Developmental Social Work: A ‘Strengths’ Praxis for Social Development
Mel Gray

Midgley (2001) claimed that "there is a need for a comprehensive formulation of what critical social development practice should involve" (p. 48). This paper is an attempt to respond to this challenge. While Midgley (2001) relates the critical perspective to Marxist-oriented practice, I suggest that the strengths perspective gives the radical edge needed for developmental social work practice. The purpose of this paper is to show how social work might develop a "development" praxis. Social workers have the knowledge and skills needed for empowering development practice and its values relating to social justice and human rights fit hand in glove with social development thinking. The main stumbling block, however, is whether social workers see this as a valid form of practice for themselves tied as they are to individualistic ‘psychosocial’ approaches within service-oriented contexts. Developmental social work requires them to get out of this box into the neighbourhood and local community and to begin talking to clients as partners who know the solutions to the challenges they encounter. Do social workers want to become facilitators of change or will they cling to their current practice? This question lies at the heart of finding a valid role for social work in social development.

A recent issue of Social Development Issues 23(1) provided a comprehensive overview of current social development theory viewing it from a social work, feminist, populist, ecological, critical, individual-enterprise, and institutional perspective. While recognising its propensity to promote empowering, critical or radical social work practice, social work has not wholeheartedly adopted the development paradigm as its praxis clinging more to clinical ‘psychosocial’ and service-oriented approaches than to community interventions (Mayadas & Elliott, 2001). Midgley (2001) identified the critical perspective in social work with Marxist influenced radical thinking articulated through structural, feminist and anti-oppressive practice approaches. In this paper it is suggested that the strengths perspective provides the critical edge needed for developmental social work.

Strengths-based approaches present a radical alternative to many current intervention models in the sense that, among other things, they question the dominant deficits-based mental health paradigm, which pigeonholes people in terms of pathology and as­signs them disempowering labels; anti-oppressive practice models that construe clients as oppressed and immediately engender feelings of powerlessness; and rigid mindsets such as positivism, ardent feminism and structuralism that lead practitioners to approach the helping situation with preconceived ideas that influence the way they listen to, hear and interpret the client’s story and their intervention (Gray, 2001).

It is a radical way of thinking which tosses aside needs studies for assets registers and which focuses on strengths, potential, ca­pacities, assets, and resources rather than needs, problems and deficits. I will attempt to apply existing social development think­ing to Africa to highlight the strengths perspective as a viable alternative to institutional social development approaches. My main purpose, however, is to try to find a praxis for social work in development and to propose that South Africa provides an example where developmental social work has arisen through policy changes in the welfare system and attempts have been made to articulate a theory and practice of developmental social work. My first attempt to do this resulted in a book in which I outlined the nature of existing social work methods and showed how they could be adapted for developmental practice (Gray, 1998a). In this paper I will begin with a brief discussion of social work and the policy changes forcing a swing to developmental social work in South Africa. I will then examine social development as a re­sponse to poverty in the way that it is more usually discussed in the literature before moving to a discussion of developmental so­cial work practice from a strengths perspective. I argue that there are various policy developments around the world, within social work mainly in relation to social development, within public policy in relation to the shrinking welfare state and the increasing em­phasis on partnership development, within economics in the swing to the social economy or the Third Way (Giddens, 2000), and the rise of the social entrepreneurship movement which is accom­panying these changes, which all offer a strengths praxis for so­cial development. I end with a brief discussion of how the so­cial work curriculum might respond to these changes.

Why Social Work Needs To Change

Social work needs to become more responsive to its context and imple­ment development on a much broader scale (Gray, 1998a).
Around the world, social work grew up within a social service infrastructure. It has Western, liberal roots and traditions and while in some countries it has, from time to time, taken a radical turn, entrenching a feminist and structuralist social critique and developing an anti-oppressive practice to accompany it, this has not happened in Africa. African social workers tend to cling to Midgley’s (1981) interpretation of social work’s Third World imperialism blaming the profession (no doubt including themselves) for its shortcomings, hinged as they are to colonialism and casework, rather than a system fraught with corruption and inefficiency and bogged by failed policies dreamt up by inept governments or their foreign advisers. Structural adjustment, a dismal failure in Africa, is a case in point (Fitzgerald, McLennan & Munslow, 1997). No other occupation has arisen to do the work social workers do. No other profession would slog on working with people with special needs in the face of never-sufficient resources as social work has done. Yet to weaken the lowly status social work has attained, the government in South Africa, and there are echoes of this further north in Africa too, are talking about the need to “train, educate, re-deploy and employ a new category of workers in social development to respond to the realities of South Africa’s crisis” and to “review the training and re-orientation of social service workers to meet the development challenges of South Africa and link these to our regional and global demands” [Minister of Welfare, Dr Zola Skweyiya, following a National Consultative Process involving civil society organisations in October 1999 as reported in Welfare Update, Newsletter of the Department of Welfare, Population and Development, 5(2), March 2000, p. 3]. No mention was made of social workers, who remain key providers of welfare services.

