Social Partnership Approach for Effective Social Worker Education

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ABSTRACT

The topic of the paper is relevant due to the current tendency in human, or social, service to turn to partnership methods in solving human problems, protecting the interests of certain social risk groups, and defining social development strategy - everything that makes social partnership an integral component of practical work, ensures that various organizations supporting social protection work provide proper and sufficient social services and care, and is considered as foundation for professional training in this sphere. The paper presents rationale for creating and evaluating organizational and pedagogical conditions (external and internal) while providing successful university training in social work and social care. It is intended for further development of occupational education in the sphere of social work through social partnership. The organizational and pedagogical conditions distinguished by the authors are able to contribute in optimization of the system of professional education and training, and provide the opportunity to develop social partnership and interdepartmental communication with various social institutions in the educational system.

Keywords: Social Partnership, Social Worker, Educational Conditions
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Relevance

Over the past few decades the changes taking place in Russia have determined appearance of new social groups that require support from public authorities to overcome hardships they have to face in life. To improve the social function of Russia, in 1991 education and training of social work professionals was initiated at university level.

There are several reasons emphasizing the importance of the issue surveyed.

First, currently we have been witnessing the completion of the stage related to a net of social work institutions as the forms of professional and social work performed by the government, social and private organizations; professionals and volunteers participating in solving social problems of the individual, family, social group or level (Kuproyanov and Kozlova, 2013; Grigorev, 2001; Kholostova, 2003; Priymak et al., 2015).

Second, a number of global human problems have been aggravated and to improve the situation large scale work in developing social work programs and university curricula have been completed. The educators had to readjust the structure of specialists' training and propose new majors, enhance the existing curricula, and introduce a multi-level system of professional social work education (Vetoshkin, 2000; Tishchenko et al., 2000).

Third, acceleration in social and cultural development of the society requires to use a variety of forms, methods and techniques of professional training in the social sector adequate to current

social needs and new forms, methods and techniques to be effectively used by social work practitioners (Pavlenok, 1998; Topchiy, 1997).

Fourth, there is a tendency for specialists to use partnership interaction and its techniques in their attempts to settle the social problems and protect interests of certain social risk groups of population, determine the strategy for their social development. As a result, social partnership has become an integral component of the social work techniques package and contributed into the basis for successful social work education (Mishin, 2001; Smirnov, 2002; Tabakaev, 2001; Zakirova et al., 2015).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social workers education, as a part of the national educational system, is still the sphere of interests of many researchers and experts that caused developing the general principles of professional social workers (Bocharova, 1994; Grigorev, 2001; Guslyakova, 2001; Slastenin, 1993; Kholostova, 2003), analyzing the social worker professional development (Kholostova, 2003; Sadovaya et al., 2015), developing the diagnostic test techniques and the student attitude to learning for the degree in social work (Kelasyev, 1994), studying the certain aspects of professional training in social work (Topchiy, 1997).

The literature review in research showed that the outcome of social worker education is closely connected to the professional readiness to work in this sphere (Slastenin, 1993; Kholostova, 2003; Shapiro, 1997).

One of the ways for successful development of professional education and training system for socially-oriented professions, which social work belongs to, is social partnership between the different components of educational process (Grigorev, 2001; Ionova, 2000; Mikheev, 2001; Mishin, 2001). In the second half of the XX century, a number of approaches used to analyze social partnership dominated as the major ones due to their focus on social partnership characteristics and consideration that this social phenomenon is both an institution and a special type of social relations.

Social partnership, in the context of higher education, is based on the following approaches: Societal (Kholostova, 2003; Panov, 1995; Shaidullina et al., 2015b); combination of ecological, social and biological (Meyerson et al., 1999); student-centered (Shmeleva, 1996); differential-and-elective (Simonovich, 2002; Shaidullina et al., 2015a).

