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Geriatric Social Work Education from Early Beginnings to Future Prospects

by

Angela M. Goins

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of Saint Thomas
School of Social Work

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Abstract

This banded dissertation is comprised of three single, but interrelated scholarly products, and explores the inclusion of geriatric content in social work education over the years. System theory and the ecological perspective are the conceptual frameworks used throughout the dissertation. As each product is presented, implications for both social work education and research will be examined.

The first product of the banded dissertation is a historical analysis that identifies and examines the beginnings of geriatric social work education in the history of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE). Using archive material from the 1940's and 1950's, this scholarly work, demonstrates that it took many systems coming together from the federal government, practice, community, public welfare, and social work education to foster inclusion of geriatric content into social work curriculum. This analysis suggest that lessons from the past can help increase the number of geriatric social workers presently and provide direction to other disciplines that work with aging populations.

The second product of the banded dissertation presents a qualitative study that examines the attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, perceptions, comfort level and training with aging and geriatrics in the field by criminal justice faculty in a university in the Southern United States. Geriatric- based education is identified as paramount across all disciplines that work with older adults. Implications of this study highlight the need for both collaboration in practice and education between social work and criminal justice professionals to meet the needs of the growing aging population.

The third product of the banded dissertation summarizes an interactive presentation delivered on November 3, 2017 at the Aging and Society: Seventh Interdisciplinary Conference. This presentation highlighted the findings of the first product and the importance of using the historical lens to identify how inclusion of geriatric content increased the number of geriatric social workers in the past. This knowledge informs present social work education and practice to increase

the number of geriatric social workers currently and provide direction to other disciplines' efforts when working with older adults.

Through these three scholarly products, this banded dissertation illuminates numerous implications for both social work education and research. With the increase in the older adult population projected to double by 2060 to nearly 98 million, more geriatric social workers are needed. Implementing actions taken by the CSWE and external parties in the past to increase the number of social workers is one solution. Ensuring that geriatric -based education is infused in curriculum across disciplines provides another solution to increase the number of professionals trained and skilled to work with aging populations. Social Work as a profession cannot meet the needs of the growing older adult population alone, interdisciplinary collaboration is required to expand social work education and research.

Dedication/Acknowledgements

I want to thank my wonderful parents, Elbert E. Goins Jr. and Anne M. Goins for instilling in me the significance of receiving an education. I thank my father for all the sacrifices he made to put me through private schools all those years. I thank my mother who sat with me for countless hours the first 18 years of my life to make sure that I did my school work so that I would someday contribute something great to the world. It is to them that I dedicate this banded dissertation and without them it would not have been possible.

Special thanks to my loving family who supported me through this endeavor (Michael, Larry, Tim, Chris, Mariana and Denis, Stephen and Gregg) and all my dear friends (particularly SBR, Jeannie, Donald, Lydia, and Dayna) who kept encouraging me along the way. I appreciate all my social work colleagues (especially Heather and Steve) at the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) for being there for me and the support of all the faculty and my dean in the College of Public Service at UHD. To all my students, former and current, for being my inspiration and cheerleaders while I have been teaching especially during these doctoral years. Their enthusiasm and encouragement helped me through the rough patches. It took a village to get me here and I am so appreciative. A special thank you to Dr. Barbara Shank whose vision made this doctoral program possible and for her gentle guidance and affirmation that I could do research and be a practice scholar. Special appreciation to Dr. Ande Nesmith, my dissertation advisor, for her patience and direction during this process and for her endless encouragement.

Finally, in loving memory of my brother, Timothy Jude Goins, who made my trips to St. Paul, Minnesota possible to work on my doctorate of social work through his generosity of time and heart with our father. I know that Timmy and Mommy are sharing my joy and accomplishment from heaven. Above all, I thank my God who made ALL things possible along with Our Lady of Montserrat, Spain who opened the necessary doors to bring this journey to fruition.

GERIATRIC SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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Geriatric Social Work Education from Early Beginnings to Future Prospects

Older adults, age 65 and over, are the fastest growing segment of the overall U.S. population making education in geriatric social work critical for the coming generation of social workers. By 2050, this demographic will increase to a projected 83.7 million that is nearly double this population currently (Ortman, Velkoff & Hogan, 2014). This banded dissertation suggest that by looking through a historical perspective, lessons can be learned to inform the future of geriatric social work education to face the challenges of the growing older adult population.