The marginalisation of social workers in South Africa was a political manoeuvre to transform the apartheid-led social work profession, to release the stranglehold of its white dominance and to give heretofore unacknowledged and legitimate occupational groups, such as community development and child and youth care workers, a recognised place in service provision (Gray, 2000). The government had little choice but to go this route to achieve the transformation of welfare it desired. Welfare coverage had to be broadened to reach all South Africa’s people, not just those with access to services in urban centres. While only 45% of the total population live in rural areas, 72% of rural people are poor (Welfare Update, March 2000). With poverty eradication as a priority, the government moved to a developmental welfare system conceived within the social development paradigm (Gray, 1998b; White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997).

In South Africa, as in Africa generally, poverty is a major problem. Africa is the poorest continent and contains the world’s poorest countries. Exacerbating the problem is the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS with poor people being most vulnerable. Social development then, in theory any way, seems the policy of choice in the face of these social problems. If Western models of social work are linked to an organised system of social services staffed by professional social workers, then it is true that they are no longer relevant. For the capacity to develop an efficient social service bureaucracy, based on models of service in the heavily industrialised First World, reaching into the remotest locations, is highly unlikely. The African models being proposed draw on the participation of people in local communities to create development programs and a community infrastructure that is culturally compatible with their lifestyle and worldview. As institutions, such as children’s homes and homes for the elderly, disappear in the face of government de-institutionalisation policies, local communities are increasingly being called upon to bear the burden of care. Without ‘redistributed’ resources to fill the service gap there is no means through which to channel funds for development. In Africa, continuous reports are heard about vast amounts of aid, poured in for hunger and relief agencies, failing to reach their destination. The paradox is that without social service infrastructure there are no channels through which to dispense aid.

It is against this backdrop that calls for the redefinition and reconceptualisation of social work should be seen, calls for social work to rediscover its indigenous roots and disengage itself from the brand of professionalised academic social work that came from the industrialised West. Before professionalisation in Africa, traditional models of helping that can legitimately be called social work already existed. They were largely family-based and drew on the myths and traditions of African culture. They came to be seen as inferior to individualistic Western models of helping which failed to incorporate the collective interests that characterised traditional practices. Also still evident in most of Africa today, unpaid social work happens daily within the family and in local communities. Women are the poorest group and feminists have long drawn attention to structural factors leading to the feminisation of poverty (Dominelli, 1997; Julia, 2001). There are alternative welfare models to the Western neo liberal one that predominates in the highly industrialised world as the South African government proposed in its White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) which prompted a complete re-evaluation of social work education and practice in South Africa.
The move towards a developmental welfare paradigm

There does not seem to be much evidence that South African social work educators are actively involved in the process of articulating and implementing the development model of social welfare (Midgley, 1996, p. 1-2).

The White Paper on Welfare (1997) required that social work should contribute to the eradication of poverty through a developmental approach which, among other things, discouraged dependency, promoted the active involvement of people in their own development, employed a multifaceted, multisectional approach, and encouraged partnership between the state, provincial government and all other stakeholders in welfare (Gray, 1996a). As social work moved to embrace developmental theory, the question arose as to whether it could lay claim to something uniquely its own in this practice domain. The swing towards developmental welfare practice and its greater emphasis on community development drew criticism of social workers who mainly practiced casework and of social work education programs for failing to teach development.

The next policy blow to social work came from the Report of the Inter-ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk (1997), which promoted the interests of child and youth care workers and further denigrated social work (Gray & Gannon, 1998; Gray & Sewpaul, 1998). Thus began the questioning of social work. Should these criticisms be taken seriously? Was community development a valid and desirable role for social workers (Gray, 1996b; Gray & Wint, 1998)? Was a four-year degree needed as preparation for community development practice? Should social work be a four-year degree? At the same time, the Report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996) and the recommendations of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) (Department of Education, 1997) proposed greater flexibility in tertiary education to allow students to move across programs and institutions and to exit at different levels. Also the transformation of the Council for Social Work into the Council for Social Service Professions led to further questions about social work's relationship to other 'social service professions' (Gray, 2000) and who should decide what should be taught in social work, the twenty universities offering social work education having always enjoyed complete autonomy in this regard. Some universities began to offer training in development (Gray & Simpson, 1998) and it is to this that the discussion now turns.