Social partnership ensures enhancement of the role of the university in the development of the region it is located in, developing partnership attitude of social partners, i.e. students and teaching staff; focus on mutual complementing in the framework of educational activities, activation of the participation degree in solving social problems of social service agency clients and consumers, use of various forms to join the social partnership participants, step-by-step use of the strategies and techniques in professional activity (Borisov, 1999; Grigorev, 2001; Guslyakova,

1999; Ivanov, 1994; Mikheev, 2001; Panov, 1995; Kholostova, 2003; Shmeleva, 1996).

At the same time, the survey of the literature and scientific studies related to the topic have displayed insufficiency of works that consider the specific content of cooperation of educational institutions in the framework of professional education system, and possible interrelation between educational institutions and state, public and commercial structures regarding their contribution into the issues of training professionals for social work. This raises the issue of developing the organizational and pedagogical conditions for social partnership to be further introduced in the process of education and training.

2.1. Social Partnership as a Mechanism for the Effective Training

In the course of our research we have considered the "social partnership" aspects as a particular interaction built on a system of mutually beneficial, constructive and long-term relationships of social partners i.e., their potential employers, universities, governments and other organizations, based on their common interests and needs in the field of professional training of social work specialists.

Social work, as a university course, that is now integrating social partnership in its content, is a process of acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities contributing to formation of professional readiness and willingness of the graduates, as well as their motivation, needs and attitude to their future job. All enlisted above allows the professionals to do the work in a certain field of their profession properly and with great responsibility which, in its turn, involves internal and external aspects of social partnership interrelation. It is of importance here to take into account the following aspects of the development evolved into the system of social work education:
- Relationship with regional development
- Preservation and reproduction of social and cultural traditions
- Studying foreign experience on social work
- Close relationship between theory and practice.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Experimental Research Database
The experiment was carried out in Amur State University, Russia, and involved their 325 students majoring in social work. 52 specialists working for social services agencies have been interviewed in Blagoveshchensk. 13 university instructors' and 52 students' questionnaires and interviews, involved in social work specialty, have been surveyed.

3.2. Research Phases
The first phase (2012-2013) - Exploring-and-theoretical, involved analysis of the scientific and methodological literature on the issue; determined methods for conducting the research.

The second phase (2013-2014) - Piloting, included the elaboration and generalization of theoretical statements. Organizational-and-pedagogical conditions and methods of implementation of social

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Work degree programs and their curricula focused on social partnership have been developed and reasoned.

The third phase (2015 to current) - Research roundup, involves systemizing, generalization and theoretical analysis of the experimental work, developing conclusions and practical recommendations on the results of the research, and writing thesis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Components of Professional Readiness

Professional education and learning outcomes are associated with professional readiness. Professional readiness can be associated with social work students' learning outcomes related to their knowledge and skills, necessary for their future profession and considered in the context of social partnership, and includes the following components:

- Information (knowledge of conflict-free interaction and cooperation techniques, understanding of the role of social partnership for professional practice, basic knowledge of the partnership as a theory and practice, etc.).
- Operational (general professional and organizational skills, negotiation skills, mediation, conflict-free interaction, conflict management, etc.).
- Motivational (focus on achieving the highest level of professional readiness, successful career, cooperation, compromise, conflict management).
- Mindset, or ideological, (emotional and personal stability, willingness to negotiate, make concessions, form and enter into conciliation agreements, concepts, ideas, attitudes, values, interests, etc.).
- And communicational (interpersonal communication, social dialogue, business and professional communication based on mutual concessions, personal and socially important goals, work with electronic documents, etc.).

The components play an important role in evaluation of professional readiness of graduates for social work. Their independent and contradictory character manifests itself on the basis of their integral interaction. The absence of any of the components can provoke deformation of the skills and abilities of the graduates to become as effective at their jobs as possible. This set of components of graduate professional readiness provides a meaningful content that is able to promote their potential in proper employment of his skills in any kind of social work activity.

