Introduction

School social workers are a vital part of addressing educational stressors, ranging from classroom interruptions to school violence. However, while social workers may possess training from their degree program to affect change in the school climate, they may lack the leadership skills necessary to proactively propose and implement change. While some skill building happens after employment, social work education sets the stage for how social workers view and approach their anticipated roles. As there is no official directive for the inclusion of leadership content in general social work education, the onus falls to the individual educators to build curricula that infuses these skills into coursework. This exploratory study investigated social work educators' attitudes towards the inclusion of leadership content in school social work curricula, both generally and via specific individual components of a proposed definition for social work leadership.

School-wide stressors impact school climate bidirectionally; studies have conceptualized this impact via Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Gregory, et al., 2010; Thapa, et al., 2013, p. 361) Through this lens, school administrators have the potential for the greatest impact on climate, through both creation of policy and through positive, guided interactions with students that foster a safe environment. As the person-in-environment perspective is unique to social work, the school social worker can contribute at this level of leadership, allowing the worker to collaborate to create school wide policies and interventions that focus on the individual in constant interaction with the surrounding environment (Karls, et al., 1997; Forenza & Eckhardt, 2020). Additionally, social workers, as advocates for vulnerable and oppressed populations, emphasize and advocate for inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in their

interactions with clients in all fields. The skilled social worker expects to advocate in all aspects of their role. Educational leaders have been tasked to look to social work for cues to address social justice issues (Khalifa, 2020); a team that includes a social worker as a part of a participatory, collaborative leadership model will serve to naturally address these issues within the school environment through inclusion for all students while introducing and implementing interventions that consider and address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Preparation for a collaborative leadership role, including skills related to identifying and creating opportunities for collaboration, can be introduced at the social work masters' level, but is not a mandatory part of the curriculum. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) lists nine core competencies as a framework for its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) for master's level social work programs in the United States; however, there are no mandated or recommended leadership preparedness criteria. The CSWE has provided specific leadership guidelines for macro-level curricula (Council on Social Work Education, 2015), but these guidelines are not part of non-specialized coursework criteria. Many curricula from universities offering Master of Social Work (MSW) degrees cover a limited amount of leadership theory and strategies, if any; task-specific skill acquisition takes precedence. Moreover, school social work roles and expectations are at times ambiguous, contributing to a "visitor" mentality that shadows micro-level social workers outside of social service settings. Simply put, the school social worker may not be equipped to take on leadership roles in their respective milieu, nor are expected to do so; they are prepared to be reactive, rather than proactive.

Considering the potential for school social workers to contribute to a positive school climate, it becomes crucial to prepared them to lead within their settings, ultimately reframing the definition of leadership within the school as a collaborative process within an ecological framework. Without these skills, the social worker may not take an assertive, productive role as a member of the educational team; the social worker may be relegated to a support role in which the worker is constantly reactive and does little prevention. The following literature review will explore leadership in education versus leadership in social work, and preparation and ambiguity in the school social work role, with the aim of providing a foundation for the within exploration.

Literature Review

Leadership in Education Versus Leadership in Social Work

In educational settings, conventional leadership is based on a traditional managerial model, with as a principal as leader. The function of the leader may vary and does change as demands change, but is usually defined through responsibilities as operations managing and decision making (Day, et al., 2020). While some, less common, variations do exist, most usually center around a figurehead that exists specifically to function as leader within the school. Within these traditional models, participatory leadership may occur but with one leader making ultimate decisions. These models have varying conceptualizations of participation; Banjarnahor, et al. (2018) found a that participatory model had a positive effect on principals' job satisfaction; however, it is of note that most studies of participatory models focus on effects for teachers and rarely on the perceptions and effects for support staff such as social workers (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1995; King, et al., 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997; Spindler & George, 1984).

Participatory leadership models in schools share the commonality of staff participation to some capacity, but the method and degree to which staff are allowed to participate can vary. Spindler and George (1984), for example, discussed multiple benefits to staff participation meetings at the middle school level, including an increased degree of ownership and "psychological commitment" (p.293) in decisions, a "morale booster" (p. 293), the development of leadership skills, and the fostering of connections between teachers and "support services" (p. 294) mentioning specifically guidance counselors. However, in their discussion of the usefulness of these meetings, there was no mention of concrete, final decisions being made by participants, the delegation of responsibilities and action amongst staff other than the principal or the invitation for ideas that would also spur tangible action; the use and purpose of participatory leadership appeared to be more psychological and less functional for the organization.