What Is Social Development?

... successful development has to do with the quality, not the quantities, of life (Strollo, 1999, p. 19).

A vast range of issues is embraced by the term 'social development'. It is both a descriptive and prescriptive term. In the former sense it usually refers to a measurement of quality of life in any given society. Thus one would say that generally the Third World was less developed than the First World. In the latter sense it is used normatively to refer to the type of quality of life all people ought to enjoy in a developed society. It usually refers to social services and resources relating inter alia to health, housing, education, work, and welfare. Because less developed countries are more in need of social development it has evolved into a policy paradigm that spells out the way social life ought to be ordered. Within this policy paradigm attention has been drawn to the relationship between social and economic development. In reality, in most of the developed world, economic development receives more attention than social development and social planning rarely pays equal attention to both. Caring for people's social needs takes second place to their political and economic ones. When applied to the less developed world, social development reports usually document what governments and non-governmental aid organisations have done to eradicate poverty. Yet despite decades of 'social development', recipient countries remain poor and undeveloped, according to reports, which usually document input (the amount of resources expended) rather than throughput and outcome.

According to Fitzgerald, McLennan and Munslow (1997), when it comes to development in Africa, “there is not a great deal to guide ... practice” (p. 3). What is emerging is a pragmatic model of development where there is some consensus about goals but not necessarily about how they should be achieved. Consensus revolves around the need to move beyond concern with economic growth to “considerations about the quality of that growth. That is, ensuring that people's basic needs are being met, that the resource base is conserved, that there is a sustainable population level, that environment and cross-sectoral concerns are integrated in decision-making processes, and that communities are empowered” (Fitzgerald et al, 1997, p. 3-4). Thus in Africa, sustainable development is concerned with meeting people's basic needs, facilitating their access to resources and improving their quality of life.

Missing from most African models of social development is any evidence of radical, feminist or structuralist critique. Unlike social work models in Australia, Canada and the United King-
dom, the politics of social development is almost completely overlooked. Whereas in Britain, community work for many workers was a form of political action as Marxist influenced theory took hold in the late 60s and early 70s, in Africa consensus-based models remained popular. Grassroots community development or 'bottom-up' community practice models emphasised participatory social change strategies which were infused with democratic ideals and populist talk of community involvement in programs concerned with improving social welfare and with combating poverty and deprivation. At the same time, rational, social planning or 'top-down' models used organisational strategies that employed experts to identify social problems and to propose and introduce programmatic solutions.

In Africa, there is almost an acceptance of, or resignation to, the inevitability of government ineptness. Corruption like hardship is a fact of life. Freirian consciousness-raising social action models hardly get a mention except as a possible strategy or technique of community development, as advocated by Rothman (1979). Warren's (1983) rational, social planning model that emphasised the importance of purposive planned change at the community level still retains currency. Warren (1983) describes community development as a "process of helping community people to analyse their problems, to exercise as large a measure of autonomy as possible and feasible, and to promote a greater identification of the individual citizen and the individual organisation with the community as a whole" (p. 35). Then, as now, for the most part, consensus-oriented models are favoured in Africa. It is within this framework that social workers are entreated to pay attention to the macro level of intervention and to involve themselves in community development and policy-making processes.

Responding To Poverty

...Gandhi...said...the world (had) the ability to satisfy everybody's needs, but not everybody's greed (Siroli, 1999, p. 19).

Generally the goal of social development is the eradication or, at least, the reduction of poverty. In social policy literature, especially that relating to the Third World, much of which was colonised for most of the twentieth century, social development has evolved as an alternative paradigm to the modernisation approach which focused on social progress and generally meant westernising most of Africa, large parts of Asia and South America. In all of these continents, the colonisers took the best resources for themselves and failed to leave many countries with a well-educated citizenry and good, strong government. Civil and cross border wars, ethnic conflict and persistent natural disasters, like droughts and floods, have led to famine and deteriorating social and economic circumstances, aggravated by political instability and unrest. In short, while the poor get poorer, the rich get richer. Single individuals and companies in the First World are richer than whole countries in the Third World.

