

Theory generated from social work practice essay

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Abstract: This article reflects on my work with academically challenged school pupils in Ghana in which Kwame represents the entire body of school children, who are academically challenged in a small community school in Assin Foso in the central region of Ghana. As a social worker, it was and is my duty to assist school pupils and the community members in their efforts of capacity building. In Ghana both the government and the non-governmental organizations have been working for social inclusion of citizens of Ghana through education for some years now. However, some people are still living in poverty ridden homes and the education of a section of the community has become a problem.

The objective of this paper to raise awareness among the community about their right to participate fully in building the future of their children and identify ways for their empowerment. Though I had the full understanding of the challenging task but the distance from USA to Ghana and the money requirements put my endeavor to help Kwame very difficult. This article records some of the difficulties that I faced, especially the challenging incidents that occurred during this time and my critical reflections on being a social work practitioner. I will discuss how I worked with Kwame and how I overcame some of the challenges. One of the main purposes is to explore and inform the reader how theories and social work values have positively impacted on my practice in the field of social work. Being a social worker I have been taught and trained to apply different kinds of theories in order to develop my knowledge in helping clients. At this point, I will discuss the critical incidents that affected my practice as a social worker. Key words: empowerment, social justices, social systems Description of the Critical

Incident This particular incident happened in a primary school in Assin Foso in the central region of Ghana two years ago.

Kwame was introduced to me by my brother who was Kwame's teacher. He asked me to help Kwame as I was a social worker in USA. According to my brother Kwame was a student who did not behave well in class, played truant and was very aggressive. Kwame lives in poverty stricken home and therefore his studies were affected since his parents could not make both ends meet for the entire family. So buying school books for him was a luxury which they could not afford. Due to poverty, the parents lacked resources to provide him proper guidance so he suffered from a lack of parental control and care. There was no motivation and academic assistance from parents since the parents were unable to provide Kwame with basic school needs.

Kwame liked to watch violent films which made him become very aggressive. He often played a truant from school to watch movies anywhere in the community he deemed. Kwame's mother was malnourished during pregnancy and had measles which contributed to Kwame's poor academic performance. The noisy and filthy nature of the home environment was also not conducive for Kwame to study. Kwame did not sleep and wake early and used to get late for school. Elders in the community tried hard to settle his parents' divorce issue which was likely to have adverse impact on the children but to no avail. None of the two parents cared much about the wellbeing of their children. There was neither positive transference nor any attachment from the parents to children.

Being a social worker, I wanted to assist Kwame to improve his academic performance in school and his aggressive behavior both in class and in school. Therefore, I made my first attempt to approach the parents before returning to USA. In order to get to know Kwame better I conducted an initial assessment with Kwame's teacher who was also my brother. I realized from this assessment that Kwame hailed from a broken home or separated family and was staying with the mother who was a hawker. As I observed Kwame critically during the assessment, it was confirmed that Kwame had become more violent, made unnecessary noise, screamed and made arguments both with the teacher and the mother.

I had another interview session with the Head teacher of the school concerning Kwame's performance and behavior and I was informed that indeed Kwame's behavior was unpredictable. In the first instance, I started to play some games with him just to find out his feelings and behaviors. During the course of the meeting, Kwame was speaking nicely to me and frankly discussed his problems at home. He complained that he had no one to talk to. His father was not with him and mother was always in the street to sell goods for livelihood. Kwame was having difficult time socializing and making friends both at home and in school. His school mates used to refer to him as a bastard which made him very aggressive towards them. As a trained and qualified social worker, I critically examined the ways I would assist Kwame to change his poor academic performance in school and refrain from such an aggressive behavior he portrayed which pushed his school mates to dissociate themselves from him.

As a result of this, I made another attempt to meet with Kwame's mother so as to find out more about his behavior and performance. However, my consultation with the mother proved negative and I was told by the mother that I was prying too much and that I should mind my own business. It was an unfortunate situation that my meeting with Kwame's mother was not fruitful.

Throughout the meeting, the mother of Kwame asserted that she did not want her son to attract more attention of the community as they reside in a small community where everyone knows each other. I realized from the statement of Kwame's mother that she did not want her neighbors to be gazing at her as she was not the only poor in the community. According to her, she had brought up her son by herself being a single mom and encountered many problems in appeasing the community members who always complained of her son's behavior. Kwame's mother made a statement that her son would be having some issues working with me since I had been living in affluence, was educated in the States and had dissimilar cultural background. Kwame was ready to work with me but the mother was trying to prevent him from completing the session.

I spent only one month in Ghana and came back to the States but before I left I asked my brother to do the follow up to see if the mother would agree to work with her son. Through my brother, I was able to persuade Kwame's mother and I started to work with Kwame to improve on his academic performance in school through conducting extra classes for him after school hours. I paid the teachers from my own pocket, sent money for Kwame's school fees and housekeeping money. Client's Culture: Kwame is fourteen
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(14) years old and the mother is forty-six (46) years of age who is an Ashanti.