A distributed leadership model, similar to the participatory model, includes multiple agents acting in an organization towards decision-making; however, the distribution in this particular model emphasizes leadership shifting to individuals with the appropriate and relevant skill to the task required. This model highlights the expertise of the individuals within the model, while emphasizing the ability to share this expertise to approach schoolwide dilemmas (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2004; Leithwood, et al., 2020).

While the managerial model in education has resulted in an expected traditional hierarchy within the school system, social work leadership is less easy to anticipate. There has been a desire to clarify social work roles in an organizational climate as early as the 1950s. Klein (1959) emphasized prioritizing the definition of social work leadership as a way to address and possibly

eliminate many of the role ambiguity issues plaguing social workers in host environments. Klein did not propose the details of this concept, but many efforts have been made to operationalize leadership throughout social work literature (Brilliant, 1986; Elpers & Westhuis, 2008; Holosko, 2009; Lawler, 2005; Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Holosko (2009), through a content analysis of literature on social work leadership, identified five key attributes of leadership as: the possession and implementation of a vision; influencing others to act; teamwork and collaboration; capacity for problem-solving; and actively creating positive change (p. 454). Hopson and Lawson (2011) specifically examined social work in the context of schools and operationalized leadership with an evidence-seeking approach, ascribing the worker with the ability to make data-informed decisions and the task of collecting and analyzing data.

For the purposes of the within study, school social work leadership will be conceptualized through a combination of definitions proposed by Holosko (2009) and Hopson and Lawson (2011). This definition provides a starting point for identifying existing leadership skills that may be used in the school system. It should be noted that some of these skills, such as data collection, may be taught in the overall master's curricula; however. due to the nuanced way that these skills may be utilized within a school system and with an understanding of the host mentality that may exist within the system, it is worth examining whether the participants of this study feel these skills are germane to becoming a school social work leader.

Preparing to be a School Social Worker

The roles and tasks traditionally attributed to modern school social workers were previously performed by visiting teachers as far back as 1906. Sugrue (2017) described a need identified in the 1920s to professionally outline and delineate roles for visiting teachers, school social work predecessors, who were responsible for acting as liaisons between the home and school environments for students. Sugrue noted, "The discussions of boundaries reflect the concern that if visiting teachers could not distinguish themselves from other school staff, they risked being given tasks, such as maintaining attendance records or following up on health concerns, that distracted from their larger professional goals (p.26)." Even through the 1960s, and to the present day, the role of school social workers was not clearly defined and at times was not easily distinguished from other helping school professionals such as school counselors or school psychologists (Hartseil, 1987; Agresta, 2004).

Today it could be argued that the need for distinguishing continues. While students involved in MSW programs may be offered school social work information as part of their curricula, there is little research compiled as to how that information is received by those students and its perceived practical usefulness. Moreover, there is a dearth of literature focused on the roles of the school social worker as perceived by schools of social work, which creates the curricula for these preparatory courses.[1] Research on school social work education reveals inconsistency in both curriculum content (Mumm & Bye, 2011) as well as state requirements (Athshuler & Webb, 2009). The lack of homogenous requirements, compared to the near

[1] A literature search was undertaken that included PsycInfo, Social Work Abstracts, Encyclopedia of Social Work and ERIC databases using the following keywords: school social work and prepare/preparation, school social work and master(s), school social work/worker and graduate education. 4 articles pertaining to this idea were published in the peer review literature between 2000-2020.

uniform requirements for school psychologists, for example, is indicative of an absence of demarcated roles for school social workers throughout the education system.