The Annual Report of the United Nations Development Programme showed that the three richest individuals in the world possessed more than the total gross domestic product of the poorest 48 countries. The 15 richest people had more than the total GDP of sub-Saharan Africa and the 32 richest more than that of South Asia. The number of undernourished Africans more than doubled between 1970 and 1990, from 103 million to 215 million. For US$6 billion a year more, basic education could become universal. This was half of what Europe and the United States spent on perfumes. Satisfying everyone's basic food needs would cost $13 billion. However Europeans and Americans spent $17 billion a year on pet food. Europe's annual consumption of cigarettes totalled $50 billion, world drug taking accounted for $400 billion and military spending $780 billion (Cape Argus, Sept 9, 1998, p. 3).

One wonders whether the policy of social development would be successful if such large-scale redistribution were possible. If $13 billion were spent, would hunger be eradicated? If $6 billion were spent on education annually, would education become universal? It is precisely because such redistribution is highly unlikely that social development remains a piecemeal process, overall little is gained and poverty continues to increase unabated. Thus Midgley (1997) has referred to it as another 'grand scheme', claiming that interventionist social and economic programs had failed to prove successful in the twentieth century resulting in a worldwide trend towards reduced state intervention in social and economic affairs and that the co-operation required between social and economic development was 'pie-in-the-sky'. The dominant view is towards an economic growth model and, in reality, society will not give serious consideration to the social development model although they might pay lip-service to it on a moral or political level (Gray, 1998b). Nevertheless, Midgley (1997) believed that

While it is true that efforts to implement social development strategies are faced with formidable
difficulties, the desperate conditions of poverty and social deprivation that characterise the lives of hundreds of millions of people throughout the world cannot be ignored. Social development is not a magical solution to the world’s problems but it does provide a comprehensive, pragmatic and workable approach to social welfare that deserves to be more widely adopted (p. 202).

Both as policy and practice, social development is a strategy to promote human welfare that is:

**Designed to combat poverty**

Poverty is identified in social development terms as a socio-economic phenomenon and, in order to alleviate it, social policy priorities must be invested in people, that is, they must help develop human capacity and human resources, and they must be linked directly with economic development measures.

**Concerned with sustainability**

Development will be very short lived and self-destructive unless it is sustainable in the sense that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Social development must be sustainable, not only in political, social and economic terms, but also ecologically (Rogge, 2001).

**Interventionist/statist**

The State’s role is to create an enabling socio-economic and political environment in which the goals of social development are taken seriously and where all social sectors work together to achieve this end. The successful implementation of social development requires an efficient government bureaucracy able to coordinate multi-sectoral development projects at the national, regional and local levels. This does not happen spontaneously. It requires organised effort in which the government plays an active role (Midgley, 1995). Miah and Tracy (2001) warn of the difficulties of bureaucratic management styles that tend to dominate within government resulting in top-down, authoritarian planning. Though social development theory emphasises bottom-up, participatory strategies and people-centred approaches to change, with government agencies as key partners playing a pivotal role in the development process, bureaucracies tend to be “rigid, ritualistic and inflexible” and this generally “excludes people’s participation in decision-making” (p. 62).

**Multi-sectoral**

Social development acknowledges the complexity of society and of social problems and requires that all sectors of society work together towards social upliftment (Fitzgerald, McLennan & Munslow, 1997; Gray, 1996a; Midgley, 1995). It has broad goals, works concurrently on many inter connected issues and uses a range of inter linked strategies. It might be seen as both a means and an end—the end being, for example, the alleviation of poverty, poor health, environmental degradation, and the promotion of participation, community, diversity, democracy, and sustainability; and the means being community development processes, institutional and policy change, and infrastructural development.

**Universal and Inclusive**

It is concerned with the population as a whole and with promoting the social welfare of all (Midgley, 1995). It recognises the multi-cultural nature of society and emphasises that inclusion means respecting cultural diversity and avoiding colonisation, a constant danger, it seems, with social development interventions. It also acknowledges people’s spirituality and connection to the land.