Kwame is the elder son among four (4) children in the family and the father's whereabouts were unknown since the mother was divorced about five years ago. She has been staying and raising Kwame all along with the other children. The mother has been a hawker since separation from her husband and has no education. Social Worker's background: I helped Kwame in the capacity of a social worker. I grew up with both my father and mother with my other siblings. I gained social and emotional support from both parents as my family has played important role in my life until recently when my father passed away.

CRITICAL REFLECTION OF MY WORK WITH CLIENT I tried to form a team that assisted me in the helping process since schools in Ghana do not have social workers or school psychologists. This formation of team was a new thing for the school. The team comprised of the teacher, the head teacher of the school, my brother and me (social worker). As we were all trying to find a common way to assist Kwame in his school academic performance, the head teacher started to scream and yell at Kwame to discontinue his destructive behavior and begin to control himself like a normal school pupil. Owing to my Western education, I tried to convince the head teacher that this screaming and yelling would have a negative effect on Kwame's behavior, and school activities. Having said this, the team led by me decided to conduct a conference in which I invited the mother so that we all could design a common intervention for Kwame's aggressive behaviors and absenteeism in school.

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As we began the session, the mother asked the head teacher to discontinue this exercise with her son. I tried so many ways to convince Kwame's mother just to allow her son to participate in the session but all proved futile. My brother had told me how the team did not feel comfortable working with me to help Kwame.

The other teacher and the head teacher refused to go on with me to help Kwame. The head teacher sternly warned me to stay away from Kwame. I nearly gave up at this point since this had been the second time but I persevered by doing one on one session with Kwame's mother to ascertain what actually the matter was. The mother confided in me that her cultural background was different from mine and I could not introduce my culture into her child which was abominable to her.

I saw a red flag coming. If I did not assist Kwame, his future would be jeopardy. I consulted my brother what to do next for the process to go on. Both my bother and myself went together to see the head teacher of the school in his house and we discussed thoroughly to help Kwame's school academic performance, instead of tackling his aggressive behavior concerns. I explained to the head teacher and later with the mother how essential it was to work with Kwame before his problems became more dangerous in the future. I told her how the team could construct a connection between Kwame's home and his school. I made them understand that I was not forcing them to work with me but only doing what I could to help the innocent child for his future. All the interventions the team has planned to work with Kwame stopped abruptly.

This was an unfortunate incident and so I had no option than to stop involving the staff from Kwame's school. I then suggested to Kwame's mother that I could arrange another teacher outside Kwame's school to work with Kwame. I informed Kwame's mother that I would be traveling the next day to the States and how my brother would continue with the process.

UNDERSTANDING THE THEORY, VALUES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN PRACTICE

Social work practice calls for clear ideas and theories that guide and influence the practitioner's thinking and practice. Social work practice has always been influenced by new theories and ideas having an impact on practitioners who engage and interact with service users. It can be said that social work theories has greatly influenced the values of my practice in social work.

As a practicing social worker, it is very important to combine knowledge and skills with empathy, empowerment and advocacy, building trust, rapport and effective communication when engaged in the helping process. Having insight into policy and procedures to make it proper with the knowledge, values and skills, I know that social work practice sometimes becomes very challenging which needs persistent reflection (Alle-Corliss, 2006). Being a social worker, I have been motivated by the works of O'Connor, Wilson & Setterland, (2003) who emphasized on obtaining and demonstrating procedural knowledge in addition to skills for rendering services in the organizational context. According to Clark (2002), social justice is of great importance in social work since it symbolizes what the mainstream social work is based on.

Understandingly, social justice is a notion or model and the significant thing about it is the actions that ensue and therefore, implies the idea of equality. For that matter, the concept is all about decreasing and eliminating inequalities in societies whenever possible. This implies that social justice concept encompasses the fulfillment of basic needs for each citizen as well as generating opportunities for equity, right and privilege. In a society, where there is social justice the individual citizen would be of equal worth (Commission on Social Justice, 2000). Adams and Sydie (2003) observe that at the macro level, institutions as well as structures do exist within the society as a whole. Therefore, the social systems is said to have needs such as survival, production, development, reproduction and socialization and that society as a system have social structures like economic, legal, educational, gender, and structures that meets those needs. The macro level of these social systems theory enables me as a social worker to concentrate on bringing changes to the societies and organizations. It is of great importance since society is dynamic to start such changes from imparting knowledge that will enhance the growth of the child in the community.

This implied that in the case of Kwame's community, I had to offer help to the larger community as a social worker in order to have impact on the children whose parents cannot take proper care of them. Social work embraces a wider range of practice including but not limited to planning, developing programs, community organizing, analyzing policies, advocating for change, evaluating programs, community education and managing human services. Healy (2005) examines how important it is to gain understanding or insight into the needs of the client and how social work

practitioner like me should respond to such needs of the client in an anti-oppressive system. Anti-oppressive approach calls for social work practitioners to be aware of different kinds of oppression and social division and know how to work in order to shape the relationships. Anti-oppressive approach explains the origination of problems of service users thereby, paying attention to the problems encountered in practice by way of identifying the cultural, personal and structural dimensions of domination. My practice in the field of social work therefore, tallies with the concepts that are presented in the anti-oppressive theory as well as systems theory.

