking (Fook 2002) and informed action in this connection. Richard Nice has aptly articulated Bourdieu's view on the two groups of practitioners: "Those who reflect on social sciences without practising them, and those who practise them without reflecting on them"(Bourdieu 1997: vii). The number of such 'practitioners' in social work is no less. This makes the task of integration of course work and field work rather difficult. Integration requires role models to create conducive environment first at the level of academic institution as well as the faculty collective.

Concept of Field

In social sciences, "field is a community of human beings who are being studied" (Srinivas et al. 1979). Bourdieu and Wacquant visualise it as a "patterned system of objective forces" and "a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it

imposes on all the objects and agents which enter in it". [It] "is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition"… "a structure of probabilities", … a measure of indeterminacy … a network, a configuration of objective relations between positions… present and potential. The strategy generating principle - habitus - enables agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations…"(Bourdieu 1977).

Field in social work, has been conceptualised by a group of social work educators (Singh 1985) as "a situation (which could be a welfare institution, hospital, industry, open community etc.) which offers avenues for students' interaction with clients and client systems… where they practise social work methods under supervisory guidance towards the achievement of learning goals of professional social work." Such a field may be "an agency setting, multi-agency setting, community without any formal agency, and community with single or multiple agency or citizen/activist group." Reference in social sciences has been made to "psychological field" (Srinivas et al. 1979), and in social psychology to "peopled fields" (Krech and Crutchfield 1948). *Encounter with the Field* (Beteille and Madan 1974) presents a fascinating account of the researchers' negotiations with the field in their work. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2004) defines field as a particular branch of study or sphere of activity, and as adjective, it refers to working in the natural environment rather than in a laboratory or office.

Thus, any chosen field with a purpose is a complex reality with its manifest and latent characteristics, and is impacted by diverse forces. It is therefore an area to work in, to work with, to work at, and to work out with specific goals. Field's emergent powers are more than those of its constituent parts. For any engagement to occur in or with the field, intellectual, cognitive, emotional and practical preparation is necessary. This applies to all epistemic and praxiological endeavours.

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (Bourdieu 1977) "the principle of dynamics of a field lies in the form of its structure, and in particular, in the distance, the gaps, and asymmetries between the various specific forces that confront one another"… Thus, "social fields are fields of forces… of struggles to transform or preserve these field of

forces". This clearly points out that field is not a physical site to be visited, exposed to or bathed in (Schubert 1969), through engagement in a variety of activities (field bath! as it were) in the name of experience. It is a site, which calls for a designed and thoughtful action, and also insight to show results. There are swings from "outer to inner and back again" (Taft 1937: 1), and of inward and outward movements (and moments) which constitute the dynamic interaction between the field's different constituents. In a society, mental structures affect social structure in important ways and the latter reflects or conditions the former. Although the focus of action can be delimited, the multi-dimensionality and temporality (past, present and future) of the field need to be recognised in any scientific or professional work.

Following Kurt Lewin, field theorists adopt an approach analogous to the physical field theory. Behaviour is viewed by them as a resultant of forces operating in space… and psychological events are treated as systems of energy. Individual's behaviour at any given time, according to Lewin, results from a constellation of psychological forces which can be located in a mathematically constructed life space.

Concept of Practice

In the domain of practice, such terms as practical, practicum, and praxis are often used. In the Supplement to Oxford Dictionary, 1982 Burchfield defines practical as something which can be used in real life and practical activity as a medium through which theory is realised or becomes actual. In other words, practice is one end of the continuum, theory the other. Practice is also a Marxist term for social action in the sense of class struggle. Practicum (Berg-weger and Birkenmaier 2000) is an interactive and structured learning process. It is inter-changeable with field (work) placement where students complete the required agency-based work as interns under a formal social work education programme. Practical is perceived as pragmatic and a moral endeavour and is distinct from the technical (Whan 1986). In psychology, the conceptualisation of field is wider, for in this discipline, field work is a method of studying social phenomena or animal behaviour (Drever 1952) by observation under normal and natural conditions, supplementing this by queries and interviews in the case of social phenomena. In sociology, the concept of

'action' includes "all human behaviour" (Weber 1964: 88; Parsons 1966: 5), which implies practice as well.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2004) uses praxis as a synonym of practice which is an actual application or use of a plan or method; the customary or expected procedure or way of doing something; or the practice of a profession or process of practicing; and practicum is a practical section of a course of study. As a verb, it means the performance of an activity or exercise of skill(s) repeatedly or regularly to acquire, maintain, or improve proficiency in it. However, perception of the field in social philosophy is dialectical and more comprehensive.