**People-centred**

It focuses on the development of human and social capital and recognises the importance of involving people in their own development. Thus it focuses on the participatory role of human beings in change that results in improving the overall quality of their lives in ecologically sound ways. It is rights-based and emphasises people-powered resources. It focuses on the promotion of participatory democracy. Participation and active citizenship (which is much more than being active in political decision making, although it includes this) is a key element of enduring social development. It underlines its proactive aspect, that is, while social development might be integrated with the promotion of human rights, it is also about taking responsibilities; it is about citizenship as practice. Social development projects involve people (not paid workers but people living in the areas being developed) and emphasises their self-determination and meaningful involvement in decision-making about issues that affect them. In short:

Social development draws on descriptive, explanatory and normative theories. It has an interdisciplinary focus and requires planned inter-sectoral co-operation yet it emphasises grassroots participation. It is universal.
and inclusive but is specifically targeted at the poorest and most disadvantaged. It is consensus based, uniting liberal, democratic and socialist ideologies. In short, social development attempts to be all things to all people (Gray, 1997).

In Africa social development needs to focus specifically on poverty alleviation, quality of life and the empowerment of women and children. It particularly needs to address primary health needs and the spread of AIDS/HIV as well as the need for education. It presents a formidable challenge to the lowly social worker and clearly requires a broad-scale multi-pronged attack from those involved in the social services and, more broadly, in development. How then can social work respond to this massive challenge?

Developmental Social Work Practice

I believe that social work can respond to the challenge of social development by evolving a form of social work practice termed developmental social work. Social workers have the knowledge, skills and value framework needed to take on this challenge, the major stumbling block being whether or not social workers consider development a valid form of practice and context of social work activity. In this section an attempt is made to articulate developmental social work as a ‘strengths’ praxis for social development.

Developmental social workers focus on poverty alleviation and social inclusion
Social work has a valuable contribution to make to the alleviation of poverty through social development (O’Brien & Mazibuko, in Gray, 1998a).

Developmental social workers focus on poverty alleviation and work towards social inclusion bringing marginalised groups into society’s mainstream. In most societies marginalised people live in rural communities, and women especially bear the brunt of rural poverty, along with those who cannot work due to physical disability or mental illness or to advanced age. While social workers cannot prevent the social, political and economic circumstances causing poverty, they can empower people to take control of their own lives and attempt to find creative and innovation solutions to social problems.

Developmental social workers operate from a strengths perspective
Right now, in your community, at this very moment, there is someone who is dreaming about doing something to improve his/her lot. If we could learn how to help that person to transform the dream into meaningful work, we would be halfway to changing the economic fortunes of the entire community (Sirrell, 1999, p. 1).

While needs are everywhere in social work discourse, empowerment models explore the strengths which people have. The way in which they overcome hardship is viewed as evidence of their resilience and power. The strengths perspective focuses on human resourcefulness, passion, energy, intelligence, imagination, curiosity, and creativity. Rather than work from a deficit or pathology focus, the strengths perspective holds that the restoration of health is contingent on the creation of an environment conducive to human growth and fulfillment. The social worker facilitates the removal of obstacles that get in the way of healthy development. These obstacles might be within the minds of clients, such as negative thoughts or lack of faith in their own ability, or in the system, such as negative labels and stereotypes, or in policies, such as those which create unfriendly bureaucratic practices. In this way, the social worker facilitates the transformation of people’s vision and dreams into reality.

Developmental social workers use assets-based community development
Individuals, families and communities have strengths and it is on these that they rebuild themselves (Gray, 2001).

Assets-based community development (ABCD) is a strengths-based approach which begins with a process of community engagement where the community worker is a facilitator and a partner in helping the community unleash its collective potential. It focuses on assets and resources rather than needs and problems. ABCD practitioners compile assets registers working from the premise that the community knows best; the community, not the worker, is the expert (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1996). Networking is extremely important to this model of community development and the facilitator is constantly ‘joining the dots’, bringing people with similar interests, talents, skills, and knowledge together to work co-operatively with one another. ABCD is essentially about harnessing non-material assets and resources, such as people’s participation, community support and naturally occurring social networks, and combining these strengths into organised community programs around issues of common concern.

Developmental social work implies political participation
The political nature of social work derives from the activities in which social workers engage to remove social injustice (Gray, Collett van Rongen, Rennie & Gaba, 2002).
Understanding how social workers can and do participate in politics is pivotal to the pursuit of human rights and social justice. Underlying the political activities of social workers is their motivation to right some wrong, to improve some policy, or to change some practice. One important dimension of social workers’ political activity is usually referred to as the ‘policy dimension’ of social work practice where social workers implement, analyse, comment on, influence, and generally work towards making policies just and meaningful. Policy is usually the vehicle through which clients are given access to services and resources, as well as to protection from harm. Thus social workers’ pursuit of social justice, by its very nature, gives their work a political dimension. Social workers engage in political activities as lobbyists, campaigners, advocates, voters, persuaders, collaborators, communicators, activists, witnesses, and individualists (Dietz Domanski, 1998). Thus one way in which social workers engage in social development is through their political activities aimed at securing social justice and human rights for their clients and communities.