School social workers have traditionally viewed leadership and related tasks such as policy creation as their least important task (Costin, 1969; Meares, 1977). While there is no clear speculation presented by either author as to why leadership tasks were ranked last on the surveys, one possible suggestion is that school social workers might be more likely to prioritize tasks thought of as not only important to their work but also tasks they felt only they could complete, justifying its importance. Leadership-related responsibilities may be perceived as being in the jurisdiction of school administrators, preventing practitioners from envisioning the unique perspective that could be brought to the tasks. School social workers have also been traditionally viewed by other professionals, such as teachers and education administrators, in an ambiguous capacity; many of these professionals frequently remark that they are unfamiliar with the role of the social worker, even at times giving the role different names (Bye, et al., 2009; Tower, 2000; Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010; Webber, 2018). While school social workers have become more aware of their leadership expertise in specific areas such as mental health and conflict resolution, they may feel their role lies with improvement and implementation of existing programs, as opposed to proposal and creation of those interventions (Elswick et al., 2018; Perry, et al., 2022)

Summary

The presented literature presents two issues that challenge the school social worker as they enter the field. The first issue involves understanding leadership in both a social setting and

for a social worker. Leadership in school settings follow a traditional managerial model, and variations that include collaboration and participation are uncommon. For the school social worker who may not have received any education on leadership skills prior to graduation, leadership within the school setting may not resonate with leadership guided by social work values.

The second issue involves the role ambiguity of school social workers; an unambiguous, empowered school social worker has the capacity to lead with the confidence of contributing their expertise. However, ambiguity can create a "visitor" mentality that results in the social worker feeling less a full member of a team that together influences the climate of the school.

For both of these issues, the social worker has the opportunity before graduation to learn the skills necessary to enter the educational environment and define or redefine the role of school social worker; however, it is unclear as to whether they are being fully prepared to take on this role. Moreover and more importantly, it is unclear as to whether social work educators deem it important or useful to provide training connected to leadership. While there is research on the concept of leadership within social work, there is no universal definitions or criteria for leadership within social work education, nor precedent for a leadership model within school social work practice. The literature also shows a lack of examination of leadership in master's program curriculum content, outside of an administrative focus. Due to this limitation, it is difficult to assess the attitudes, beliefs and values of program directors and instructors towards the leadership content provided to school social work students.

Methodology

This exploratory study sought to answer the following research question: How do social work educators in Master of Social Work Programs rate the importance of inclusion of individual leadership skills in their school social work (SSW) curriculum?

Sample

The study use a purposive sample strategy, directly contacting program directors and administrative staff in all CSWE-accredited MSW programs in the United States (301 at the time of sampling). For the purpose of this study, Program Directors were defined as an individual identified as a "MSW Program Director," "Program Director" or "MSW Program Head" by a college or university with a CSWE-accredited School of Social Work. Email addresses were confirmed through the college or university's website. If the Program Director's contact information was unavailable on both the college or university's website and the CSWE's website, solicitation for participation was made to the Dean of the School of Social Work. If both were unavailable, solicitation was made to the listed "contact person" on the CSWE's website. Individuals were allowed to self-select to participate by responding to prompts to complete an electronic survey. An a priori power analysis was completed using Stata to determine appropriate sample size using an R-Squared test of all coefficients in a multiple linear regression, $\alpha = .05$, and a medium effect size (d=.15) with 5 covariates. Results showed that a total sample of 13

participants were required to achieve a power of .80. A total of 75 individuals responded to the survey, a response rate of 24.9 percent.

Data Collection and Analysis

A cross-sectional, self-administered online survey was distributed by Qualtrics link via email to the accredited MSW program directors and administrators. The survey was available from June 2020 to September 2020. This survey was created specifically for this study. A quantitative analysis was conducted using Stata 16 (StataCorp, 2019).

Findings

Description of Sample

Within the sample, the majority of respondents (n=59; 78.7 percent) held PhD degrees. 65.3 percent (n=49) held the position of Department Chair or Program Director of their respective MSW programs. 48 percent of participants (n=36) were part of a school that offered a school social work elective, while 42.7 (n=32) had no such elective; 26.7 percent (n=20) of respondents were part of a school that had a full school social work concentration, while 64 percent (n=48) of respondents had no concentration. A list of relevant descriptive characteristics of the participants can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Participant Frequency Information

Variable	*n*	*%*
Current position at College/University		
Assistant Professor	1	1.3
Associate Professor	2	2.7
Professor	2	2.7
Department Chair	25	33.3
Program Director	24	32.0
Associate Dean	3	4.0
Dean	9	12.0
Other	2	2.7
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0
Highest Degree Obtained		
MSW	5	6.7
PhD	59	78.7
DSW	3	4.0
Other	1	1.3
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0