> Uranicki (1965) visualises practice as "the basis of humanity. Man exists and develops only by transforming his natural and social reality and that in this way he transforms himself also…. Man is the only creative being. So much is he creative being that his very being and essence are subject to his creation…. Man creates his own history, his historical life, according to the possibilities of his own practice."

> "There are three essential sides of the concept of practice: sensuous–concrete, theoretical-abstract, the emotional-experiencing. Practice is not possible without some definite, emotional attitude in the sense that it must meet some kind of need; nor it is possible if it does not sensually change and create objects and reality; and finally sensuous changing of objects is not possible if it is not conscious, planned, theoretical and free… Practice [is] the unity of the sensuous and the theoretical activity…, the relationship of those two elements is mutual, functional, they condition each other… [The] relative independence of abstract thought makes it possible for it to lag behind or to anticipate concrete-sensuous activity. In the same way, the complexity and spontaneity of man's sensuous activity (in the first place his productive and historical activity) make it very difficult to produce a simultaneous theoretical view of all these processes. As the concept of practice embraces the sensuous and the theoretical - it is inadequate to oppose theory and practice, as if they were two things which should be a unity; practice itself, understood as a

fundamental function of man, contains both in itself. To separate them would be to allow the possibility of a kind of practice which did not include consciousness, hypothesis and theory: as if a theory were possible which did not involve the total experience of man's sensuous activity…. Man's material, social and theoretical practice are found to have indivisible relations with and effects upon one another…[S]olution of a theoretical problem is the task of practice and is accompanied through practice… [and]… correct practice is the condition of a true and positive theory…, practice involves the directive moment, foresight, projecting, planning, control etc."

Praxis to Paulo Friere is a "dialectical interaction between action and reflection, and [it] is an ongoing, cyclical capacity to be both transformed and transformative, … to identify actions and relationships, critically assess them, modify or design future actions and interactions based on the results of reflections". Pracsis however is a "practitioner's reflection on actions, characteristics and situations by impacts and strategies" (Alvarez 2001). Its scientific study, which is known as praxiology (Alexandre 2000) is "study of actions human beings perform and their understanding at the highest level". It is a "science of functions, groups of facts which are linked in a certain order, and concerns somatic facts as well as psychological ones, and individual facts as well as collective ones". The praxiological knowledge transcends the subjective and objective forms of theoretical knowledge (Bourdieu 1977).

Grlic (1965) is of the view that "theory is inconceivable without certain practical repercussions… human practice transforms the world, and does not conform to it." It is "a creative… a living process". Mao Tse Tung uses the expression social practice as follows:

His reflection on <u>social practice</u> "encompasses class struggle, political life, scientific and artistic pursuits"… man's social practice alone is the criterion of the truth of his knowledge of the external world. Theory therefore is based on practice and it serves practice. Social practice begins with the perceptual stage of cognition. Gradually concepts are formed and these lead to the stage of rational

> knowledge…. From rational knowledge may emanate revolutionary practice. Knowing a thing therefore means coming into contact with it… living in its environment… and personal participation. There is a historical unity between theory and practice. Truth can be discovered through practice and practice can further verify truth, and develop it" (Foreign Language Press 1967).

Argyris and Schon (1974) view practice as a "sequence of actions undertaken by a person to serve others…" "A theory of practice then consists of a set of interrelated theories of action that specify for the situations of the practice the actions that will… yield intended consequences." They make a distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use. For Schon (1987): "Practicum is a setting designed for the task of learning a practice." It is a "virtual world" and "also a collective world."

Dominelli (2004) sees practice, as an endless cycle of thinking and doing. Social workers "constantly reflect upon what they do and what they think about what they have done". In this process, they become "reflexive and engage in critical action. Practitioners and clients create knowledge both about each other and for each other through the work they do together. They both act reflexively and engage in process that promotes criticality". In social work, "field practice is a consciously planned set of experiences, occurring in a practice setting, designed to move students from their initial levels of understanding, skill and attitude to levels associated with autonomous social work practice" (Hamilton and Else 1983: 11).