Developmental social workers use an inductive approach to policy practice

... human need and human development (should be) the ultimate value framework for our political analysis (Christian Bay, in Sirolli, 1999, p. 21).

An inductive approach to policy analysis and development works from a bottom-up, people-centred, humanistic, strengths perspective. It sees policy formulation as an inductive, negotiated or dialogical process and social problems as being socially constructed, that is, “shaped by who is doing the looking” and which “can be reconceptualised to more clearly reflect the reality of the people who are experiencing them” (Chapin, 1995, p. 508). Inductive policy practice holds that it is essential that the client’s voice is heard, that situations are framed from the clients’ point of view and that clients themselves are involved in policy making processes. It listens to clients’ stories of strength, resilience and survival and attempts to make these the “linchpin for action” (Weick et al, in Chapin, 1995, p. 512). It is future-oriented and focuses consistently on mobilising resources that can improve the situation (Saleebey, in Early & Glen Maye, 2000).

Developmental social work involves consultation

Consultation is a facilitative, empowering process which is consistent with social work’s changing role in society and its professional image and status (Stevens, in Gray, 1998a).

Many social workers work in organisations where they are ideally placed to consult with people at all levels to further the aims of developmental social work whether this consultation be at an international, national, regional, or local level. The fundamental difference to these extreme levels of the consultation spectrum is that at the international level the social worker needs to operate as an expert while at the local level, the social worker needs to pay full attention to the experience and knowledge of participants who best know their own capacities and strengths.

Developmental social workers do casework

Social development forces social workers to use integrated practice methods and therein lies its greatest value (Sturgeon, in Gray, 1998a).

For developmental social work to flourish, it requires a harmonious social and political environment which provides institutional support through its social policies and development programs. Developmental social work differs in its focus and application rather than in its theory or methodology and social work’s philosophy is entirely consistent with that of social development (Gray, 1997). Thus casework remains important. Work on the individual and family level occurs alongside group and community development interventions, organisational development and policy change. In this sense, development social work is a variant of the ecosystems perspective where community development rather than casework predominates.

Developmental social workers use facilitative group work models

The roots of group work are in social reform, democratic participation, social action, mutual aid, and concern with vulnerable and oppressed populations (Birnbaum & Auerbach, 1994, p. 333).

All community development interventions take place through the medium of groups of various sizes with differing purposes and participation is central to all developmental social work approaches. Whether the approach is through management, through community development or through group work, people must be directly and actively involved in designing and implementing programs. Facilitative group work makes social workers participants in group processes where their main goal is to pass on their knowledge and skills so that people are empowered through their practice (Rooth, in Gray, 1998a).

Developmental social workers are social entrepreneurs

Everybody does better when everybody does better.
Across the world, entrepreneurship is going through a revival at a time when, at least at the grassroots or local community level, there is renewed interest in self-employment, informal sector or small business development. The failure of governments, corporations and markets to generate enough jobs for the unemployed is in large part the reason for the burgeoning of small individual or micro-enterprises across diverse contexts. This means that social entrepreneurship or 'Enterprise Facilitation' has become "the social technology of choice for job creation" (Sirolli, 1999, p. 3). Enterprise Facilitation is a respectful person-centred approach that rests on the belief that people, not formulas, create and run successful businesses, in so doing constantly reshaping the economic landscape. It was founded on the assumption that self-motivation, energy and intelligence exists everywhere and that harnessing these assets, rather than the introduction of technology, is the key to successful community economic development. "Technology is only an asset to human growth and development if it is appropriate to a specific situation" (Sirolli, 1999, p. 19). Sustainable solutions lay in finding technologies that were in tune with local resources, know-how, means, and culture.

"... to respect other cultures: we have to wait to be invited to share other people's problems, we have to listen with an open mind, and we have to leave behind our own prejudices and assumptions of superiority" (Sirolli, 1999, p. 15).