4.2. Professional Readiness Evaluation

The study on this issue was carried out in the form diagnostics at the initial state of social work education and training process to distinguish the tendencies, dynamics and characteristics in students' professional development through evaluation and appraisal of their professional readiness performance. An education experiment was carried out in the form of a longitudinal study during the whole period of students' learning at university, from the first year and to the moment of their graduating from it.

Assessing each component of professional readiness (informational, operational, motivational, ideological and communication) made it

possible to receive the integral index which brought to four levels:

- Unacceptable (level of having a general idea when a student is able to detect and identify things and processes but is not able to respond professionally, properly, doesn't obtain sustainable professional motivation).
- Critical (level of reproduction, information rotation and iteration, operations, actions, decisions routine problems, lack of motivation for professional activity).
- Acceptable (satisfactory level of developed professional values and skills allowing to carry out professional activities with a common methodology and sequence algorithm completed while acquiring the professional curriculum).
- Adequate (level of creativity, positive results and adequate outcomes in performing one's professional functions).

To calculate the integral index of professional readiness (IIPR) we used a qualimetric approach: $IIPR = k_{(inf)} + k_{(o)} + k_{(m)} + k_{(id)} + k_{(c)}$, where information, operation, motivation, ideology and communication indices are summed up. These indices are equal to the level of each of these components.

4.3. Evaluating Partnership Opportunities through Diagnostic Tests

To clarify the characteristics of professional activity in social work we have performed an expert survey which involved social work and care specialists from social agencies, the Department of Medical Care and Social Work at Amur State University, and the teaching staff of the university.

The respondents showed content awareness of social partnership, a specific social technology, ideology, way of resolving social conflicts and contradictions in the social sphere. Moreover, their answers suggested partnership theory and technology knowledge as an imperative part of the education content.

Professionals in their responses spoke, or wrote, in terms of the main categories used in project management, confining social partnership potential with additional resource support of ongoing actions and activities for social protection of the population (35%), solving conflicts emerging when fulfilling one's professional responsibilities and duties (13%), and on the whole focused on the applied aspects of partnership in social work (45%), overshadowing ideological and conceptual aspects of the issue under study (13%). At the same time the teaching staff noted that it is possible to form a new approach to social policy, assistance and support of the population (47%) and the use of partnership techniques to resolve social conflicts (30%) on the basis of social partnership.

A large portion of interviewees pointed out it should be recommended that a student has a strong curriculum with intensive practical training based on social partnership (41%) in the field of social work, case study of problematic situations that require partnerships (38%), developing own social projects and programs on social partnership (32%). The teaching staff responders emphasized logistics, software and IT support of the educational process, equipment, specialized classrooms, development of original copyrighted courses on social partnership

and their introduction at all levels of professional education (35%), opportunities of the practice-based learning (30%) and active implementation of continuous, mid-term and final knowledge and skills testing (18%).

Thus, experts in their answers confessed the necessity of social partnership not only for professional activity of social workers (as terms of holistic approach to client problem solving, involving competent specialists to the pedagogical process, organization of the facilities for practice and experiments, adjusting collaboration of educational institutions and social agencies, and also as a certain set of knowledge, abilities and skills), but also on the stage of professional education on social work (as the bases for develop of professional readiness).

4.4. Organizational and Pedagogical Conditions for Professional Education and Training in the Frame of Social Partnership

The goals and tasks in education and training with social partnership are determined by social demands, Russian federal standards of higher education, professional readiness description models. Therefore, the purpose of professional training on the basis of social partnership is connected with degree of professional readiness of potential social work and care specialists.

The main objectives refer to:
(1) Accumulation of theoretical knowledge, developing methodical and professional skills necessary for training in a higher education institution and future professional activity; (2) motivation necessary to be engaged effectively in future professional activity; (3) development of adequate outlook related to social sphere; (4) development of the communications necessary for effective implementation of professional duties and responsibilities; (5) personal qualities necessary to solve social problems of clients in social work (communicativeness, kindness, tolerance, etc.).