Variable	*n*	*%*
Possession of State License: Master's-Level:		
Yes	37	49.3
No	13	17.3
I am currently working towards my license	1	1.3
Possession of State License: Clinical-Level:		
Yes	32	42.7
No	30	40.0
I am currently working towards my license	2	2.7
Other	4	5.3
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0
Location of University		
Alabama	3	4.0
Arkansas	1	1.3
California	3	4.0
Connecticut	2	2.7
Florida	1	1.3
Georgia	2	2.7
Hawaii	1	1.3

Variable	*n*	*%*
Idaho	1	1.3
Illinois	4	5.3
Indiana	1	1.3
Kentucky	2	2.7
Louisiana	1	1.3
Maine	1	1.3
Maryland	1	1.3
Massachusetts	2	2.7
Michigan	3	4.0
Minnesota	2	2.7
Missouri	1	1.3
New Jersey	2	2.7
New York	3	4.0
North Carolina	2	2.7
Ohio	6	8.0
Oregon	1	1.3
Pennsylvania	4	5.3
Puerto Rico	2	2.7
Tennessee	2	2.7

Variable	*n*	*%*
Texas	5	6.7
Utah	1	1.3
Vermont	1	1.3
Washington	1	1.3
West Virginia	2	2.7
Wisconsin	1	1.3
Wyoming	2	2.7
Prefer not to say	1	1.3
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0
Participant's University/College Type		
Public University or College	46	61.3
Private University or College	22	29.3
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0
Participant's University/College setting		
Urban	26	34.7
Suburban	22	29.3
Rural	20	26.7

Variable	*n*	*%*
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0
School Social Work Elective Offered		
No	32	42.7
Yes	36	48.0
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0
School Social Work Concentration Offered		
No	48	64.0
Yes	20	26.7
Missing	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 2

Continuous Descriptive Information

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*n*	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Number of years in CSWE-accredited program	17.7	8.1	68	1.0	39	17	20
Average number of classes taught - 2019-2020	2.8	1.9	68	0.0	8	3	2

The dependent variable was operationalized through a five-item Likert-type statement: *It is important to include skills to become a leader in school social work practice curriculum*. Responses included *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Agree* and *Strongly Agree,* bivalent around a neutral middle. Evaluation of the responses revealed the possible presence of social desirability bias, which will be further detailed in the limitations section. Due to the presence of these biases, the responses to the dependent variable were redistributed due to the skewed responses; positive responses (Strongly agree and Agree) were combined to one response with a value of "1", and all other responses including the neutral response were combined to one response with a value of "0". This resulted in a bivariate variable more representative of the lack of variation in responses. Frequencies for the dependent variable as written and the modified variable can be found in Table 3. The modified variable was used for data analysis.

Table 3

Frequency table for dependent variable and modified variable

Variable	*n*	%
It is important to include leadership skills to become a leader in school social work curriculum		
Strongly agree	30	40.0
Agree	22	29.3
Neither agree nor disagree	6	8.00
Disagree	0	0.00
Strongly disagree	1	1.3
Missing	16	21.3
It is important to include leadership skills to become a leader in school social work curriculum (modified)		
0 Agree (Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)	7	9.3
1 (Strongly agree, Agree)	52	69.3
Missing	16	21.3

To answer the proposed research question, the individual components of leadership as operationalized by Holosko (2009) and Hopson and Lawson (2011) were used as a foundation for conceptualizing school social work leadership. Participants were asked to rate the importance of inclusion of the individual components on a five-item Likert-type scale; responses included *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Agree* and *Strongly Agree*. Responses to each statement is detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency distribution of responses to components of leadership, as operationalized by Holosko (2009) and Hopson and Lawson (2011)

Statement	*n*	%
School social work curriculum should include the skills to possess and implement a vision.		
Strongly agree	27	36.0
Agree	29	38.7
Neither agree nor disagree	3	4.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	1	1.3
Missing	15	20.0
School social work curriculum should include the skills necessary to influence others to act.		
Strongly agree	29	38.7
Agree	22	29.3
Neither agree nor disagree	7	9.3
Disagree	0	0.00
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Missing	15	20.0
School social work curriculum should include the skills to encourage collaboration.		