Sirolli (1999) based his 'Enterprise Facilitation' approach on the psychological theories of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. He said the first question the enterprise facilitator asks is: "Do you know anyone in town who is currently thinking of becoming involved in setting up a business?" (Sirolli, 1999, p. 31). Far from being an individualistic approach, Sirolli demonstrates that by helping people achieve what they want to achieve, both personal and broader community needs are satisfied. Individual businesses are essentially social enterprises for they benefit the community in a variety of ways, inter alia, by offering them employment, training, skill development, or a product they can consume, use or just enjoy. Social entrepreneurs recognise that real empowerment comes from the achievement of economic independence and autonomy.

Developmental social work involves partnership development
Partnerships provide space for creative practice (Jfo, 2001).

Like assets-based community development, partnership building is a strengths-based approach which involves identifying, locating and building on the assets, strengths, capacities, and skills already existing in a given situation. Partnerships imply mutuality, exchange, sharing, and dialogue as the means through which people learn from one another how best to tackle local challenges. Social workers have the skills necessary for partnership building and engaging and networking with people at all levels. They are familiar with the relationship between the government and non-government sectors in social service provision and recognise the key role of the community, especially in community development. However, the trimming of government services, economic rationalism or the shrinking welfare state has led to increased interest in the role of business or the corporate and economic sectors as partners with government and community in social development. Termed the social economy or 'Third Way' (Giddens, 2000), there is recognition that social service provision and community development rests largely on the development of partnerships between these key sectors. As stated by Fitzgerald, McLennan and Munslow (1997), before wide-scale, sustainable social development can be achieved, there is a need to strengthen the civil service, to build civil society and to engage the private business sector in a tripartite socio-economic development partnership.

Developmental social workers prefer participatory action research approaches
People know what is needed in their communities and have the ability and talent to find their own solutions.

Research is as important to developmental social work as it is to other forms of social work practice. However, the participation of service recipients and beneficiaries in their own welfare and development is integral to sound developmental social work practice. Participatory action research is valued for its empowering and emancipatory strategies (Collett van Rooyen, in Gray, 1998a). Consistent with the strengths perspective and assets-based approach to community development, participatory action research places a high value on the knowledge and experience of people, particularly those people whose knowledge and experience has been suppressed or dominated by others (Karger, 1983). It has been defined as "an experiential research process where people are collectively involved on an equal basis in collective action aimed at knowledge development, education, social change and empowerment" (van Rooyen & Gray, 1995). Mulenga (1994) referred to it as an "emancipatory approach to knowledge production and utilization" (p. 29), which involves local people as researchers in seeking solutions to community problems and in taking collective action to deal with them (Maguire & Mulenga, 1994). To distinguish it from community development, since it
proceeds through similar stages of community engagement, consultation, planning, and action, participatory action research involves the systematic study of a problem or issue, which applies the same rigour as ordinary research, but additionally involves non-researchers as researchers in the process.

In summary, developmental social work is a type of social work that affirms the profession’s commitment to poverty alleviation and social inclusion, recognises the link between social and economic development, and construes welfare as an investment in human capital rather than a drain on limited resources. It is a type of social work which diverges from the residual, service-oriented approach directed at special categories of people in need to strengths-based, respectful people-centred approaches, such as those outlined above, which place people in local communities at the centre of development. In a sense developmental social work shares ecosystems thinking about holistic interventions at different levels of activity, individual, family, group, community, policy, local, and global. The strengths perspective is ideally suited to this form of social work for at its core is a belief in people and their propensity to change. There is increasing scepticism about the government’s ability to provide whether it is jobs or services and there is a great deal of anti-government and anti-welfarist sentiment within the social entrepreneurship literature. This is where social work has an important job to do in showing how institutional services can become responsive to local needs and in networking to marshalling resources for community development.

The Social Work Curriculum

It is impossible to teach students everything they need to know about every problem they are likely to face and every context in which they might work. What is most important is to teach students to be resourceful, to learn how to locate information and to find creative solutions to problems. Most of all, the goal is to produce critically reflective practitioners who are able to think on their feet and to apply their knowledge and skills to a wide variety of contexts. This approach requires that students be presented with a mindset which sees the world in a certain way. Students need to be presented with a world of uncertainty where human behaviour and social phenomena are ever changing variables that cannot be easily reduced to a series of readily generalised laws. This implies that social work education should not provide students with cookbook approaches or “ready answers of the ‘how to do it’ variety” (Lef, 1988, p. 23). It should instead seek to encourage students to use their intellect and to find innovative, creative alternatives. As stated by Papell and Skolnik (1992), social work practice is more than an intellectual process. They emphasised the importance of relationship, imagination, creativity, and artistry in the belief that learning must be an exciting, stimulating process, a process of discovery rather than only the digestion of existing knowledge. Students need to understand that the process of knowledge building is never complete, that they are not mere recipients of knowledge but also actors in the process of knowledge development. Social work, especially, through its fieldwork education program, provides students with an ideal opportunity to test out new knowledge and to mould and adapt it to the real world that they encounter in their practice.

