

School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

Stefani Burosch¹, Gwendolyn Fearing-Afflick², Jenny Athanasiou-Malisa³, Andréanne Fleck Saito⁴, Tracey Grose⁵, Geer Harvey⁶, Kimberley Sherman⁷, Rick Csiernik⁸

Abstract: *School social work (SSW) as a unique and specialized field of social work practice emerged in North America nearly 120 years ago. In the Canadian province of Ontario, the formal designation of ‘school social worker’ has been used since 1945. Despite this rich history, little documentation exists about the development and context of SSW in Canada. The aim of this article is to stimulate and contribute to the emerging scholarly literature on SSW practice in Canadian K-12 public schools. The first half of the article provides a brief overview of the history of SSW, its emergence and organization within the Canadian and Ontario contexts. The latter half of the article introduces a practice framework for SSW in Ontario developed by the Association of Chief Social Workers – Ontario School Boards (ACSW-OSB) in 2019. The framework is discussed through the narrative reflections of six of the authors, all past or present members of the Ontario Association of Social Work (OASW) School Social Work Advisory Group (SSWAG), who represent a small convenience sample. A simple descriptive thematic analysis led to the development of four major themes: (1) the value of a practice framework for school social workers (SSWs) in Ontario; (2) the value of role integration and interprofessional practice; (3) the promise of SSW leadership; and (4) the critical importance of professional identity rooted in social work values and ethics. The article concludes with consideration of limitations and recommendations for future research and development of the framework.*

Keywords: Canada, school social work history, narrative research, Ontario, practice domain, practice framework, school social work

Author note

The authors' views expressed here are their own and do not represent those of their employers. The authors wish to thank the Ontario Association of School

¹Lakefield, Ontario, Canada

²Grow. Flourish. Achieve Counselling and Consulting Services, Greater Toronto Area, Ontario, Canada

³Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

⁴School Mental Health Ontario

⁵School Mental Health Ontario

⁶Peel Region, Ontario, Canada

⁷Peel Region, Ontario, Canada

⁸School of Social Work, King's University College

Board Social Work Leads, formerly the Association of Chief Social Workers – Ontario School Boards, for sharing their work on the framework and for their invaluable contribution to the preparation of this manuscript.

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Stefani Burosch.
Email: sburosch@gmail.com*

School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

School social work (SSW) in North America is approaching its 120th anniversary. The designation of ‘school social worker’ emerged in the Canadian province of Ontario in 1945 (Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010). Despite this rich history, little documentation exists about the development of the profession in Canada, particularly compared to the United States of America (USA) (Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010; Teasley & Richard, 2017). Additionally, Canada lacks a recognized model for SSW at the national or provincial level. In proposing the USA National SSW model, Frey et al., (2012) argued, “there is a critical need for a model of school social work to assist advocacy, practice, and research efforts related to the promotion, practice, and evaluation of school social work” (p. 131). Lack of role clarity, underappreciation, poor understanding of SSWs by school staff and policymakers (Frey et al., 2012), underutilization (Sherman, 2016), and confinement to practice behind closed doors (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018) are challenges in SSW, maintained or exacerbated by the lack of a practice framework.

This article seeks to contribute to the literature on SSW practice in Canadian K-12 public schools, with a focus on the province of Ontario. The first half of the article overviews the history of SSW in Canada; social work organization in Canada including within public education; the role of SSW practice; and a summary of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (School and Community System of Care Collaborative, 2022; Short et al., 2017; Short et al., 2022). The latter half of the article introduces the first edition of a framework for SSW developed in 2019 by the Association of Chief Social Workers - Ontario School Boards (ACSW-OSB), renamed the Ontario Association of School Board Social Work Leads (OASBSWL) in 2024 (OASBSWL, personal communication, December 5, 2024). The framework is explored through narrative reflections of the authors who are members of the Ontario Association of Social Workers

(OASW) School Social Work Advisory Group (SSWAG). A simple descriptive thematic analysis is presented. Considerations for future development and research are discussed.

Development of School Social Work in Canada

Prior to its introduction in Canada, SSW was occurring in the early 1900s in the northeastern USA with an initial focus upon social welfare (Constable & Alvarez, 2006; Jozefowicz et al., 2002; Morrison, 2006). Early SSWs used the title ‘visiting teachers’ or home and school ‘visitors’ to bridge the gap between home and school (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Franklin & Gerlach, 2006). These early practitioners were initially employed by community agencies that identified the education system as a potential vehicle for social change (Allen-Meaers, 2006; Costin, 1969).

Unlike in the USA, the development of SSW in Ontario and throughout Canada was primarily influenced by child labor laws and the introduction of compulsory school attendance legislation. The inclusion of social workers in Canadian schools only began in the 1940s as a response to student truancy and attendance-related concerns (Huxtable, 2022). In this capacity, SSWs were tasked with reducing student absenteeism to meet legislative requirements (Huxtable, 2022). In the 1970s there was a dramatic shift in Ontario toward a more holistic model of SSW (Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010). Given the connection between attendance and mental health (Kelly et al., 2016), the contemporary focus of the SSW role is on supporting student mental health and supporting educators and system leaders to develop capacity to respond to student mental health concerns (Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010; Mayor, 2021).

Organization of Social Work Practice in Canada

SSW practice in Canada exists within the broader context of the social work profession. A Canadian professional association for social workers (CASW) was formed in September 1926 (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). Later, there was differentiation of provincial associations, and the incorporation of Ontario’s Association of Social Workers (OASW) was enacted in 1964 (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). The OASW is the voice of social workers in Ontario (OASW, n.d.)

5 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

and engages in advocacy and government lobbying on behalf of the profession. The School Social Work Advisory Group (SSWAG) is an advisory group of the OASW composed of practicing SSWs. The group's mandate is to develop, promote, and advance the practice of SSW in Ontario (SSWAG, personal communication, November 4, 2024). Registration with professional associations and regulatory bodies builds credibility. A Master of Social Work and registration with a regulatory body are the primary requirements for Canadian SSWs (Huxtable, 2022). The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) is the regulatory body in the province of Ontario. The OCSWSSW was created when the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998 was proclaimed on August 15, 2000. Only registrants of the College can use the protected title 'social worker' (OCSWSSW, 2025).

Organization of School Social Work Practice in Ontario

SSWs are the primary providers of school-based mental health services in Ontario. Ontario has the largest number of SSWs in Canada, approximately 450 (Huxtable, 2022). Public education in Ontario is governed by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OMOE). Funding for primary and secondary education is obtained through taxation including sales tax on consumer purchases, income tax, business tax, and through an educational levy on municipally collected property tax (OMOE, 2025). The OMOE's budget for the 2024–2025 academic year was projected at \$29 billion with \$117.65 million allocated to funding for mental health (OMOE, 2024a). Education funding is allocated to school boards through core funding grants determined by the number of students in each jurisdiction. While most of the expenditure on salaries is budgeted for teachers, school boards are also funded to hire SSWs (OMOE, 2024b).

Within the MOE, SSW falls under the Student Support and Field Services Division, which includes the Special Education Branch and, as of the 2021–2022 school year, the Mental Health Branch (OMOE, 2023). The recent addition of the Mental Health Branch, combined with policy directives for school boards related to school mental health implementation, reflects the government's increased attention to youth mental health and the role of the education system in addressing

these needs (OMOE, 2022, 2024c). In recent years, the OMOE has increasingly focused on culturally relevant mental health services for equity-deserving groups including Indigenous, Black and racialized, and 2SLGBTQIA+ students (School Mental Health Ontario, 2025). In response, some school boards have employed SSWs with lived experience and who belong to equity deserving groups to better serve the needs of these student populations (SSWAG, personal communication, January 17, 2023).