Application is another term which has been given a specific meaning by McGlothlin (Jones 1969). It refers to "education in carrying out operationally the practice skills of the profession". [This] "includes field work, skill exercises, planned observation of practice and laboratory tasks"… "it implies a broader teaching technology than has been typically associated with field instruction… [and] requires greater direction and control by the schools of the educational experience for application training, specificity of learning objectives… and ordered sequencing."

Social work practice is bi-focal. It "consists of direct and indirect services to individuals, families and groups with the objective of achieving mutually established goals to improve

the quality of life, prevent breakdown and remedy problems. It is a planned and purposeful intervention aimed at individual and social change that is based on social work knowledge and values…" (Wells 1984).

It can be seen from the above selections that dimensions of practice range from the realm of philosophy to that of action. It has been conceptualised as a fundamental human function, emotional experience, consciousness, transforming and transformative endeavour, 'embedded' theory and vice versa (that is, dialectical relationship between and unity of theory and practice), an action-reflection process, a movement from pracsis to praxsis, a structured and planned application, and an instrument of knowledge development and improvement in the quality of life. It is therefore for the concerned human service profession to decide upon its <u>take</u> from such a wide range and operationalise it depending upon, among others, its level of knowledge development, available technology, level of learners, and thrust of its response to emerging societal needs.

Field Education and Allied Terms

Field education in social work has been described by such inter-changeable terms as field work, field instruction, field learning, field work practicum, field practicum or field practice/placement. Field instruction emphasises "intellectual and emotional learning and acquisition of attitudes and skills. It involves conceptual learning (generalisations from specific experiences reflecting the total curriculum), preparation of students for change, reflection and feedback …"(Finestone 1969). Development in the field may be ahead of courses taught or vice versa. While students put into use learning from all the classwork in the field, the latter also contributes to courses taught in the class (Berg 1969). Though valued for "real life" quality, the problem in field practice always remains as to how this experience can be used for educational purposes without diluting its vital quality (Berg 1969).

According to a group of social work educators, field work in social work education [is] "a guided interaction process between a student and the actual life situation in which social

work as a profession [has] an abiding interest and deep concern, and which [needs] to be remedied, improved or changed for a fuller development of human-environmental potential" (Singh 1985). Field work should however be distinguished from extension work (Singh 1994). Brown and Gloyne (1966) view field work as "any kind of practical experience in a social organisation or agency if this experience has been deliberately arranged for the education of students who are undertaking courses partly or wholly designed for those who intend to become social workers." Field Work Manual of the School of Social Work, University of Southern California (1956) describes it as "an educational experience which is integrated and integrating in which a student uses individual instruction in learning for practice of social work method." The purpose of field work, according to A. E. Fortune, is to provide opportunity to apply and integrate content of theory (Bogo and Vayda 2000: 44). Since field learning is cumulative, each phase rests on the experiences of the preceding ones.

Desai (2004: 54) has described field work practicum as "a closely supervised educational internship in a social work setting that provides planned opportunities to apply theory taught in class work to actual situations, which in turn, enhances classroom teaching". This description however does not take into account a situation warranting intervention where no theory has yet been developed and only practice wisdom will come to the help of the professional and enhance learning.

The concept of specialisation and field of practice (which is distinct from field practice) has been examined by the Sub-Committee of the National Association of Social Workers' Commission on Social Work Practice (1962). The Sub-Committee has opined that when the specific characteristics of an organisation/institution – or cluster thereof – so shape the "specific as to make a significant difference in social work practice, this is known as field of practice". The Sub-Committee further states that "a field of practice is temporarily stabilised interaction between generic social work content and a social institution or a series of complex and inter-related organisations within a social institution". The use of the term 'generic' refers to "social workers' shared values, purposes, knowledge, sanctions and method… in relation to situations, clients, problems

and modes of purposive intervention". It recommends that "a field of practice should be identified and recognised if the special characteristics of a social institution or a network of organisations demand specific adaptations and applications of social work knowledge, attitude and skill, and if social work practice responds with identifiable emphasis and integration… [This] emphasis and integration should be sufficiently distinctive from those in other fields to require special attention in training, research professional communication and interchange". Here, the expression 'sufficiently distinctive' is noteworthy and can even be applied as a criterion in the agencies chosen for specialisations in India with some modification.