Social work educators have to prepare social workers for current and future practice (Ramphal, 1994). A teaching curriculum must be designed around what educators hope to achieve; its objectives derive from the kind of practitioner one wants to produce. The social work curriculum is designed then to produce critically reflective practitioners able to:

- **Respond to an ever-changing environment**: The educational process needs to transform students into social workers who are responsive to the changing context in which they will work and to be involved in a wide and diverse range of functions, activities and roles (Bernstein, 1995). Therefore, social work cannot be purely an academic subject since it straddles the divide between the university and the community.

- **Think critically**: Students need to be able to think clearly and logically, and give sound reasons and explanations for the decisions they make and the actions they take, and justify them in terms of the theory and values of social work.

- **Make ethical decisions**: They need to see the relationship between and grasp the importance of social work goals and values and the commitments they make in relation to the ethical and political dimensions of practice.

Most social work curricula provide a generalist education which include the following:

- **Social work theory and research** where students learn the knowledge base of social work and research methods. They become familiar with diverse theories, such as *inter alia* critical, structuralist, feminist, ecosystems, psychosocial, developmental, postmodern, and constructivist theory. They learn both qualitative and quantitative research methods and are introduced to debates about evidence-based practice and interpretive approaches.

- **Social work practice** including casework, group work, community work, social development, social policy, supervision, administration, and management.
• **Practice contexts** including child and family welfare, deviance, disability, corrections, mental health, and medical practice settings.
• **Social problems** including poverty, unemployment, alcoholism and substance abuse, AIDS, and housing.
• **Contemporary social issues** including gender, sexuality, violence, racism, cultural sensitivity, and women's issues.
• **Policy and legislation** including child welfare, criminal procedures, alcoholism, mental health, and social security.

Additionally, a developmental social work curriculum needs to focus on the strengths perspective and within it, assets-based community development, social entrepreneurship, partnership development, participatory action research, and an inductive approach to policy practice. It also needs to provide a sound overview of policy shifts giving rise to changes within welfare that are forcing social workers to re-evaluate their practice. Incisive critical debate is needed as to social work's emancipatory values and whether or not they match its practice. Social development offers a praxis for the sound fulfillment of social work values but the crucial stumbling block is whether or not social workers see development as a valid role for themselves.

**Conclusion**

While social development as a field of study is growing, it has yet to develop a strong theoretical basis (Midgley, 2001). Even though it may be said to constitute a form of practice in diverse contexts across the world, it is not a form of practice with which social work readily identifies, despite its harmony with social work goals and values. Mayadas and Elliott (2001) suggested that social development has the potential to enrich social work's empowerment, strengths, assets, multicultural, feminist, and global perspectives and they acknowledged its links to macrostructural practice. However, they recognised that "few attempts have been made to operationalize a social development approach to social work in practice terms" (p. 11). This paper suggests a strengths praxis for social development in the belief that developmental social work derives from an inherent faith in people and their propensity to find their own solutions to life's challenges. Democratic, participatory, people-centred approaches stem from a respectful, human rights value system and the view that social justice requires that people be given equal opportunities in life, equal access to society's resources, and self-determination in making decisions that affect themselves or their communities. The strengths perspective is a radical departure from conventional community development approaches, which focus largely on needs, gaps, problems, and deficits. To this extent it provides the critical edge needed for empowering development practice. Even though development is not a mode of practice which social workers have readily adopted, South Africa provides a unique example of government policy changes that have forced social workers to re-evaluate social work education and practice and to move to embrace a developmental social work approach. This paper is an attempt to articulate the relationship between social development and social work and to suggest a strengths-based developmental social work model as one way in which to operationalize this as a practice form for social work. A curriculum for developmental social work is suggested though the question of whether this is a valid direction for social work worldwide remains open for discussion and debate.

**References**


Correspondence to:
Mel Gray
Professor of Social Work and Head of the School of Social Sciences
The University of Newcastle
School of Social Sciences
University Drive
Callaghan 2308
NSW Australia
Mel.Gray@newcastle.edu.au