Even though SSWs are the primary deliverers of mental health services in Ontario schools, the role often lacks clear definition and can vary between school boards. The CASW-ACTS (n.d.) described the role of SSWs as follows: individual counselling and support for students; family counselling and support for caregivers; student support groups; support to students and staff after a traumatic event; provision of education to caregivers, families, and staff; fostering communication amongst students, families and the school; facilitate referrals to community agencies; plan and deliver specialized activities for students, families and staff; develop and deliver community programming; and advocate for students, schools and communities.

Similarly, Vetere and Carley (2006) stated that SSWs “intervene and mediate daily between people and their environments to assist them with realizing their potential and resolving difficulties—injecting preventive strategies and removing barriers to growth as they go” (p. 175). As the largest regulated profession providing psychotherapy and counselling services in Ontario (OASW, 2022), Registered Social Workers (RSWs) are highly and uniquely skilled to recognize, intervene, and prevent mental health concerns amongst children and youth (SSWAG, personal communication, January 17, 2023). These attributes position SSWs well to complement the work of teachers and other educational staff. Given the range in this role, SSW is a specialized area of practice that offers diverse interventions to students, families and educational staff (Elswick et al., 2019; Huxtable, 1998). These diverse interventions are further understood, influenced, and defined in Ontario by the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model adopted over the last decade (OMOE, 2024c; Short et al., 2017).

The Multi-Tiered System of Support Model

The MTSS model is an approach to mental health promotion, prevention, and early identification and intervention (Short et al., 2022). This model places service delivery on a continuum that includes mental health promotion (universal), preventative interventions for at-risk students (targeted), and intensive services for the top tier most vulnerable students (individual/identified) (Short, 2016). Within this model, SSWs are positioned to provide regulated mental health and social work services at tiers two and three (OMOE, 2024c). The tiered model illustrates that the role of SSWs has expanded beyond attendance counselling, ‘visiting teachers’, and home and school ‘visitors’ to include intervention for student mental health. To facilitate this role shift, and as part of a broader approach to school mental health, the OMOE provides ongoing implementation support to school boards via an organization called School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON). SMH-ON helps boards integrate a systematic approach to evidence-based programming across the tiers of intervention (Short et al., 2022).

Under the guidance of SMH-ON and informed by the MTSS model, SSW practice in Ontario’s 72 school boards is increasingly characterized by the implementation of evidence-informed practice (OMOE, 2024c). Evidence-informed practice has received attention for its effectiveness on outcomes for children and youth. “Evidence based practice is a process of transparent, culturally sensitive, and evidence informed practice that uses the best available empirical evidence to help clients solve their problems” (Franklin & Kelly, 2009, p. 46). SSWs are encouraged to identify and use evidenced informed interventions to address a range of emotional and behavioural concerns. The focus on evidence-informed mental health services in school settings is yet another indicator of a shift in the role of SSWs that expands beyond truancy and school attendance. Consequently, SSWs support a myriad of complex student issues.

In addition to the implementation of evidence-informed practices, there is increased focus on equity, inclusion, and diversity. Schools are confronted with recognizing and addressing the ongoing effects of colonization and various forms of marginalization and oppression within the education system including anti-

Indigenous and anti-Black racism. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst to exposing physical and mental health inequities among racialized and otherwise marginalized populations (Jenkins et al., 2021; Sanford et al., 2022). Given the varied and growing complexities of SSW practice in Ontario, role definition and clarity remain significant concerns affecting SSWs' ability to effectively serve the province's diverse student population.

A Framework for School Social Work in Ontario

Despite a rich, evolving tradition of SSW in Ontario schools, a model or framework comparable to the well-established model in the USA (Frey et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2016), does not exist in the Canadian context (Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010). In a climate of limited resources coupled with the expanding role of SSW and increasing accountability measures in public education (Carpenter et al., 2012; MacLellan, 2009; Sattler, 2012), SSW leaders and practitioners recognize the need for a framework to guide their practice.

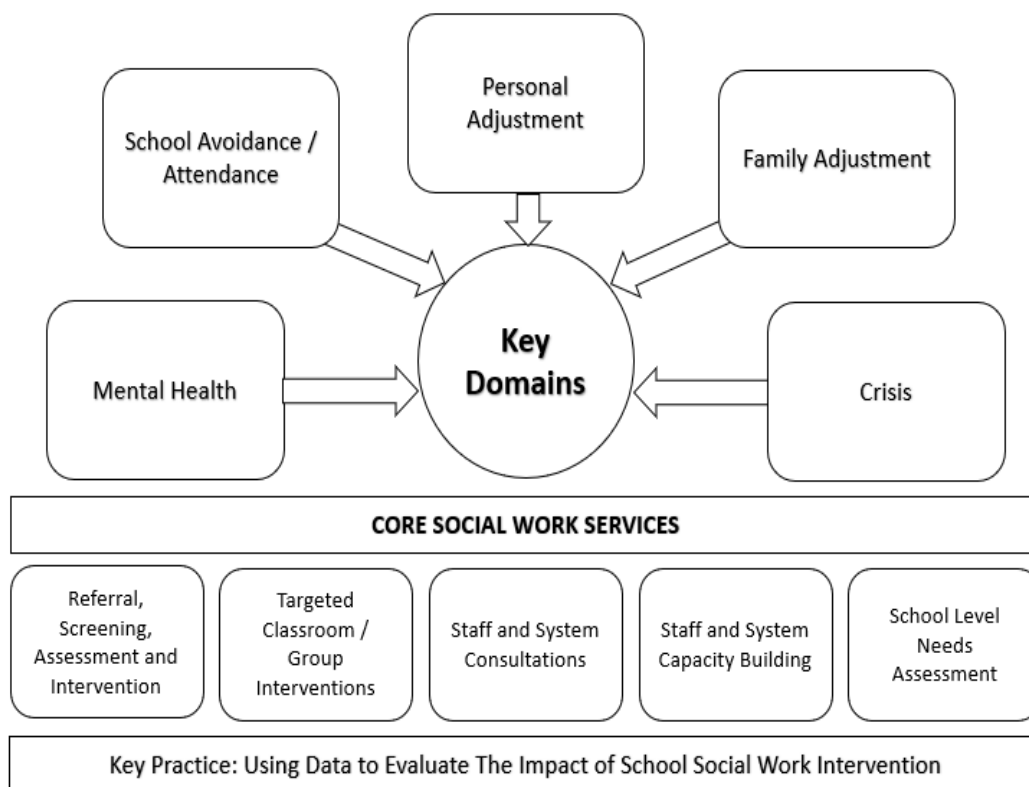
In 2015, members of the then ACSW-OSB met with the late Dr. Michael Kelly, researcher and professor of Social Work at Loyola University, Chicago to discuss a vision for SSW in Ontario. The goal was to develop a framework to provide consistency in the SSW role, while respecting the unique needs, diversity, and resources within each district. In January 2016, eighteen school boards partnered with Dr. Kelly to develop a SSW framework that includes five key domains, five core service areas, and one key practice (Figure 1) (ACSW-OSB, 2019).