Statement	*n*	%
Strongly agree	39	52.0
Agree	18	24.0
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1.3
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Missing	15	20.0
School social work curriculum should include the skills to develop a capacity to problem-solve.		
Strongly agree	43	57.3
Agree	13	17.3
Neither agree nor disagree	2	2.7
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Missing	15	20.0
School social work curriculum should include the skills to create positive change.		
Strongly agree	37	49.3
Agree	19	25.3
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1.3
Disagree	0	0.00
Strongly disagree	2	2.7

Statement	*n*	%
Missing	16	21.3
School social work curriculum should include the skills to collect data in their schools to inform outcome-driven practice.		
Strongly agree	32	42.7
Agree	22	29.3
Neither agree nor disagree	2	2.7
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Missing	17	22.7

The modified dependent variable was analyzed in relation to each of the individual components of leadership. An analysis of the responses to the individual components revealed non-normally distributed responses in all cases, so Fisher's exact tests were conducted to determine significance. The modified dependent variable was used in all six Fisher's exact tests. The results can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Results from Fisher's exact test: components of leadership

Variable	*n*	Fisher's exact p-value

School social work curriculum should include the skills to possess and implement a vision.	59	.09
School social work curriculum should include the skills necessary to influence others to act.	59	.25
School social work curriculum should include the skills to encourage collaboration.	59	.03
School social work curriculum should include the skills to develop a capacity to problem-solve.	59	.30
School social work curriculum should include the skills to create positive change.	58	.22
School social work curriculum should include the skills to collect data in their schools to inform outcome-driven practice.	57	.37

A significant association was found between one of the components, “School social work curriculum should include the skills to encourage collaboration” and the dependent variable, “It is important to include leadership skills to become a leader in school social work curriculum (modified)” ($p = .03$, Fisher’s exact test).

Discussion

Identifying an agreed upon model of leadership in social work, let alone school social work, is a difficult task. The proposed models set forth by Holosko (2009) and Hopson and

Lawson (2011) were combined to examine the relationship of the perceived importance of each component to the perceived importance of leadership in school social work overall, with the hope of building a unified school social work leadership model that addresses ambiguity in the role of school social work while empowering the practitioner to define this role.

Fisher exact tests revealed no significant relationships with the exception of one concept and the dependent variable, specifically the statement, "School social work curriculum should include the skills to encourage collaboration." If social work educators within this study perceived school social work leadership skills as important, they were more like to give a higher rating to the necessary skill of collaboration; however, among other skills there was no significant relationship. It is reasonable to assume that the other statements are statements that are traditionally associated with leadership on a managerial level (Brilliant, 1986; Lawler, 2005). This finding resonates with a very common view of social workers in host settings such as schools, as a team collaborator versus as a traditional team leader (D'Agostino, 2013). Akin to participatory leadership, this may be connected to the empowerment model proposed by Elpers and Westhuis (2008). Among priority in host settings may be the need to participate in an interdisciplinary team, and therefore collaborate; however, other skills connected to innovation may be considered less important and germane to the needs of the environment (Vyshedsky, 2021).

The influence of others, additionally, could even be considered undesirable. This may be rooted in an observation made by Klein (1959):

> Another facet of this topic is seen in the reaction of social workers to autocratic climates. Social workers believe in democratic values and self-determination. They recoil from direct command and authoritarianism and consequently may unconsciously fight the organizational climate and reject it. Their attitudes are probably observable by others and may result in diminished acceptance and communication. (p. 93)

Klein proposes that it is innate to social workers to fight autocracy; therefore, elements indicative of an autocracy, such as influence and even the concept of the social worker as sole leader, may be considered antithesis to "true" social work practice. Throughout the literature, one of the centralized themes in operationalizing leadership within social work has been the juxtaposition of traditional managerial concepts with social work values and priorities (Brilliant, 1986; Lawler, 2005; Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005). Lawler (2005) argued that leadership may not be defined but more assumed to be the person "in charge"; Wielkiewicz and Stelzner (2005) also discussed leadership models based on an "industrial paradigm" (p. 326) common to most settings, with a traditional manager. Definitions of social work leadership that deviate from the industrial paradigm are more likely to stress the use of interprofessional or participatory strategies, perhaps with the goal of addressing or alleviating the contrast. However, it is worth considering whether school social workers can influence an environment rooted in collaborative, participatory leadership that recognizes and fosters the contribution of the expertise of all professionals.