Advances in medical technology and increase in the number of baby boomers, individuals born between the years, 1946 to 1964, are two key factors for the expected influx of older adults (McInnis-Dittrich, 2014). According to Ortman et al. (2014),

The aging of this population will have wide-ranging implications for the country.

The projected growth of the older adult population in the United States will present challenges to policy makers and programs, such as Social Security and Medicare. It will also affect families, businesses, and health care providers (p. 1).

In the social work profession, there has been increased awareness to this population in recent years and the stark contrast in the number of students who choose careers working with this population as opposed to other populations. A 2004 national survey study of licensed social workers in the U.S. identified that 12 percent of social workers noted working with older adults in practice (Whitaker, Weismiller & Clark, 2006). Despite these survey findings, social workers practicing with older adults in the U.S. increased, yet, more social workers are required to meet the needs of this population (National Institute on Aging, 1997).

Social work education through the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has been critical in preparing students to work with older adults in the last several decades. Through collaborative efforts and funding, programs such as the Hartford Geriatric Work Initiative and the

Hartford Partnership Program for Aging Education have helped social work schools in the country to infuse aging content into social work curriculum resulting in the growth of social workers willing to work with the aged (CSWE 2015; McInnis-Dittrich, 2014; Kolomer, Lewinson, Kropf & Wilks, 2006). However, preparation and efforts by social work education, specifically, to develop aging-specific curriculum for students in schools of social work were not always existent. By examining the history of geriatric social work education in the country, one sees little research tracing its beginnings in the literature. Archive materials by way of correspondences, memorandums and letters between the CSWE and external parties interested in the inclusion of geriatric content into social work curriculum offer insight into when the need for geriatric content became apparent in social work education.

CSWE has made significant strides over the years to increase the number of geriatric social workers, yet, there are still insignificant numbers to meet the needs of the multi-faceted growing older adult population (Fredriksen-Golden, Bonifas & Hooyman, 2006). The influx of the aging population will affect not only social work as a profession, but other disciplines and professions as well. Professions and disciplines expected to encounter challenges related to work with the increased older adult population include healthcare, education, and criminal justice (McInnis-Dittrich, 2014; Rogers, Gualco, Hinckle & Baber, 2013; Payne & Berg, 2003). One profession alone is not equipped to address the needs of this demographic. Collaborative innovation between social work and these other professions is required to secure that older adults grow old in a manner that they deserve and are entitled to in their country.

Through historical analysis, this dissertation explored at what point in the history of social work education, it became necessary for the inclusion of geriatric content into the curriculum of schools of social work in the country. The dissertation further examined how this inclusion was imperative to the increase in geriatric social workers in the U.S. to meet the needs of the rising aging population. Then, using the findings of this historical analysis, this dissertation informed

through qualitative interviews how another discipline such as criminal justice currently encountered aging issues in education. These results informed potential collaboration between criminal justice and social work to educate students to meet the needs of aging populations. Findings of this dissertation were shared in a public and peer review forum through a third product which added to the social work education knowledge base related to geriatric social work education, practice and research.

Conceptual Framework

Two conceptual frameworks set the background for this dissertation. Concepts highlighted in systems theory and the ecological perspective were used. Forder's (1976) description of systems theory was applied to the first product of the dissertation that focused on how different groups worked together in social work education history to develop and include geriatric content into curriculum when it was non-existent. This group effort was not without conflict. Forder (1976) asserted how different subsystems in a system often have different objectives when compared to not only other subsystems, but from the system itself. The difference in objectives leads to conflict. Forder (1976) suggested that conflict is needed for change. Conflict plays an important role in systems theory in environments that are always changing (Forder, 1976). The system represented in this dissertation is social work education, specifically, as was seen in geriatric social work education. It took a series of systems and subsystems that were interrelated to infuse geriatric content into social work curriculum. Conflict played a role in expanding educational opportunities for students to be trained and educated to do geriatric social work in all types of settings.

Using the systems approach and framework, students continue to benefit today from aging related curriculum to prepare them for geriatric social work practice. The banded dissertation through a historical analysis research paper discussed the concept of how many systems including

social work impacted and informed present curriculum in geriatric social work education.