The first edition framework for SSW was created by gathering insights on practice from managers of SSW, and by collecting data from SSWs about their practices in schools (ACSW-OSB, 2019). All SSWs in participating school boards were invited to complete a voluntary survey. A total of 377 SSWs responded, representing a 92% response rate. The survey identified five key domains of practice, five core social work services, and one key practice. These domains, core services, and key practice are described below. Dr. Kelly's consultative role with the project was completed in December 2017 when a report was presented to the ACSW-OSB (ACSW-OSB, 2019). The next sections summarize the five key

9 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

domains of practice, five core services, and one key practice identified in the first edition of the framework.

Figure 1: *First Edition of a Canadian School Social Work Framework*



Note. This figure depicts the first edition framework for school social work in Ontario. The framework emerged from project work conducted between 2015–2017 by managers of school social work in participating Ontario school boards and the late Dr. Michael Kelly. Reproduced with permission from “School Social Work: A Framework for School Social Work in Ontario,” by The Association of Chief Social Workers - Ontario School Boards, 2019, unpublished report. Copyright 2019 by the Association of Chief Social Workers - Ontario School Boards.

Five Key Domains of Practice

The framework’s five key domains of practice are mental health; school avoidance/attendance; personal adjustment; family adjustment; and crisis (ACSW-OSB, 2019). Mental health refers to interventions that SSWs provide in response to presenting problems such as anxiety and depression. Promoting well-being also falls within this domain. School avoidance and attendance capture the unique position of SSWs in addressing barriers to attendance. Complex social and historical factors contributing to school avoidance such as race, gender, class, generational trauma, or sexuality, are considered. Within this domain, SSWs may act in a clinical capacity, or they may act in the role of an attendance counsellor

under Section 26 (1-4) of the Ontario Education Act (1990). Personal adjustment refers to social, emotional, and behavioural challenges that a student might experience in response to stressors such as grief and loss, factors related to the social determinants of health, pregnancy, exposure to violence, adverse childhood experiences, peer conflicts, health issues, substance use, racial discrimination, sexual or gender identity, newcomer settlement, and colonization. Similarly, family adjustment refers to challenges arising from a wide range of stressors impacting a family's ability to cope. These factors include violence in the home or community; poverty; factors related to the social determinants of health; change in family structure; parental mental health; marginalization due to race, religion, or sexual or gender identity; and systemic racism, classism, or other forms of oppression. Finally, crisis intervention captures SSW interventions with students experiencing suicidal ideation or who are engaged in self-harming behaviours. It also includes support for the school following a school-based crisis or traumatic event. These events have the potential to cause significant emotional distress for individuals or to overwhelm the usual effective coping mechanisms of a system and can include hate crimes, racism, serious accidents, significant violence, sudden death or loss, and natural disasters (ACSW-OSB, 2019). In addition to the domains, SSWs identified five core services.

Core Services

Through the data collection, five core service areas were identified: (1) referral, screening, assessment and intervention; (2) targeted classroom/group interventions; (3) staff and system consultations; (4) staff and system capacity building; (5) school level needs assessment. These core service areas complement the MTSS model which underpins the work of SMH-ON (Short et al., 2017), creating alignment with the SSW framework for Ontario. The five core services are described in detail below.

Referral, Screening, Assessment and Intervention

The first core service area refers to individual treatment services. The Association recognized that SSWs require defined processes for referral, screening, assessment and service delivery to ensure efficient and effective use of

limited SSW resources. A six-step process was proposed and includes: identification of a need for service; obtaining informed consent or triage for risk; assessment and formulation; determination of needs and goal setting; intervention; and progress monitoring and evaluation. The final step of progress monitoring and evaluation might lead to the continuation, tapering, pausing, or completion of service depending on the student's progress and unique needs. Further, the Association identified that individual intervention services need to be provided within an anti-oppressive practice approach that values and affirms student identities (ACSW-OSB, 2019).

Targeted Classroom/Group Interventions

Whole class or small group prevention and intervention programs can enhance the efficiency of service because multiple students receive service at the same time. Research supports the effectiveness of evidence-informed practices in classrooms to develop students' social emotional learning skills (Durlak et al., 2022). These interventions support SSWs to enhance school climate and build teacher capacity, contributing to improved social, academic, and behavioural outcomes (Franklin & Kelly, 2009; Kelly et al., 2010). The Association proposed the following process to select and implement interventions: identify the need, behaviour, or skill gap; identify evidence-informed programming to address the need; select a group of participants through appropriate screening tools; and group delivery and evaluation (ACSW-OSB, 2019).

Staff and System Consultations

Staff and system consultation involves SSWs applying their professional expertise to provide guidance to school or board-based staff about a student or issue. The 'client' is considered the staff member seeking consultation. Consultation may or may not lead to a referral where the SSW provides direct service for the student or family. If a referral is opened, consultation also allows for ongoing collaboration with the staff member. The Association's recommended process for consultation involves three steps: a staff member has a question or concern that may fall within the five key domains; the SSW asks open ended questions to develop an understanding of the problem and to assess change

readiness; the SSW reflects and validates concerns, reframes behaviour, and helps to generate strategies (ACSW-OSB, 2019).

Staff and System Capacity Building

Staff and system capacity building involves SSWs sharing their practice knowledge and strategies related to social-emotional learning and mental health promotion within the MTSS model. The Association's recommended process for developing effective staff and system capacity building sets out four steps: determining if an identified professional learning need falls within the five key domains; determining the goal, audience, logistics, and current level of knowledge of the participants; collaboratively determining and co-creating content and format with educators; and delivering the learning and completing an evaluation (ACSW-OSB, 2019).

School Level Needs Assessment

School level needs assessment involves SSWs using school-based data such as school climate survey results, attendance data, the SMH-ON board wide scan and reflection tool, and other relevant school data, to tailor their services to meet the unique needs of their school. The Association's recommended process for engaging in school level needs assessment involves four steps: identifying school stakeholders to consult; reviewing the data; collaboratively completing an assessment of need; and setting timeframes to re-evaluate goals.

Evaluation

The final piece of the framework is characterized as a key practice: using data to evaluate the impact of SSW intervention. SSWs are encouraged to create data plans using tools such as screeners, standardized measures, and pre and post assessments to measure intended outcomes. While not widely practiced by SSWs represented in the survey, using data and evaluation is seen as important in demonstrating the value of SSW services (ACSW-OSB, 2019).

The preceding section summarized the Ontario framework for SSW. The OASBSWL continues to revise the framework and plans to produce a second edition. Presently, the Association is engaged in discussions about issues such as: impacts of COVID-19; consideration of U.S. influences on the framework

development; the need for critical reflection on the personal adjustment domain, specifically how the domain frames and responds to students' experiences of racism and other forms of oppression; the need to embed anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-ableism, and anti-Black racism into all aspects of the framework; consideration for the growth in membership and representation within the Association; and the need for flexibility in how the framework is applied in local contexts (OASBSWL, personal communication, Dec 5, 2024).

Methodology

This article aims to stimulate and contribute to the emerging scholarly literature on SSW practice in Canadian K-12 public schools by introducing and contextualizing the first edition of a Canadian SSW practice framework. The framework's strengths and areas for development are explored through the written narrative reflections of six of the eight authors who responded to the same three prompts: (1) Provide a brief introduction of yourself and where you practice; (2) How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge; (3) How you apply or don't apply the framework. These written narratives constituted the qualitative data for the article. The authors represent a convenience sample of past and present members of the OASW SSWAG.

Author Demographics

Author demographics were extracted from the narrative reflections and are summarized in Table 1. Many of the authors represent diverse perspectives, including experience with social justice and anti-oppressive practice. However, most authors identify as white, cisgender, and middle-class. The narrative contributors all work within public education which is predominately structured by Western norms, values, and approaches to learning and well-being. The authors acknowledge the biases, influences, and limitations that our personal and professional identities inevitably have on our reflections and on the meaning making process (Yan, 2016). Thus, we view this contribution to the literature as but one reflective discussion that might stimulate and enrich the profession and practice of SSW in Ontario and Canada more broadly.