The goals and objectives of education and training are in close link with the eventual result, i.e. with developing the students' readiness to their future job and career.

As social partnership is rather universal, we distinguish internal (strengthening degree integrity and continuity of various levels and elements of professional training system in social work) and external conditions (determining interest of the state and municipal authorities, as well as the population of the region, in developing professional social education). These conditions determine developing various elements of social work education structure incorporated with social and partner interaction.

External conditions are created in the internal educational space of university and include factors and characteristics of professional training determined by its structural divisions. Internal conditions are developed through interaction of various social subjects taking into account the main tendencies in the development of professional social training in the country and in a certain region, and characterize the process of acquiring knowledge, skills; formation of the professional readiness including motivation,

requirements and attitude to future professional activity in the field of social protection and care of the population.

The allocated internal and external conditions have been grouped in blocks:
• Organizational block is directed on realization and development of the system of higher education in the sphere of social work and social partnership, and reflects the fundamental ideas and priority values, requirements defining world outlook, ideology of social professional education and social partnership through concepts, principles, normative documents, target programs, and methodical documentation.
• Structural block is presented by aggregate social partnership of the social constituents involved in fulfilling educational goals, pre- and after- university education, social services and social protection agencies, local governments, public associations and organizations, etc. This block assumes interaction of all elements of the university internal and external environment considered within the frames of professional training of students.
• Content block determines the content of a university curriculum and supposes application of social and pedagogical techniques, methods to form professional knowledge, abilities and skills, and personality of students. This block is directed to introduce and implement theoretical and practical education, as well as independent work of students.

The frames of organizational-and-pedagogical conditions for implementing proper professional education on social partnership ideas substantiate and underpin the content of Social Partnership course. Its aim is in close connection with necessity to facilitate theoretical and regulatory-and-legal framework in the field of social partnership, introduce information and experience gained, and social partnership techniques used to solve effectively the tasks of practitioners in social work.

The content of the course covers theoretical information toward forming of theoretical knowledge, consensual skills and habits necessary to realize and perform joint activities, establishing relationships based on mutual aid and support, both at their personal level and in business. The course content was delivered through traditional classroom instruction, lectures, seminars, independent and individual classes, which were supplemented by tests and tasks to solve problems dealing with the topics logically interconnected with the contents of other disciplines, or courses, studied at the university. This pedagogical experiment made it possible to improve the proficiency of students by 58% ($P < 0.05$) from 2.1 ± 0.3 to 4.3 ± 0.5, and the level of skills by 50% ($P < 0.05$) from 2.2 ± 0.3 to $4.4 \pm$ of 0.5.

4.5. The Experiment Results

The following internal and external indicators testify to efficiency of social partnership study in professional training at university. In the period 2007-2012 the number of the existing and re-executed agreements on cooperation and social partnership in academic, educational, research and production spheres related to social work has increased; long-term contracts (for 1 year and longer) in developing and executing all types of students' practical training,

as well as short-term contracts (<1 year) related to a certain type of practicing while learning has doubled (from 4 long-term contracts to 10 contracts signed, and from 110 short-term contracts to 239 respectively, by the date 01.07.2015). The number of social partners involved in joint projects (educational, educational, methodical, research, advertising, etc.) has also increased by 150%.

Pedagogical conditions accompanying the training procedure of Social Work specialty and incorporating social partnership study have been supported during the whole period of study at the university, i.e., 5 years.