The projected increase of the older adult population, however, necessitated not only a systems framework to produce more geriatric-trained social workers, but an ecological approach. Significant advances in social work education to infuse geriatric content in its curriculum along with innovative programs to increase geriatric initiatives in social work schools have been made, yet, there are not enough social workers to meet the needs of older adults by 2020 (National Institute on Aging, 1997). More innovation is needed. It will take other disciplines to help meet the needs of the older adult population. Using the ecological perspective, this banded dissertation made recommendations how other disciplines such as criminal justice can work together along with social work to produce more professionals specialized to work with older adults in the settings or environments that influence the older adult and vice versa.

The ecological approach used in this dissertation focused on the relationships between humans and their environments and how they influence the other (Gittermain & Germaine, 2008). When this approach is applied to older adults one can see that the relationship between an older adult and his or her environment is vital to his or her ability to be successful in the environment they find themselves. This dissertation additionally incorporated Pardeck's (2015) application of the ecological approach. This perspective focuses on external factors such as policies and macro and micro level approaches and their impact on individuals to be supported in their environments.

Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

This banded dissertation is comprised of three products. The first product of the banded dissertation provided a historical analysis through archive material to ascertain the point in social work education history in which the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) infused geriatric content into its curriculum. This product described and addressed requests that were made to the CSWE to increase the number of geriatric social workers in the community through inclusion of

geriatric content in schools of social work. This product chronicled how the CSWE responded to these external requests and inquiries and underscored the historical implications for the need of geriatric content curriculum for social workers and other disciplines as well. The research presented what players were involved in the decision to move forward with geriatric content and what was involved in this process and hardships along the way. What the CSWE did in the past regarding infusion of geriatric content in curriculum continues to impact the present in that it provides example how this infusion can be done with other disciplines in conjunction with social work education. The product posed questions that guide future research and discussed implications for future generations of social work students interested in geriatrics and other students from other disciplines that work with older adults.

The second product of the banded dissertation was a scholarly work which addressed how older adults are currently supported by professionals from another discipline in their environments. The criminal justice profession like social work is one profession that also works with older adults in many different environments. The article addressed a qualitative study that was conducted with criminal justice faculty at a university in the southern United States through interviews about their values, skills, perceptions, attitudes and training in working with this population. Using an ecological approach incorporating both criminal justice and social work, this product categorized and discovered connections between criminal justice faculty and older adults in the context of their practice. Implications of this scholarly product suggested creation of interdisciplinary educational approaches to advance geriatric- infused knowledge for the purpose of meeting the needs of this fast growing older adult population.

The final product of the banded dissertation represented the summary of a presentation given at a peer reviewed international conference. The paper presentation was based predominately on the first product of the banded dissertation and was entitled “Geriatric Social Work Education: An Historical Perspective on the Social Response to Aging.” The presentation

was delivered to participants of the Aging & Society: Seventh Interdisciplinary Conference on November 3, 2017 on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley, in Berkeley, California. The conference focused on the changing social dynamics of aging in all areas related to aging including social work education. This conference provided the ideal forum for the exchange of the combined research conducted for both scholarly products of this banded dissertation. Participants were acquainted to the history of geriatric social work education in the U.S. and its beginnings as outlined through the archive findings to and from the Council of Social Work Education. The presentation additionally introduced participants to early data from the second product of the banded dissertation focused on the implications and recommendations for infusion of geriatric content into other disciplines and professions.

Discussion

The goal of this banded dissertation was to discover how social work education historically responded to society's request for more geriatric social workers skilled to work with the aged population. In light of the current shortage of these trained social workers, this dissertation proposed that looking back to the past would inform future efforts to increase the number of geriatric social workers to help this population. The history of geriatric social work education in the U.S. reflected the eventual inclusion of geriatric content by the Council of Social Work Education into its curriculum as one solution to produce more geriatric social workers to meet the needs of the growing aging population. Using a historical lens, this dissertation met its second goal which was to inform other means that social work as a profession could influence the number of professionals trained and skilled to work with older adults in the country. Collaboration between social work and other professions and disciplines was recommended through the research in the dissertation. With the current older adult population constituting nearly one-fifth of the overall U.S. population by 2030, society will face multi-faceted challenges and needs of this demographic

(Day, 1996). Based on a 2004 national survey of social workers, there is only 12 percent of licensed social workers choosing practice with older adults (Whitaker, et al., 2006).