Table 1: Author / Contributor Demographics

Author Name	Self-Description of Identity	Practice Context	Years in Practice	Approach to Practice in Our Own Words
Andréanne	White, cisgender, middle-aged, daughter of French immigrants, single parent of two	Consultant at School Mental Health Ontario, former SSW in a Catholic French language board	10+ years	“Heavily influenced by structural, ecological, psychosocial, and anti-oppressive theory and knowledge... [I work] at a systems level...to contribute to policy and to influence the use of upstream culturally relevant and affirming mental health promotion practices in schools.”
Geer	Black, cisgender, male, [I] came to this country as an immigrant, my family [came] for a better life	Manager of social work in an Ontario school board; former SSW in a rural Ontario high school, primarily white student population, increasing racialized population in the last 10 years, Black population making up the largest racialized group	10+ years	“My social work education...has allowed me to operate from a lens where anti-oppressive practice is at the heart of what I do...I make a point of being very visible in my school, and I start my day off in the front hallway greeting students as they enter the school.”
Jenny	White, middle-aged woman of European descent	Manger of SSW services at a mid-sized Ontario school board, student demographics include range of socio-economic backgrounds and many new immigrant families, Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities; former school board Mental Health Lead, former SSW	15+ years	“My role as manager [is] to support both the macro and micro system needs...I work alongside senior leaders to prioritize mental health and social work services to support students to reach their fullness of humanity”
Kimberley	Canadian born, white, married, cisgender female, mother, middle-age, middle-class, able-bodied	SSW in one of the largest publicly funded school boards in Ontario, located in a diverse community, large and vibrant newcomer population, access to provincially funded community services has not	14+ years	“These core beliefs [anti-oppression, social justice, and human rights in social work practice] remain at the heart of my work. My...practice applies a strength-based approach...establishing

15 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

Author Name	Self-Description of Identity	Practice Context	Years in Practice	Approach to Practice in Our Own Words
		kept pace with the regions' [growth], parents, students, and community members have demanded action on...equity issues		meaningful, hope inducing relationships"
Stefani	Canadian born, white, married, cisgendered, middle-aged, middle-class, and able-bodied woman of European descent	SSW in a mid-sized, geographically large school board in central Ontario serving mostly rural communities, areas of low socioeconomic status, predominately white student and staff populations, growing populations of self-identified Indigenous students and racialized student populations	15+ years	"Founded in the biopsychosocial approach...critical theoretical perspectives such as feminism, intersectionality, and anti-oppressive theory...My practice approach strives to support the immediate social, emotional, and mental health needs of each student while advocating for system change."
Tracey	Cisgendered Black woman of Jamaican Caribbean descent	On secondment to School Mental Health Ontario; former SSW in the USA and Ontario working in both elementary and secondary schools	20+ years	"As the only Black social worker in my board for over 15 years, I strive to amplify the voice of many marginalized...I work from an anti-oppressive lens...to remove barriers to children, youth, and families, optimizing their full potential in life."

Data Analysis

The authors adopted a qualitative approach to knowledge creation and meaning making, centering the authors' practice wisdom and experiences. Andreadou and Chatzifotiou (2023) suggested that such an approach offers "rich and compelling insights into the real worlds, experiences, and perspectives of ... clients as well as professionals" (p. 130). Six of the eight authors contributed written reflections about their experiences as practicing SSWs. These reflections served as the source of data for a simple descriptive thematic analysis focused on

the practice framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017). One of the authors, Stefani, reviewed the narratives and used counts of key words and phrases to identify emergent themes. Stefani and Gwendolyn, the latter of whom did not contribute a reflection to the article, further discussed and refined the themes. Themes were then member-checked and finalized with the remaining authors. Simple descriptive thematic analysis is common in social science fields, including social work, when researchers wish to center participants' viewpoints and to focus on description rather than interpretation of the data, particularly in introductory or exploratory work in an emergent area (Andreadou & Chatzifotiou, 2023; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Findings

This section presents the written responses to prompts (2) How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge; and (3) How you apply or don't apply the framework. Presenting the findings in this manner maintains the "rich and compelling insights into the real worlds, experiences, and perspectives" (Andreadou & Chatzifotiou, 2023, p. 130) of the contributors. It also honours that the perspectives and practices of SSWs are informed by our intersectional identities and the contexts in which we practice our profession (Mak, 2023; Yan, 2016). The narratives are presented below in alphabetical order by first name.

Andréanne

How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge. My experience working directly with students allowed me to observe how school environments contribute to the mental health and social well-being of students. They have the potential to elevate students to grow and thrive, just as they have the potential to dismiss, further marginalize and hurt. Taking stock of the student's strengths, their cultural and social identities, their environment, and the contexts within which the school and community operate are inextricably connected and relevant to understand how to best support. Supporting the mental health and well-being of young people in schools requires the work of many across the system including students, educators, parents/caregivers, school leaders, professional staff (like SSWs), and community cultural and mental health

supports. Working at a systems level is a unique opportunity to contribute to policy and to influence the use of upstream culturally relevant and affirming mental health promotion practices in schools.

How you apply or don't apply the framework. When I started out as an SSW, having access to a tool like the SSW framework would have been a welcome roadmap. My orientation [to the role] consisted of shadowing a senior SSW, peer support, participating in self-directed learning, and probably making a lot of mistakes. I also relied on my previous social work experiences and the OCSWSSW professional practice guidelines to carve out what I understood my role to be. My supervisor was a system principal who was an educator with little knowledge of the standards of practice. As a small team of SSWs, our work was misunderstood by many of our educator colleagues, and we often felt like a marginalized workforce disconnected from SSW colleagues in other school boards. As SSWs we often advocated for student rights and for our rights and responsibilities as professionals.

After years of piecemealing my own toolbox, I was pleased to see this [framework] come to life and imagined it could be valuable to support onboarding of new SSWs and to help individual boards adapt the framework to their own contexts. The framework has potential to articulate consistency in SSW as a profession. This framework is an ideal opportunity to highlight the role of SSW leadership, which unfortunately is not noted in the current framework. For SSW teams who struggle to access a supervisor with a social work designation, having this role outlined as part of the framework would provide leverage to have those conversations. This tool is not only about helping SSWs' frame their work but helping the education system better understand what we do. Another opportunity for this framework would be to reinforce social work core values to focus on social justice from an anti-oppressive, anti-racist stance, and to include critical reflection/reflexivity about the role and our work within the education system. This framework articulates the roles of SSWs as they are, and I think could be more visionary.

Geer

How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge. The focus of my practice is the mental health and wellbeing of all the students in the school. My social work education has allowed me to operate from a lens where anti oppressive practice is at the heart of what I do. Being embedded in the high school that I am at has allowed me to be involved in various initiatives. I make a point of being very visible in my school, and I start my day off in the front hallway greeting students as they enter. For me this is a tier one intervention as I am working to support the school culture. A big part of my role is identifying the gaps related to student needs. I've supported students in starting the county's first Jack Chapter (student lead mental health support group) and I have supported Black students in operating a Black Student Association. I've partnered with local community mental health agencies to provide DBT groups in our school, particularly because the community that I work in has limited transit. I've advocated with local mental health agencies to provide their service within our school as otherwise the young people in our community would have difficulty accessing service. The biggest challenge that I have as an SSW is getting young people connected to ongoing community mental health support. There are often long wait lists for service. The young people in this community also must travel long distances to seek adolescent crisis support. They are also limited in their ability to access a psychiatrist. In my school board, the support that the SSW provides to the school is part of a multidisciplinary team including special education, guidance, psychologist, behavioural specialist, and school administration.