The Draft National Council of Professional Social Work in India Bill, 1993 (University Grants Commission 1999) defines field work as follows: "Field work means the prescribed supervisory instructional component of professional training through suitable field placement." Professional social work in the Draft Bill has been defined as a "form of practice which follows acknowledged methods of social work carried out by professional social workers." An observation, that field component should be removed from social work education because it should be the responsibility of agencies and employers (as externship), and that schools should offer relevant theories and research, and teach practice skills in simulated exercises and laboratory settings, has not found favour with social work institutions anywhere, although simulated exercises have been introduced as supports to field learning.

The above descriptions compiled from different sources adequately emphasise the educational purpose of field practicum as planned and sequential placement in an agency or social organisation. It is reflective, integrative and integrating as well as focuses on real life situation; it calls for individualised instruction under a qualified educator or instructor, and an appropriate linkage with course work. It is not a programme of incidental learning although it may occur in the field. It is learning by experience and from experience. These may be taken as components or attributes of field learning or even indices for assessing field education and its outcome. Field work orientation,

simulations, visits, camps for exposure or study tours do support field learning but they do not fall under the ambit of practice.

Organisation of Field Education

In the literature on field placement, variations have been reported with regard to the role of field educator or facilitator. In the USA, UK, Canada, and a few educational institutions in India, the responsibility for field education is entrusted to field supervisor or field instructor, field liaison, faculty liaison or field advisor - singly or jointly - depending upon the availability of qualified personnel, workload in the academia or organization/agency, school-agency relations etc. Generally, a member of the faculty coordinates the field work programme. In some institutions, this function is divided between two or more faculty for the second year students separately. In India, in most of the social work institutions, this role is performed generally by the social work faculty who teach theory courses, and social workers of the agencies run under them especially for evaluation purposes as per university rules.

Variations among countries regarding the required investment of time by the students in field learning have also been noted. Placement requirements based on a survey of 163 schools in 67 countries ranged from 200 hours to 1000 hours (Skolnik et al. 1999). The Council on Social Work Education in the USA has prescribed 400 hours for the undergraduates and 900 hours for the graduate students (Berkun 1984). The Philippine law for registration specifies practical training in an established social work agency under the direct supervision of a fully trained/qualified social worker. There is stipulation of 1000 case hours under the law for licensing (Drucker 1972). In India, it is a required minimum of 300 hours per year over a period of 60 days in each year, with minor adjustments in the number of days. In Australia, it is a minimum of 140 days spread over 980 hours and distributed in two placements. In the New Zealand, this requirement is 120 days (Shardlow and Doel 1996a). In the UK, the present requirement is 50 days for the first year of training and 80 days for the second year with placements in two settings. The new law stipulates 200 days of placement - raising it from the current requirement of 130 days (Burgess 2004). How will this be organised as part of an academic programme

is still a matter of debate. Generally, two placements emerge as the norm. In the USA and Canada, field instructors are also being trained due to high turn-over rates (Skolnik et al. 1999).

In the first year, the field placement in both the generic or specialisation streams of educational programme is generic. It is either in a community or an agency in India. If a community placement is offered in the first year, an agency placement is made in the second year, and vice versa. Depending upon the local situation, this placement may or may not be linked with an elective course, special interest or concentration course. Block placement of four or eight weeks is a special feature in India, although this is not supervised by the teaching faculty generally. This is offered at the end of the second year or after the fourth semester. One school of social work however has made it compulsory for four weeks after the second semester of the first year also in order to enlarge the experience of students in more field situations.