The demand for geriatric social workers is high with increased numbers of older adults requiring help, but, the supply is low, to meet their needs. Social work cannot face the needs of the aging population in isolation. Other professions and disciplines are confronting similar challenges with the dramatic growth of older adults. Criminal justice is one discipline in particular encountering the rise in the aging population in many settings including prisons, jails, and community-based programs involving probation and corrections. As the research in this dissertation revealed, collaboration between social work and other disciplines such as criminal justice is necessary to provide basic geriatric knowledge when educating students about potential work with aging populations. These realities have multiple implications for social work education, practice and future research along with implications for other professions.

Implications for Social Work Education

Being that there is still a demand from practice and community for more geriatric-trained social workers today, findings from this research have numerous implications for social work education. In the 1940's and 1950's, community agencies looked to social work education to train and educate future geriatric social workers (Landau, 1953; Stokes, 1949; Hollis, 1948). CSWE responded by including geriatric content into its curriculum on the undergraduate level in schools of social work (White, 1959). This action increased the number of students choosing geriatrics as a career. CSWE should increase the number of required aging course selections offered at both the BSW and MSW levels to ensure exposure to aging content and topics. Interprofessional collaboration focused on aging populations and the required workforce for this demographic is one area that social work education could expand (Browne et al., 2017). An example of interdisciplinary or interprofessional courses that could be offered include social work and criminal

justice. Both social work and criminal justice faculty could collaborate together to teach about aging issues that impact each profession and how the two can work together to ensure the welfare of older adults. The creation of an aging certificate comprised of courses specific to work with older adults as they are encountered by the social work profession and other professions is another implication.

Schools of social work should make it a priority to routinely reach out to community agencies that work with older adults to establish more geriatric settings for students to do their field placement requirements for their social work degrees. Because social work education has made strides to incorporate geriatric content to educate students to work with the aged, they can train other professions about this population.

Implications for Future Research

This banded dissertation highlighted several areas for future research especially in areas regarding incorporation of aging content in undergraduate and graduate social work education, innovative collaboration between social work and other disciplines and professions in teaching on aging, and use of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as it relates to aging courses. First, there needs to be more research exploring how geriatric content can be infused on both the bachelor and master levels in schools of social work to encourage more students to choose geriatrics as a career. Aging courses and geriatric field placements have proved successful to expose students to work with older adults and increase the number of geriatric social workers. Yet, more innovation is needed to infuse geriatric content in university settings. The second product of the banded dissertation presented qualitative study results to examine how one profession external to social work such as criminal justice viewed aging issues on the undergraduate level. The findings of this study revealed many ways that professions can work together to educate students to have basic geriatric knowledge to work with aging populations which is vitally warranted with the population growth expected. Future research suggestions

include replication of the qualitative study conducted for this dissertation, but focused on professions like urban education. Many grandparents are raising their grandchildren. What can urban education students learn about aging to help them when working with school age children raised by grandparents?

Finally, further research influenced by this banded dissertation would be the applications for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). With the infusion of geriatric content into the social work education curriculum over the years, there are many opportunities for faculty to study how effective teaching this content is on student learning. With the increase in the older adult population, students will have many opportunities to work in diverse practice areas with the same population. Gammonley et al. (2014) highlight that there should be more focus on one segment of the aging population specifically those with dementia. Incorporating service- learning components to an aging course can offer students the one on one contact with older adults with dementia. Service learning can increase students' learning experience and knowledge of practice with this segment of the aged population. With data taken from this type of course, faculty can engage in scholarship that can inform teaching best practices for other faculty considering innovative teaching modalities.

In conclusion, the research from this banded dissertation highlighted the role of the past in understanding the present and future when it comes to the geriatric social work education. Looking back at how social work education responded to society's need for practitioners skilled and trained to work with older adults provides guidance to CSWE's current efforts to educate more students to work with this population. Research from this dissertation also highlighted that social work education cannot meet the challenge of educating future professionals skilled to work with this population alone. Other professions and disciplines are needed to work with the social work profession to ensure a workforce capable of facing the challenges that this growing population presents to society. Interprofessional and interdisciplinary approaches are required and encouraged to move geriatric social work education and work with older adults in general forward.

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Inclusion of Geriatric Content in Social Work Education: Voices from the Past

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UNAVAILABLE UNTIL JUNE 1, 2020

Inclusion of Geriatric Content in Social Work Education: A Multidisciplinary Approach

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