How you apply or don't apply the framework. Referral, screening, targeted classroom interventions, staff and system consultation, and school level assessment are ways that my daily duties are carried out. The only portion that I am not usually involved in is family adjustment issues except during moments of crisis or if the student has given me consent [to involve family]. One of the parts of the framework I noted was the determination of how long a file could stay open. While my case numbers might be high, I feel that it is my responsibility to determine which files require my immediate attention. I think the framework

19 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

limits a SSW's ability to be flexible in determining which files are appropriate referrals. For me, every interaction that I have with a young person is beneficial, because when they are in crisis or having difficulty managing, I can rely on previous contact I might have had with them.

Jenny

How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge. SSW is a unique role within education. As a secondary profession within a large system, SSWs play an integral role in supporting students' overall mental health and well-being. SSWs are advocating for individual, student, and family needs, while educating system staff on how to best support and create safe and inclusive spaces, to ensure environments in which students can thrive academically, spiritually, and mentally. As a manager I support both the macro and micro system needs. I work alongside senior leaders to prioritize mental health and social work services to support students to reach their fullness of humanity. I provide education and training to system staff, including crisis response and consultation to SSWs and administrators. I also work with a team of social work professionals to look at best practices and evidence informed modalities, to ensure that interventions support student needs. There has been a shift in SSW with the increase of student needs, recognizing complex individual and family circumstances. Ongoing professional development has been a priority. With the support of SMH-ON, joint efforts support the need of SSWs and their unique ability to provide prevention and interventions in schools.

How you apply or don't apply the framework. In my board, all social work referrals are triaged using the framework. SSWs consult with school administration and staff to ensure that appropriate referrals are made following the framework key domains. Interventions are based in evidence informed practice and ongoing assessment of need. Although [high] caseloads, primarily in secondary schools, make it difficult to provide ongoing consistent interventions, goals are set using measures to create some consistency. The primary goal is to ensure that staff and students know that there is support available.

Kimberley

How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge. I am a graduate of institutions that centered anti-oppression, social justice, and human rights in social work practice. These core beliefs remain at the heart of my work. My practice applies a strength-based approach to working with students and families. I am committed to establishing meaningful, hope-inducing relationships with my students as we work together in counselling, problem solving, and accessing information and resources. Central to my practice is a focus on positive attributes and strengths of my clients as this can positively affect a student's sense of dignity, capacities, rights, and self-worth. This approach lends itself to the SSW role as an empowering advocate for students and families, important in an institution where oppressive policies and practices may contribute to unsafe and unequal experiences for marginalized groups.

In the wake of COVID-19, demand for mental health supports [in schools] surged. Students are experiencing unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression, trauma and chronic stress, school violence is on the rise, and school avoidance and absenteeism persist. The current volume of referrals, complexity of cases and systemic issues can be overwhelming. In a given day, I may find myself working with a student in crisis, providing professional consultation to school teams, pivoting to facilitate a suicide awareness training, picking up and delivering groceries from a local food program, presenting at an evening school meeting, sharing community resources, and advocating for system change. Multiplied across up to six schools, there are simply not enough SSWs to meet the growing needs.

How you apply or don't apply the framework. Having a strong sense of professional identity is essential to effectively working in an education setting. Working primarily with educators and in multi-disciplinary teams, I have at times encountered a lack of understanding of the SSW role. SSWs can struggle to be recognized as integral members of intervention planning and as contributors to school leadership. This can be especially challenging given that we often work independently and across multiple locations. The framework is an essential tool for SSWs to use and share with educators and professional support colleagues as

we attempt to collectively clarify our role. In my school board, the former manager played an integral role in the framework development and championed its implementation. The framework has helped define our services, provide guidance to school staff on appropriate referrals, and equip SSWs with tools for assessment and intervention.

While I believe SSWs in my board are valued, differing expectations among colleagues with diverse educational backgrounds and perspectives can at times leave SSWs feeling underutilized or misunderstood. This dynamic can be further complicated when these same colleagues supervise or contribute to performance appraisal feedback. I carry a copy of the framework and reference its key domains and core services in discussions with school administrators. The framework supports constructive dialogue, allowing me to speak with confidence about readiness for change, client motivation, and how these align with school goals. While the framework provides guidance, there may be opportunities to highlight the leadership role SSWs can play in advancing social justice, as well as contributing to policy and practice development that enhances the learning environment for all students. Opportunities to engage in system-level leadership, alongside educators, has the potential to strengthen student outcomes.

Stefani

How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge. As a new graduate, I was passionate about social work's core mission of social justice. My social work education provided a strong foundation in the biopsychosocial approach and in critical theoretical perspectives such as feminism, intersectionality, and anti-oppressive practice theory. However, when I entered practice, it quickly became apparent that public education, then and now, continues to reflect and (re)produce dominant Western perspectives and norms. The work of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada has increased awareness of this issue however much work remains to be done to disrupt and decolonize education to make it inclusive and responsive to all students. Over the last fifteen years, I have attempted to foreground issues of power, privilege, oppression and a holistic view of the child. However, I find my work as an SSW

increasingly conditioned by the dominant evidence-based practice narrative. This narrative often frames mental health challenges as pathologies located within the individual. Maintaining an integrated practice identity that balances critical and dominant perspectives in practical ways is a challenge. My practice approach strives to support the immediate social, emotional, and mental health needs of each student while continuing to advocate for system change.

How you apply or don't apply the framework. The framework is not explicitly applied at my school board however our approach reflects many elements of the framework. Generally, our team practices across the key domains except for school avoidance and attendance. Attendance functions were recently removed from our portfolio in an intentional shift away from the 'truancy officer' and 'friendly visitor' model. Our new model aligns with the direction of SMH-ON and the MTSS. With respect to the core services, our team continues to work on developing clear referral, screening, assessment, and service delivery methods. We are also working on integrating targeted classroom and small group interventions. Time to collaborate with educators and school staff, clear communication about the role of the SSW, and balancing time spent on individual versus small group and classroom work, present challenges. The remaining core services are currently occurring in limited ways. Time constraints, being stretched across up to six school sites, and limited opportunity for interprofessional learning and collaboration represent challenges in these areas.

Tracey

How you practice school social work, major focus and challenge. Offering mental health services to children and youth in schools is an ideal opportunity to remove the extensive waitlists in community support or the expense of private mental health services. I am currently on secondment (loan) to SMH-ON. As a cisgendered Black woman of Jamaican Caribbean descent, I work from an anti-oppressive lens seeking to remove barriers to children, youth, and families, optimizing their full potential in life. I am a social justice advocate who works to affect systemic change in the educational system's colonial and structural anti-Black and anti-Indigenous processes.

How you apply or don't apply the framework. I believe a SSW framework would provide consistency in how SSW is implemented across the province. I was trained in the USA where there are national associations and research efforts to provide structured supports in schools. These supports are evidence-based and reviewed and adjusted for improved outcomes. I believe a framework to structure our work is essential. I believe the framework does not include sufficient anti-oppressive practices and strategies, but reviews and edits could include these perspectives.