Payne and Askeland (2008) reviewed that, the critical incident model seek to provide reflections on the problems through making analysis on personal work experiences in addition to theorizing gained knowledge through practice. With this in mind, I tried to address the issues that came across in the course of performing my duties as a social worker. Below is an example of my practice with Kwame (client). The social work profession promotes social change and problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFSW/ IASSW, 2000).

In order to bring change in Kwame's life, systems theory is one of the theories I applied which describes connections between families and groups. Initially, it was very challenging when I considered the distance between Ghana and USA but I later reflected that the world had now become a global village and how I made phone calls to contact clients in my previous

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employment with Residents at Greytones in Cincinnati, Ohio in USA. I conducted initial assessments about Kwame's background in order to assist him. I took guidance also from Kadushin and Kadushin (1997, p. 100) who reflected that communication was another way of bringing people together and so I made phone calls and electronic mails to clients, parents, teachers and community leaders. I worked things out through my brother in Ghana who was Kwame's teacher. I made several contacts with the single mother of four children about my intentions to help Kwame in his situation. I contacted Kwame's school to find out what had been preventing Kwame from being performed in class.

I spoke with Kwame myself severally and ascertained from him if he was being maltreated either in the school or at home. I spoke also with the assemblyman (community leader) to identify what help the community had to offer to the socially disadvantaged children in the community. I tried to develop his understanding on how my brother would meet the community on my behalf. I understood that social work did not allow practitioners to offer financial help to people but I deemed it fit and proper at this point to set an example for the community to emulate and also to be able to penetrate through the existing boundaries of the community. I built the trust and rapport with the community members and Kwame. By virtue of my efforts, Kwame became attached to me more especially my brother and called me at times to see how I was faring. As a social worker in the helping process with Kwame, I made sure positive transference in this relationship as it happened in all human relationship (Howe, 2008).

Most social work practitioners encounter negative transference in their practice such as unfriendly feelings of hatred, jealousy and mistrust. The outcome of helping Kwame was positive as he started performing very well in school, became very active in sporting activities and refrained from aggressiveness. This project with Kwame motivated and encouraged me to so much so that I started thinking of setting up an NGO with the specific focus on the socially disadvantaged children in that community. It has become my aim as a social worker to advocate for social justice in Ghana for equal distribution of natural resource to help children like Kwame in Ghanaian schools. This can only be achievable if I involve myself in social policies and politics so that I may be in a position to influence the powerful people in the community and make a transformation as all human societies are dynamic. In the course of promoting social justice, the civil rights and political rights of citizens should be put into consideration but at the same time, their social, economic and cultural rights should not be neglected. According to the Australian Association of Social Workers, (2002, p.

8) social workers act as catalyst in a way of changing structures that maintain both inequality and injustice. As an advocate in my community in Ghana I will make sure that policies and structures that people in power have made in controlling the powerless are reviewed so as to achieve equal opportunity. Payne (2005, pp. 142-143) defines systems theory as a socially focused theory which attempts to explain connections between families and groups.

To some extent, the systems theory appraises my professional practice since personal theories are shaped by my family relationships. It should be noted <https://assignbuster.com/theory-generated-from-social-work-practice-essay/>

that in systems theory the family is seen as an interconnected component that comprise of individuals or members who influence each member in the form of interactions and relationships (Compton & Galaway, 1999). More comprehensively in this case, I did understand family model in systems theory guided me in helping my client at work after the mother intervened to stop helping her child. The mother of my client became uneasy, frustrated and irritated at the school teachers, the head teacher and me on the grounds that we were all trying to disgrace her and the child since as my interventions were uncommon in their small rural community. Theory integration in social work practice is all about application of various or broader theories or models to a specific situation as seen in Kwame's case. In integrating theories, I have always been reflecting on my previous experience and application of theories that I learnt during my college years on the problem solving situation.

O'Connor, Wilson & Setterlund (2003) examined a practical application that called for better reflection besides experiences. They also recognized that a particular theory needed to be used to solve a problem. As suggested by Fook (1996), I employed critical incident reflection to incorporate both theory and practice in the helping process with Kwame. By so doing I critically reflected on events which were necessary to me as a social worker. WHERE I STAND TODAY AS A SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONER Having been working with Kwame yielded an enormous impact on my experience as a social worker regarding as it came to assessments preparation and theory application. The saying is true that practice makes a man perfect.

The experience I got from working with Kwame with the help of my team members has strengthened me and has created the right path for me in the field of social work in the arduous task of helping the socially disadvantaged in communities. By actively working with clients over time has brought some positive changes in my thoughts and engagement mechanism with clients in my social work practice. Helping Kwame and building community capacity has been a great achievement in my life. In conclusion, where I stand today as a social worker I take pride in having gained knowledge and understanding of clients' thoughts, feelings and actions which in the long run help in the social work.