The level of proficiency (informative component of professional readiness) of the graduates achieved 4.8 ± 0.2 points ($P < 0.05$), that makes the target level. The level of displaying professional skills (operating component) of the graduates achieved 4.9 ± 0.2 points ($P < 0.05$). Integral index of motivational component related to professional readiness was continuously increasing and during the experiment time came up to the level desired, or required, (4.8 ± 0.4 points at $P < 0.05$). Mindset index (ideological) of professional readiness of the graduates has come up to 4.3 ± 0.3 points (planned level) with $P < 0.05$. The index of communicative component has made 4.7 ± 0.3 points (planned, required, level). This general positive dynamics can be explained by the fact that since their third year the students have been combining general and special courses, and, moreover, participating in the work of social work agencies, contacting their clients and communicating with them in their trips, acting as social care personnel, etc.

The IIPR to social work, in the time of experiment has grown (Table 1) from $23.6 \pm$ of 0.3 points (planned level). General positive dynamics can be explained not only by positive changes in certain components of professional readiness (first of all mindset, ideological, component which considers social partnership as the special type of world outlook and mindset, and communication (communication of various social forms with one common goal), but also by studying from the third year the courses providing with professional information, developing their skills, habits and manners for their future professional partnership interaction.

The dynamics of these changes shown in indices proved that pedagogical experiment the students participated in helped them to acquire all required knowledge and skills, and reach the proper,

very good, level of the professional readiness. The research conducted showed that it is expedient to use social partnership as leverage because, eventually, it is able to promote readiness and willingness of students to be engaged in social work after graduating from the university.

The results allowed to draw a conclusion that realization of the conditions proposed for implementation of professional training through university Social Work and Social Partnership courses, ideas and techniques, can ensure a good level of student professional readiness.

5. CONCLUSION

The social work profession can be difficult and challenging, requires nearly all important personal qualities:
- Maturity and a high level of personal commitment
- An open mind and a willingness to examine and even change one's own attitudes and possible prejudices
- Patience, determination and both physical and emotional resilience.

Practical skills developed through studying the program, using the simulation and recording facilities, integrating social partnership ideas and techniques helps students gain a good grounding in ethics, diversity, psychology, sociology, social policy and law for social work practice.

We hope that all the above discussed issues, that have been proved and confirmed by experiment results, are of theoretical and practical importance to all interested in enhancement of the level of Social Work education and training in Russia because students should always benefit from high standards of social work training, plus state-of-the-art skills development facilities and strong relationships with local social work agencies. They also should have opportunities to enjoy challenging and rewarding practice placements.

We tried to present materials that are able to display organizational and pedagogical conditions allowing optimizing the system of professional social work combined with social partnership course, developing students' skills to be further used in their jobs, and establish interdepartmental communication and relations between various social care institutions.

Table 1: Dynamics of the integral index of professional readiness of students enrolled in the specialty "social work," in points

PG components	Group	M±m					p1-2	p1-3	p1-4	p1-5	p2-3	p2-4	p2-5	p3-4	p3-5	p4-5
		1 course	2 course	3 course	4 course	5 course										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Informative	EG	2.1±0.3	2.3±0.4	3.6±0.2	4.2±0.2	4.8±0.2	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05
Operating	EG	2.5±0.3	0.3±0.3	3.7±0.2	4.5±0.2	4.9±0.2	>0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Motivational	EG	2.6±0.3	2.7±0.4	3.3±0.3	4.1±0.3	4.8±0.4	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	<0.05	>0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Iideological	EG	2.1±0.2	2.4±0.2	3.3±0.3	3.7±0.2	4.3±0.3	>0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Communication	EG	2.2±0.2	2.9±0.2	3.5±0.3	4.0±0.2	4.7±0.3	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
IPG	EG	11.5±0.3	13.3±0.3	17.4±0.3	20.1±0.2	23.6±0.3	>0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Level	EG	I (unacceptable)	II (critical)	II (critical)	III (acceptable)	IV (adequate)										

Vertical: Components (informative, operational, motivational, mindset (ideological), communicative), Horizontal: Years of study at university. Levels: I-Improper (insufficient), II-Critical, III-Proper, sufficient, IV-Proper, very good and fully meeting the curriculum requirements

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