Analysis and Discussion

The following section presents the results of the thematic analysis which led to the development of four major themes: (a) the value of a practice framework for SSWs in Ontario; (b) the value of role integration and interprofessional practice; (c) the promise of SSW leadership; and (d) the critical importance of professional identity rooted in social work values and ethics. The analysis of the authors' narrative contributions is summarized in Table 2 and includes sample quotes demonstrating each theme. The discussion elaborates on these themes and contextualizes them within the research literature. Limitations and implications for future research and development of the framework are discussed.

Table 2: *Thematic Analysis*

Theme	Sample Quotes
Value of a Canadian School Social Work (SSW) Practice Framework	“After years of piecemealing my own toolbox with colleagues...I was pleased to see this [framework] come to life and imagined it could be valuable to support onboarding of new SSWs and to help individual boards adapt the framework.” – Andréanne “[A] school social work framework is an essential tool for social workers to use and share with educators and professional support colleagues as we attempt to collectively clarify our role.” – Kimberley “I believe a school social work framework would provide consistency in how school social work is implemented across the province.” – Tracey

Theme	Sample Quotes
Value of Role Integration and Interprofessional Practice	“Most of the high schools have a dedicated social worker who supports...the student population. I am really pleased with this model as it allows me to become embedded in the school where I work.” – Geer “SSWs are advocating for individual, students, and family needs, while educating system staff on how to... create inclusive spaces.” – Jenny “Working primarily with educators and in multi-disciplinary teams, I have at times encountered a lack of understanding of the SSW role.” – Kimberley “Time to collaborate with educators and school staff... and limited opportunity for interprofessional learning...represent challenges.” – Stefani
Promise of School Social Work (SSW) Leadership	“This framework is an ideal opportunity to highlight the critical role of school social work leadership within school boards.” – Andréanne “[My role] requires working alongside senior leaders, to prioritize mental health...” – Jenny “There may be opportunities to highlight the leadership role SSWs can play in advancing social justice, as well as contributing to policy and practice development...Opportunities to engage in system-level leadership, alongside educators, has the potential to strengthen student outcomes. ” – Kimberley
Professional Identity Rooted in Social Work Ethics and Values	“Another opportunity of this framework would be to better reinforce social work core values.” – Andréanne “Having a strong sense of professional identity is essential to effectively working in an education setting.” – Kimberley “As a new graduate, I began my work in schools passionate about social work’s core mission of social justice...However, I find my work...increasingly conditioned by the dominant evidence-based practice narrative” – Stefani “I am a social justice advocate who works to also affect systemic change in the educational system’s colonial and structural anti-Black and anti-Indigenous processes.” – Tracey

Value of a School Social Work Practice Framework

SSW has a rich history in North America and is established in countries around the world as an increasingly specialized area of social work practice (Huxtable, 2022; Lalonde & Csiernik, 2010). As reflected in the narrative contributions of the authors, the Canadian context is no exception. In the wake of

the COVID-19 pandemic, heightened rates of distress, loneliness, depression, social isolation, and suicidality amongst children and youth in Ontario-experienced disproportionately by students who are racialized, have special needs, or are otherwise marginalized (Short et al., 2022)-resulted in acute awareness for increased school-based mental health services across the tiers of intervention (OMOE, 2022). Ontario SSWs have been at the heart of the response. Yet despite the specialized knowledge and skills that SSWs have long contributed to student success and well-being in Ontario, a practice framework within the Canadian context has remained elusive. As a result, Canadian SSWs may face many of the challenges commonly recognized in the international literature including lack of role clarity, professional marginalization, misuse or underutilization, and high caseloads (Peckover et al., 2013; Sherman, 2016). Indeed, SSWs in Ontario report challenges due to high workload compounded by escalated mental health issues following the COVID-19 pandemic, and long waitlists for community services creating a need to ‘fill the gap’ (SSWAG, personal communication, January 17, 2023). In a climate of limited resources and heightened accountability, the authors identified the value of a practice framework to support consistency and effectiveness of SSW interventions.

Value of Role Integration and Interprofessional Practice

In an exploration of international SSW models, Huxtable (2022) suggested that ideally, the role of the SSW is broad and flexible, enabling the SSW to apply their specialized knowledge, values, and skills to address a wide range of concerns affecting student success and well-being, and to act as part of a multidisciplinary team. Similarly, Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome (2018) argued that SSW models need to move away from SSW practice *in* and *for* schools to SSW practice *with* schools. The latter positions the SSW as a partner, as opposed to a guest or employee, whose primary tasks include supporting the needs of all students through integrating social work knowledge, values, and skills into educational practices and policies. The first edition of the practice framework outlined in this article is aligned with a broad and flexible approach to the role, however, as reflected in the author narratives, the role of the SSW as a key partner

in fostering school culture could be better defined. Additionally, the framework could more clearly articulate the role as part of a multidisciplinary team across the tiers of intervention. In other words, a clear definition of SSW *with* schools is required. Indeed, interprofessional collaboration, defined by Bronstein (2003) as, “an effective interpersonal process that facilitates the achievement of goals that cannot be reached when individual professionals act on their own” (p. 299), has been identified as a promising feature of SSW practice and leadership that can enhance outcomes for students (Ball, 2018; Gherardi et al., 2022).

The Promise of School Social Work Leadership

Linked to the theme of role integration and collaboration, the theme of SSW leadership emerged as an area for further research and framework development. Perry et al. (2022) argued that leadership skills in SSW are valuable and needed. Teasley (2018) stated that SSWs possess the knowledge base to take on leadership roles in schools and to facilitate the needed shift away from professional silos to interprofessional collaboration. SSW leadership skills are required to effectively navigate the host setting of schools and the education system more broadly (Perry et al., 2022). A wide range of leadership opportunities for SSWs exist including: collaborating with school administrators (Scott, 2017; Sherman, 2016); creating shared visions and leading interdisciplinary collaboration (Franklin & Gerlach, 2006); engaging in staff supervision, instructional collaboration, and academic leadership initiatives (Sherman, 2016); developing programs, consulting, and building capacity of school and district staff (Teasley & Richard, 2017); advocating for human rights and reducing barriers to education (Huxtable, 2013); and participating in social activism, systems and policy change (Villarreal Sosa & Nuckolls, 2018). In addition to these leadership possibilities, there are calls for critical SSW leadership centering anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing practice approaches to address the real harms that students experience in schools (Ball & Skrzypek, 2020; Daftary, 2020; Kelly, 2020; Meza, 2020). The literature on leadership as a feature of SSW practice is steadily growing (Elswick et al., 2018;

Elswick et al., 2019; Vyshedsky, 2023). This promising dimension of SSW is an area that should be considered in the second edition of the framework.

Professional Identity Rooted in Social Work Ethics and Values

Several of the authors reflected on the critical importance of professional identity as SSWs. Huxtable (2022) asserted that SSWs need to maintain control over their role definition and to be involved in policy making with respect to school-based services to ensure alignment with social work ethics and standards. Given the increasing mental health needs of students and their families, and the recognition that schools are ideal places to provide mental health supports (Short et al., 2017), Ontario SSWs have an opportunity to (re)assert their professional identity, values, ethics, and to clearly define their role within the multidisciplinary educational team.