In India, institutions of social work which offer specialisation courses by field, identify agencies and liaise with them for field work. These agencies may be functioning in the field of child welfare, family welfare, youth welfare, social welfare, industry, criminology and correction, social defence, disability, constructive work, etc. New (or innovative) concurrent and block placements are also tried in order to help students secure jobs in a wider area. One school of social work, however, has taken a conscious decision since 1970s to place undergraduate and post-graduate students for field work in the community settings or slums, with marginalised groups, and such other groups whose rights to shelter, livelihood etc. are adversely affected by development programmes (Mary Alphonse 1999). Historically, work in the field to relieve distress, offer support or consolation, and visit to homes has been an essential component of practice since the birth and subsequent professionalisation of social work. This was first followed by short-term training to new volunteers by experienced social workers. However, university affiliation of professional education led to its academicisation on par with other general theory courses thereby causing tension between the demands of course work and field work. But the latter has been universally accepted as an essential component of

professional education. To what extent this acceptance has been translated into reality varies from place to place, and so do the improvisation and innovation. As it obtains, field practicum itself requires due placement as core of the curriculum in social work in order to make students' field experience more creative, integrative and transformative. Its degeneration into casualisation should be prevented.

New approaches and innovations in field education which have been reported over the years include multi-method approach of Hollis and Taylor (Hoffman and Salle 1994: 22), reflective practice (Schon 1983; 1987), non-sexist field based learning (Berkun 1984), practice research unit with skills lab components adopting different approaches to learning (Pilcher and Shamley 1986), private placements (Manthrope and Stanley 1997), clinical practice by simulation in law and social work (Heldberg et al. 1985), partnership in course development and teaching (Haynes and Beard 1998), inter-organisational method of service delivery (Monk and Newdom 1976), learning plans (Fieldman and Neuman 2001), service learning (Williams et al. 2002), policy practice (Saulnier 2000), classroom teaching of social work practice (Wells 1984), field work possibilities with radical community organisations (Galper 1980), unit caseload approach and joint learning with other professional learners (Hale 1969), teaching centre (Meyer 1969), social services centre for a multi-problem community (Brieland 1969), field action projects (Tata Institute of Social Sciences 2001; Rajagiri College of Social Sciences 2004), and collective practice as alternative practicum experience (McKenzie and Hudson 1980). Many Schools across the world have established their own agencies, re-oriented their foci, or partnered with community organisations, institutions, and self-help groups to strengthen field learning.

Innovation in field education, however, should not be regarded as synonymous with extension or expansion of existing programmes in new places or launch of new programmes. Innovation is a change in the method or technique of an existing programme or use of a facility. Irrespective of regular or innovative field placements, two related questions on field learning, namely, professional approach and integration of

theory with practice, remain central everywhere.   They need examination and re-examination, for they cannot be <u>assumed</u> to have been answered.

The following patterns in field placements have been noted by Jones (1969): single agency placement; teaching centre; subsidiary/satellite field experience in social agencies outside the agency that serves as setting for field instruction providing the primary practice experience; centre situated in independent location (with several agencies cooperating); teaching centre in a host institution where school contracts to provide services to clients; and service centre administered by the school to provide education and service. Free-floating community placements being used by schools of social work in India (working through local agencies and groups) may be added to this list along with international placements on a limited scale. Conflicts relating to priority of university-based practice teachers (which is development of autonomous professionals) and those who are agency-based (which is service goals) have been examined at length by Shardlow and Doel (1996a) in an international context. These are to be dealt with on a continuing basis. Factors/criteria for the selection of field placements have also been identified to strengthen field learning (Selber et al. 1998; Singh 1985).

Social Work Perspectives in Field Education
Malcolm Payne (2005) has identified perspectives (e.g., feminist), models (e.g., task-centred practice) and theories (e.g., cognitive-behavioural theory) in social work which range from the psychodynamic perspective to that of empowerment and advocacy. They are eleven. Models, according to him, describe principles and patterns of activity; perspectives express values or views of the world to conduct oneself in practice; and theory explains an action which causes or results in particular consequences.

These have been grouped as reflexive-therapeutic (personal development and self-fulfilment), individualist-reformist (maintenance of social order and provision of welfare service to individuals in society), and socialist-collectivist (empowerment, transformation, social justice and social change). Ten different models of practice learning have been described by Shardlow and Doel (1996b). These are integrated

model, apprenticeship model, competency-based model, growth and development model, managerial model, academic model, articulated model, loop model, role systems model, and the structured learning model. The last is a new model developed by them which seeks to provide systematised guidance for practice teachers and students in terms of the content of student's learning, use of specific method of learning, and assessment of student's competence. However, entries on theories, models and perspectives in the *Encyclopaedia of Social Work* of the National Association of Social Workers (1995) are twelve in number. They are based on method, setting, and social and psychological change, and do not correspond with Payne's classification which, of course, is the latest.