Limitations

One of the more pressing limitations in this survey is the global pandemic. Data for this study was collected in May 2020, a reactive time for both social work educators and school social workers transitioning to virtual environments. With the benefits of hindsight as both groups attempted to balance educational and psychological demands, the role of school social worker during a pandemic would demand a new investigation and an updated definition of school social work leadership. Netolicky (2020) proposes that the school leader has a responsibility to act as a "credible voice" (p.393) for their environments in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic; while school social workers are expected to interact within multiple systems, the question of whether and how this interaction shaped both their practical leadership skills as well as their own definition and expectations of leadership for that role was not explored. Daftary et al. (2021)'s qualitative study provides a foundation for exploration in terms expectations and practical demands during this crisis; future quantitative studies will hopefully provide a lens for examining and updating the school social work curriculum with specific examples and practical skills in collaboratively leading in times of physical, psychological and emotional crisis in the learning environment.

Additionally, the survey used was specifically designed for this study, and was not validated and tested for reliability prior to use. However, Cronbach's alpha for the six-item scale related to school social work leadership as part of the larger survey was .94. While there is no absolute agreement on the limits of an alpha coefficient to consider a scale reliable, it is agreed that a value above .90 is considered excellent (Kline, 2005).

Social desirability response bias may be presence within the responses, suggesting that participants may have provided responses perceived as professionally compelled (Croasmun & Ostrum, 2011; Larson, 2018). Krentzman and Townsend (2008), in their evaluation of scales for use within social work, highlighted the challenges of social desirability response bias, noting that "scales that increase the likelihood of social desirability bias feature items so clear and straight-forward that the "right answer" becomes obvious" (p.25). They further observe that social desirability response bias can be manipulated through the way the items are specifically worded (p. 16). To address this bias, responses to the Likert-scale representing the dependent variable were redistributed during analysis, creating a dichotomous variable. The neutral middle was included with negative responses due to the minimal responses received. However it should be noted that despite the overwhelming positivity within responses, there was still a lack of significant relationships between the variables. Repeating the survey with rephrased responses that allow for perceived acceptance of variation may allow for more acceptable variation; for example, adding "nice to have" for example, versus suggesting an all-or-nothing response.

Additionally, the survey focused predominantly on social work educators in administrative positions within their institutions. This focus assumed that administration would have direct input in the creation or approval of curriculum and program development. Repeating the survey with the intentional inclusion of full or part time professors, may yield different results as it increases the likelihood of participants who have practiced in schools and other host settings.

Implications

Leadership at the Practice Level

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of social work educators in including leadership content in school social work curriculum. The findings suggest further work needs to be done in defining leadership within this setting. Either educators do not believe leadership skills are necessary or applicable, possibly beyond collaborative skills, or educators identify different leadership skills as relevant or applicable in this setting. Further exploration in this population to understand school social work leadership in general as well as leadership in micro practice in general is necessary. Additionally, studies such as Perry et al. (2022) reveal the importance of including practitioners in defining leadership, and highlight the need to include practitioners in building school social work curriculum that prepare practitioners to not only be assertive in taking leadership roles but comfortable in defining this role for other professionals in their respective milleus.

Curriculum Development

This study represents a beginning investigation to the focus of leadership skills in school social work curriculum. While participants overwhelmingly rated the inclusion of these skills as necessary, it would be imperative to confirm the presence of these skills throughout the curriculum. Follow up can include a qualitative content analysis of the current school social work syllabi offered in MSW programs. A similar examination was taken in Berzin and

O'Connor (2010), but thirteen years of social upheaval and a global pandemic require a re-examination of identified priorities. As previously mentioned, there is no leadership skill requirement set forth by the CSWE, but administrators appear to view this as important; a future study can investigate the specifics of where this content can be added to the Master's curricula, if at all. An exploration of the needs of school social workers in the field combined with the perception of schools of social work may prompt the CSWE to assess the inclusion of leadership skills at the practice level as a necessary addition to competencies in the future.

Research

Future research into this area includes revisiting the definition of social work leadership, and school social work leadership more specifically. The definition used in the study represents a good start, but given the demands of the global pandemic and the much-needed emphasis on social justice prioritized by CSWE, a new definition of school social work leadership should be investigated. Definitions should be forged through an exploration of practitioners in the field and the field itself, allowing schools to more thoroughly prepare future practitioners for proactive roles.

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