Themes linked to the OCSWSSW professional ethic of advocating for social justice, such as combating anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and Islamophobia, addressing power and privilege in the education system through advocacy and involvement in systems-level work, and working from an anti-oppressive and critically informed practice perspective, emerged through the authors' narrative reflections. These themes align with recent scholarly literature calling for SSWs to stay grounded in social work values and ethics, to support anti-oppression, anti-racism, and decolonizing efforts, and to assume leadership roles in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within public education (Mak, 2023; Meza, 2020). These themes further align with an awareness of the need for greater representation of Indigenous and racialized mental health workers in schools to provide culturally and linguistically relevant supports (SSWAG, personal communication, January 17, 2023). While the first edition of the framework speaks to these themes within the document's text, they are not immediately evident in the framework itself. As several authors identified in their narratives, and in alignment with the direction of the OASBSWL, these areas of the framework hold opportunities for development.

Implications for Future Research and Framework Development

The preceding discussion highlighted areas where the framework is aligned with existing research on well-established North American social work models, and areas for development within the Canadian context. Future efforts should endeavor to include input from all Ontario school boards, and to include the voices of managers, SSWs providing direct services, and those in system level roles. Consideration is also needed for the Catholic, English and French language contexts of public education in Ontario. Finally, it is imperative in the Canadian context that an SSW framework includes the voices and culturally relevant approaches of Indigenous practitioners and communities, Black and racialized SSWs, and those whose identities represent otherwise marginalized groups. Such approaches are vital to reconciliation and decolonizing efforts, affirming student identities, and addressing experiences of racial trauma, discrimination, and other intersecting forms of harm that occur in education settings (Ball, 2020; Meza, 2020).

Limitations

The qualitative approach of the article and use of a small convenience sample introduced several limitations including the potential for bias on theme development and analysis, risk of oversimplification and/or overgeneralized understanding of the data, and a lack of generalizability of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Given that research on Canadian SSW is in its infancy, the intent of the authors was not to conduct a study adhering to rigid methodological guidelines, nor to make claims to strict trustworthiness or generalizability criteria. Rather, through a simple descriptive thematic analysis of personal reflections and practice insights, the authors sought to stimulate and contribute to the emerging dialogue and scholarly literature on the development of an SSW practice framework within the Canadian context. The rich personal narratives bring life to the framework and provide an entry point for ongoing research and dialogue. As the framework continues to develop, further research using a range of qualitative, quantitative,

anti-oppressive, and decolonizing methodologies are needed to understand how SSWs in Ontario individually and collectively implement the framework as it currently exists. Additionally, as it evolves, research should evaluate how the framework impacts SSWs' practice experiences, and how SSWs engage in knowledge creation and meaning making within their work more broadly.

Conclusion

In the absence of a SSW practice framework, Ontario school boards may conceptualize, fund, and implement the role differently, resulting in lack of role clarity, underutilization of SSWs unique skill set, and inconsistencies in service delivery. This article is the first of its kind to introduce and discuss an SSW practice framework in the Canadian context. The findings pointed to the value of a framework to promote consistency and effectiveness of practice, to realize the full potential of SSWs as leaders and partners in education, and to foster a strong sense of professional identity rooted in social work values and ethics. The discussion highlighted areas of nuance required to reflect the unique needs of Ontario's diverse student populations whose lives are influenced by the ongoing effects of colonization and other forms of trauma, marginalization, and oppression. In the words of one author, "this framework articulates the roles of SSWs as they [currently] are." The present moment offers an opportunity for Ontario SSW leaders and practitioners to build on this first effort, and to be visionary in their definition of the role as they endeavor to serve students, families, and communities in the 21st century.

References

- Allen-Meares, P. (2006). One hundred years: A historical analysis of social work services in schools. *School Social Work Journal*, 31(3), 24–43.
<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/iassw/sswj/2006/00000031/00000003/art00004>
- Allen, S. F., & Tracy, E. M. (2004). Revitalizing the role of home visiting by school social Workers. *Children & Schools*, 26(4), 197–208.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/26.4.197>
- Andreadou, D., & Chatzifotiou, S. (2023). Conducting Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research of Social Work. *Social Cohesion and Development*, 18(2), 119–131.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.37477>
- Ball, A. (2020). Calling social work to the movement for educational justice. *Social Work Research*, 44(4), 267–277. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svaa014>
- Ball, A. (2018). Education. In A. L. Iachini, L. R. Bronstein, & E. A. Mellin (Eds.), *A guide for interprofessional collaboration*. Council on Social Work Education.
- Ball, A., & Skrzypek, C. (2020). School social work and the educational justice movement: A snapshot of practice. *Children & Schools*, 42(3), 179–186.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdaa014>
- Bronstein, L. R. (2003). A model for interdisciplinary collaboration. *Social Work*, 48(3), 297–306.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/48.3.297>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology (Vol. 2): Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Carpenter, S., Weber, N., & Schugurensky, D. (2012). Views from the blackboard: Neoliberal education reforms and the practice of teaching in Ontario, Canada. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 10(2), 145–161.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2012.647401>
- CASW-ACTS. (n.d). *Social work practice in schools*. <https://www.casw-acts.ca/en/social-work-practice-schools>
- Constable, R., & Alvarez, M. (2006). Moving into specialization in school social work. *School Social Work Journal*, 30(3), 116–131.
<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/iassw/sswj/2006/00000031/00000003/art00009?crawler=true&mimetype=application/pdf>
- Costin, L. (1969). School social work: An analysis of function. *Psychology in the Schools*, 6(4), 347–352.
[https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(196910\)6:4<347::AID-PITS2310060405>3.0.CO;2-4](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(196910)6:4<347::AID-PITS2310060405>3.0.CO;2-4)

31 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

- Daftary, A. H. (2020). Prioritizing school social workers' roles and responsibilities to combat oppression in K–12 schools: Perspectives from educators with anti-oppressive orientations. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 5(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1072>
- Durlak, J. A., Mahoney, J. L., & Boyle, A. E. (2022). What we know, and what we need to find out about universal school-based social and emotional learning programs for children and adolescents: A review of meta-analyses and directions for future research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 148(11/12), 765–782. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000383>
- Elswick, S. E., Cuellar, M. J., & Mason, S. E. (2019). Leadership and school social work in the USA: A qualitative assessment. *School Mental Health*, 11(3), 535–548. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-9298-8>
- Elswick, S. E., Cuellar, M. J., Williams, M., Albert, W., Norfleet, T., Carlson, S., Fleming, G., Lieg, N., & Shine, J. (2018). School social work leadership: Essential knowledge, and practice for the profession. *School Social Work Journal*, 42(2), 57–73. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1206818>
- Franklin, C., & Gerlach, B. (2006). One hundred years of linking schools with communities: Current models and opportunities. *School Social Work Journal*, 31(3), 44–62. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-08867-004>
- Franklin, C., & Kelly, M. S. (2009). Becoming evidence-informed in the real world of school social work practice. *Children & Schools*, 31(1), 46–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/31.1.46>
- Frey, A., Alvarez, M., Sabatino, L., Dupper, D., Raines, J., Streeck, F., McInerney, A., & Norris, M. P. (2012). The development of a national school social work practice model. *Children & Schools*, 34(3), 131–134. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cds025>
- Gherardi, S. A., Knox, K., Stoner, A., & Garling-Spychala, B. (2022). Perceptions and practices in school social worker-teacher interprofessional collaboration. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 8(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1085>
- Gherardi, S. A., & Whittlesey-Jerome, W. K. (2018). Role integration through the practice of social work with schools. *Children & Schools*, 40(1), 35–43. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdx028>
- Jozefowicz, D. M. H., Allen-Meares, P., Piro-Lupinacci, M. A., & Fisher, R. (2002). School social work in the United States: A holistic approach. In M. Huxtable & E. Blyth (Eds.), *School social work worldwide* (pp. 33–55). National Association of Social Workers.
- Huxtable, M. (1998). School social work: An international profession. *Children & Schools*, 20(2), 95–109. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/20.2.95>