Any of the perspective or models of social work, and of learning - severally or in combination - can be adopted for field practicum. Reference to multi-method approach has already been made in the preceding section. Alternately, a beginning can even be made with the well-known Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or discrimination against Dalits and women in a locality under any of the perspectives of choice.

The other approach to field learning could be based on how professional social work is defined in a country. In the last hundred years, definitions of social work have changed, and they have become broader and more inclusive. During the clinical and therapeutic phase of profession's development, the focus was on helping people help themselves in leading personally satisfying and socially useful lives. During the current rights phase, the focus is on facilitating (and partnering with) people to take steps, singly and collectively, to solve problems, enhance their life chances, and change themselves as well as the environment through empowerment. This is not to say that the earlier clinical or therapeutic approach has been or should be discarded. In an info-tech society where individuals and groups are afflicted by mental stresses and violence, and when rage and suicides are on the increase, necessity of preventive and therapeutic stress management services is obvious and widespread. Perusal of data on farmers' suicides in groups in different parts of India, and of families through "pacts" shows that it is not only the poor who have ended their lives. Apart from loans and debts, there have been other presses and stresses at work leading to destruction of one's self or the family unit. Stress is a

very complex phenomenon and it cannot be managed by structural, environment, policy change or debt relief alone. Individualised counselling services by professionals are also required on an organised and sustained basis.

In the context of field education, a cursory look at a few definitions or descriptions of social work will also be in order. Dominelli (2004: 42-43) has very aptly described the process of "working the social", as it were, which is reproduced below because it imparts a focus to field education also. "The negotiation of understandings and experienced realities provides the bases for the work that practitioners and clients do together, and constitute the 'social' that shapes and is shaped by their interaction… the 'social' is shaped by forces out with the professional arenas as well as within it… The 'social' involves the layering of many contexts and their interaction across and within one another. The 'social' simultaneously creates helping relations and controlling ones as part of the technologies of governmentality…."

The National Association of Social Workers, USA defined social work as "helping individuals, groups and communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favourable to this goal" (Jones 1969). It may be noted in this connection that 1960s was the phase of civil rights movement which was making deep impact on the US society as well as the profession of social work. During the same period, Ruth Smalley saw the purpose of all social work effort "to release human power in individuals for personal fulfilment and social good, and to release social power for the creation of the kinds of society, social institutions and social policy which make self-realisation most possible for all…"(Jones 1969).

The latest internationally accepted 'universal definition' of social work by the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers at the Joint Congress of Social Work in 2000 is as follows:

> "The social work profession promotes change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance

> well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

One may choose any of the above definitions as guiding principle for practice education and work out modalities for course work and field work. Field practice consists of activity as a <u>medium</u> with cognitive, affective, intuitive, reflective, dialectic, and practice wisdom components - all merged into one. The interactive nature of these components in the learning process requires due appreciation. Field placement therefore is not an external, organisational or physical structure; it is a live mental construct which causes and undergoes change with the unfolding of action.

The definitional changes particularly during the past three decades point to a review of the present pattern of social work curriculum and method or field-based specialisations. This is imperative especially after the World Summit on Social Development (1995), a Post-Summit Review, consensus on Millennium Development Goals, publication of a series of Human Development Reports and their incorporation in the development plans of different countries. In view of these developments, the areas of concentration in social work may focus on three core domains, levels or situations, and another two as supportive at the level of macro intervention. These could be grouped as follows: (1) individuals and families, (2) groups, communities and neighbourhood, and (3) groups and communities in crises, special situations or vulnerable circumstances, under the core domains; and (4) social policy, law and welfare, and (5) sustainable social development, peace and international social welfare as supportive domains. This classification has been done on the basis of direct and indirect practice. A student may choose one each from the two groups. If these five areas are accepted for curriculum development, practice education may be organised through judicious selection of placements, and introduction of relevant courses under foundation, basic, optional, and concentration categories to support reflexive and reflective practice around them. Alteration in the priorities of these areas every two or three years may also be thought of, and special readings, practice curricula, integrated teaching through tutorials and seminars etc. could

be introduced. Field-based or action research in the placement areas/agencies may, among others, apply field theory, game theory and force field analysis at the advanced level on a selected basis. This component may also be introduced in the teaching and practice of social work research by inter-professional and interdisciplinary teams.