- Huxtable, M. (2022). A global picture of school social work in 2021. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 7(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1090>
- Jenkins, E. K., McAuliffe, C., Hirani, S., Richardson, C., Thomson, K. C., McGuinness, L., Morris, J., Kousoulis, A., & Gadermann, A. (2021). A portrait of the early and differential mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada: Findings from the first wave of a nationally representative cross-sectional survey. *Preventive Medicine*, 145, 106333. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2020.106333>
- Jennissen, T., & Lundy, C. (2011). *One hundred years of social work: A history of the profession in English Canada 1900–2000*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Kelly, M. S. (2020). School social work: Now more than ever. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1055>
- Kelly, M. S., Frey, A., Thompson, A., Klemp, H., Alvarez, M., & Berzin, S. C. (2016). Assessing the national school social work practice model: Findings from the second national school social work survey. *Social Work*, 61(1), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv044>
- Kelly, M. S., Raines, J. C., Stone, S., & Frey, A. (Eds.). (2010). *School social work: An evidence-informed framework for practice*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195373905.001.0001>
- Lalonde, G., & Csiernik, R. (2010). An exploratory study of school social work in Ontario. *Canadian Social Work*, 12(2), 60–67. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256082404_An_exploratory_study_of_school_social_work_in_Ontario
- MacLellan, D. (2009). Neoliberalism and Ontario teachers' unions: A “not-too” common sense revolution. *Socialist Studies (St. Albert)*, 5(1), 52–74. <https://doi.org/10.18740/S4TC7R>
- Mak, C. (2023). Decolonizing school social work practice: The delicate dance around power, privilege and oppression. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 93(2–4), 360–381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377317.2023.2268169>
- Mayor, C. (2021). Teacher reactions to trauma disclosures from Syrian refugee students. *Children & Schools*, 43(3), 131–140. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdab013>
- Meza, E. (2020). The possibility of critical school social work: Our role in disrupting racial inequity [Guest Editorial]. *Children & Schools*, 42(3), 147–151. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdaa018>
- Morrison, V. (2006). History of school social work: The Illinois perspective. *School Social Work Journal*, 30(3), 1–23. <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/iasw/sswj/2006/00000031/00000003/art00003?crawler=true&mimetype=application/pdf>

33 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

Ontario Association of Social Workers.

(n.d.). *The voice of the social work profession*.

<https://www.oasw.org/Public/Public/Home.aspx?hkey=3e495991-f497-4de8-9b55-da2af0fb2758>

Ontario Association of Social Workers.

(2022, May 3). *Ontario social workers to boost mental health services for marginalized people: New funding will help Indigenous, Black, racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ and other marginalized populations*.

https://www.oasw.org/Public/Public/Announcements/Ontario_Social_Workers_to_Boost_Mental_Health_Services_for_Marginalized_People.aspx

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. (2025). *About Us*.

<https://www.ocswssw.org/about-us/>

Ontario Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2. [ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca)

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2022, February 17). *Ontario's learning recovery action plan for students*.

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1001622/ontarios-learning-recovery-action-plan-for-students>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2023).

Employee and organization directory.

<https://www.infogo.gov.on.ca/org?id=2738>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2024a).

Ontario increasing funding to boost reading, writing and math: Getting back-to-basics supported by the largest education investment in Ontario history.

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004488/ontario-increasing-funding-to-boost-reading-writing-and-math>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2024b). *A*

guide to core education funding: 2024–2025 school year.

<https://www.ontario.ca/files/2024-09/edu-a-guide-to-core-education-funding-24-25-en-2024-09-20.pdf>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2024c).

Policy/program memorandum 169.

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-169#foot-6>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2025,

January 15). *School funding: Learn how we fund schools and how funding supports student achievement and well-being*.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/school-funding>

Peckover, C. A., Vasquez, M. L., Van

Housen, S. L., Saunders, J. A., & Allen, L.

(2013). Preparing school social work for the future: An update of school social workers' tasks in Iowa. *Children & Schools*, 35(1), 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cds015>

- Perry, Y., Elswick, S. E., & Cuellar, M. J. (2022). Leadership in school social work: Implications for promoting the preparedness of tomorrow's practitioners. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 7(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1061>
- Sanford, S., Um, S., Tolentino, M., Raveendran, L., Kharpal, K., Weston, N. A., & Roche, B. (2022). *The impact of Covid-19 on mental health and well-being: A focus on racialized communities in the GTA*. Wellesley Institute & The Mental Health Commission of Canada. <https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Mental-Health-and-Well-being-A-Focus-on-Racialized-Communities-in-the-GTA.pdf>
- Sattler, P. (2012). Education governance reform in Ontario: Neoliberalism in context. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 128, 1–28. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ971058.pdf>
- School and Community System of Care Collaborative. (2022). *Right time, right care: Strengthening Ontario's mental health and addictions system of care for children and young people*. https://cmho.org/wp-content/uploads/Right-time-right-care_EN-Final-with-WCAG_2022-04-06.pdf
- School Mental Health Ontario. (2025). *Identity-affirming school mental health: A frame for reflection and action*. <https://smho-smso.ca/about-us/identity-affirming/>
- Scott, N. (2017). Partners in education: Leveraging the roles of school social workers through collaboration with school principals. *NASW Specialty Practice Sections: School Social Work*. Spring/Summer.
- Sherman, M. C. (2016). The school social worker: A marginalized commodity within the school ecosystem. *Children & Schools*, 38(3), 147–151. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw016>
- Short, K. H. (2016). Intentional, explicit, systematic: Implementation and scale-up of effective practices for supporting student mental well-being in Ontario schools. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 18(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623730.2015.1088681>
- Short, K. H., Bullock, H. L., Crooks, C. V., & Georgiades, K. (2022). Using implementation science to optimize school mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 41(3), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.7870/cjcmh-2022-021>
- Short, K. H., Finn, C., & Ferguson, H. B. (2017). System leadership in school mental health [CASSA Discussion Paper]. <https://www.cassa-acgcs.ca/cms/lib/ON01929128/Centricity/Domain/30/CASSA-Discussion-Paper-System-Ldrship-in-School-MH.pdf>

35 School Social Work in Ontario, Canada: History, Context, and Reflections on a Canadian Practice Framework

Teasley, M.L. (2018). A renewed commitment for leadership in social work practice [Editorial]. *Children & Schools*, 40(2), 67–69.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdy008>

Teasley, M. L., & Richard, L. (2017). Changing the paradigm for school social work roles. In L. Villarreal Sosa, T. Cox, & M. Alvarez (Eds.), *School social work: National perspectives on practice in schools* (pp. 39–54).

<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx082>

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H. & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 15(3), 398–405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048>

Vetere, R., & Carley, G. (2006). Creating a new model of help in school social work. *Children & Schools*, 28(3), 175–179. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/28.3.175>

Villarreal Sosa, L., & Nuckolls, R. (2018). School social workers: A call to action in support of human rights [Editorial]. *International Journal of School Social Work*, 3(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1038>

Vyshedsky, C. (2023). Social work educators' perceptions of school social work leadership – What are the characteristics that make a leader? *International Journal of School Social Work*, 8(2), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1115>

Yan, M.C. (2016). Multiple positionality and intersectionality: Towards a dialogical social work approach. In A. Al-Krenawi, J.R. Graham, & N. Habibov (Eds.), *Diversity and Social Work in Canada* (pp. 114–138). Oxford University Press.