In the Indian context, apart from conventional social and welfare services, programmes or projects identified in the development plans of the government, efforts of local bodies, community organisations and voluntary organisations especially in poverty reduction generally and in the most backward districts, wetlands and wasteland development, food and work security, shelter and environmental security, cooperation and self-help groups, micro-credit, participation, governance etc., may also be looked at by the schools of social work concerned in their area, and block/district level intervention could be planned as part of field education. These projects are societal responses to meet human needs and they do require professional social work support and intervention to make greater positive impact on the people and the area.

If rights-based approach to field practice is preferred, constitutional provisions may be seen vis-à-vis the development programmes to ground policy practice or direct service action. In other words, selected or integrated theories of social work, models of field learning and teaching, programmes in the development plans, and local issues or problems can be the starting point of visualising, conceptualising, structuring and imparting field education with a flexible pattern of placement. Due importance should be given to tested knowledge, hypothetical knowledge, and tacit or assumptive knowledge (Dybiez 2004; Barker 1999). Peckham Experiment of 1943 tried out successfully in the UK with family as unit is still relevant for organising field education by any human service profession. This experiment is a fine combination of action research and inter-professional practice (Pearse and Crocker 1943).

In order to configure the practice education component in social work, content analysis of all the foundation, basic, methods, optional, concentration, and allied courses needs to be done in terms of their objective, historical development, perspectives, theory, description

and information, linkage with other courses as well as the entire academic programme, and also the component of application. For, there are courses in the syllabi, which are 'vast' in coverage, and also those which are 'narrow', so to say. While inequity in the society is decried, it is collectively practised in the academia! An analysis of the asymmetrical distribution of topics and reading lists of courses under each of the above areas along with allocation of time and credits will introduce further rigour. Results obtained by this exercise will specifically help delineate and strengthen the practice education components course-wise and generally. Two issues of the *International Social Science Journal* (UNESCO 1993; 1994), which give details of social science laboratories and management of social transformation (MOST), will be relevant in this connection. Also the findings of research reported by Secker (1993) should be given serious consideration. This study has brought out that "every day social approach" was applied by students more than theory based approach (which is "fluent approach") in their field placements. This needs correction through joint reviews by the faculty, the learner and the agency on a regular basis in order to deepen and enlarge the space for the <u>practice of professional practice</u> and make social work a practice-led profession.

Recapitulation

Models, perspectives or theories of social work practice and of field education do not fit into dichotomous "either-or" categories. They constitute only the organising framework(s) to realise the mission of the profession. Whether diagnostic, functional, developmental, radical or rights, these perspectives have been conceptualised, designed and implemented to facilitate human betterment, social development and social transitions. These can be likened to tributaries or rivers which finally meet and merge with the ocean of humanity. No comparative cross-cultural study has been made at the global level regarding the relative degree of their effectiveness. Nor is it advisable. Such a study is also difficult at the present stage of profession's development and that of social science. Lateral thinking (De Bono 1970) may partly fill this gap. Bertrand Russell (1931) in his book *The Scientific Outlook* has given an outline of a scientific society and scientific government which "produce(s) results as intended". His vision still remains to be grounded despite decades of planned development in several countries. Experiments

of this kind can be undertaken at the household, village or ward level to at least experience the process and its outcome, and share the same at the academic and research fora. If social work educators and practitioners, by adopting differential approaches and through their sustained, <u>scientific</u> and sustaining professional contributions could make the ocean of humanity less turbulent, more humane, equitable, eco-friendly and socially just, their professional goals will have been more than achieved. The maxim to be followed in any such organised human endeavour - be it scientific, praxiological or axiological - is: "speculate and do". This also means that field education as a core component of education in professional social work merits a better deal. This is quite possible by effecting structural change in the present curriculum through a process of reflection, academic and practice retreat and re-configuration. Lest one forgets, the inspiring engagement during the pioneering phase of the profession "… where we lived what we taught …" (Manshardt 1967: 90) should serve as a reminder to facilitate this process.

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