

School Social Work Practice with Children of Special Education in Northern Ireland: Autobiographical Accounts

Hamido A. Megahead

An Independent Research Scholar

Belfast, Northern Ireland

Hamido15@yahoo.com

An Abstract:

The aim of this manuscript is introduce and present an academician pursuit with promoting and encouraging school social work with special education children in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The methodology of autobiographical accounts was used. The autobiographical accounts in terms of “specific behaviour” “specific situation” and specific encounter” were discussed. Themes and appropriate intervention were offered.

Introduction

For more than 5 years, I worked in The Education Authority, Belfast Region, Northern Ireland. My duties were to supervise children of special education during their lunch time and their practice of physical and recreational activities after their given lunch time. On any given day there have been 268 children and young people who have attended the special education setting. Their age-range is from 3 to 18 years old. As an independent social work research scholar, this work has opened and offered an interesting window to promote the idea of school social work practice in the special education setting in Belfast (Megahead, 2017. 2019). School social work is a practice field that has been well-known and implemented in the US context. However, it is a missing field practice in Northern Ireland and the UK. At this position, I emphasised the school social work practice aspects. Also my duties have given

me a direct and first hand experiences with children and young people of special education in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I am going to report on my autobiographical accounts in this special education environment at Belfast. I offered direction and guidance in terms of appreciating situations of special education children and demonstrating how school social work practice addressed them.

Background and Orientation

On 2008, the Journal of Families in Society sent me three books on the US school social work. These three books were as follows:

- 1-Evidence-Based Practice in School Mental Health By: James C. Raines
- 2-The Domains and Demands of School Social Work Practice: A Guide to Working Effectively with Students, Families, and Schools By: Michael S. Kelly
- 3-Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in Schools: A 360-Degree View of Research and Practice By: Michael S. Kelly, Johnny S. Kim, and Cynthia Franklin.

I was intended to write a review on these three books. However, for some personal circumstances and conditions, I was not able to do so and I returned them back to the journal of Families in Society without writing a review. Since that time, the idea of school social work attracted me and made me to think about in whether the school social work is existed in Northern Ireland or the whole UK or not. I started to talk and discussed with two staff members (a lady and a gentleman) at some academic setting in the UK. Also I talked and discussed with two lay persons (a woman and a man) in Belfast. I discussed with them one same question “*whether school social work has existed in the Northern Irish and UK context or not*” They indicated that “*Social work in the school settings is only related to the Child Protection Issues*”. Child protection matters are the only and the main focus of school social work in Northern Ireland in particular and the UK in general. These child protection matters

can be only addressed by social services. They also confirmed that educational welfare officer is the only recognized position existed in Northern Ireland and the UK.

From the above three books sent to me by the journal of Families in Society and my discussed with the academic staff members and the lay persons, this academician pursuit has been emerged. The US school social work begins at the turn of the 20th century; fuelled by immigration, poverty, and the growing nation that a child has the right to education (Agresta, 2004). Social workers were known as “visiting teachers” and were responsible for ensuring that children attended school and for helping teachers to understand the new immigrants. During 1940-1950, the term visiting teacher was replaced with the term school social workers which included and adopted a more clinical orientation. The school social workers began to address the problems that caused absenteeism associated with behavioural problems, this acted as liaison between home and school and made referrals to appropriate agencies. School social workers complete social histories, counsel children and families, mobilizing community resources, and work with home, school and family to facilitate children’s adjustment at the school environment. Now, school social workers have been called to address violence in the schools (Agresta, 2004). Role responsibilities of the US school social workers with children at special education vary widely. Some role responsibilities focus solely on determining the eligibility of children to special education. Other role responsibilities are assigned full-time school social workers to schools serving a small number of students, such as a day treatment program for emotionally disturbed children (Pryor, Kent & McGunn, 1996).

In the UK, the role of the educational welfare officers (EWOs) was created by the Forster’s Education Act (1870) giving local authorities the power to make school attendance compulsory in Britain; the role was further developed by the Education Act 1944, allowing EWOs to provide support to young people and their families and to facilitate school

attendance (Henderson, Cheung, Sharlandc, & Scourfield, 2016). The primary purpose of EWO has been to enable all children and young people to get the best out of the educational system, thereby improving equality of opportunity. The role of the educational welfare officers is to encourage parents to form good relationships with school, to identify attendance problems and support parents and pupils to resolve them (Reid, 2008). They are responsible for investigating the cases of non attending pupils. They are investigating the reasons of absenteeism, offering information and guidance and undertaking planned interventions (Children Workforce Development Council, Occupational Summary Sheet, 2007/2008). In sum, the tasks of the educational welfare officers are to reduce the school attendance rates, to raise the educational attainment and to limit and confine the non-attendance with special education needs. (Henderson, Cheung, Sharlandc, & Scourfield, 2016).

Method

The methodology of autobiographical accounts was based on narratives and specific behaviours the author recorded in his daily work in this concerned setting developed over more than five years. One approach of the methodology of autobiographical accounts has termed micro-narratives that are brief stories focused on a specific experience (e.g. Baumeister & Stillwell, 1992). My experience was to work as supervisory assistant in the special education setting, while I have been disclosing my position as independent social work research scholar seeking to promote and encourage school social work with special education children. The following section is explaining the findings of this academician pursuit. These findings divided into two parts; specific situational behaviours of children and Stories of approaching children Situations.

Specific Situational Behaviours of Children

The first concerned behaviour: Andrew (age 17 years old) comes to me and shakes hands with me. He strongly and unnaturally squeezed my hand in a peculiar and

hurtful manner. A female teacher had seen this behaviour. She spoke to Andrew, stating “don’t be so hurtful and squeeze the author’s hand like that” and asked me not to voluntarily give him my hand when he comes to greet me. I have intervened with Andrew whether that is through interacting or just observing, while he is walking with his friend. Every time I talk to him, I found he needed the closeness in proximity of others and that is why he has been grasping other people’s hands like so. Through my guidance I helped him accept a hand shake normally without any strange grasping from him.

The second concerned behaviour: when Richard (Age 13 years old) came to greet someone who is new to school, while the other party had given their hand to Richard to greet them, Richard would quite disrespectfully slap the other across their face. Other odd actions the young male would execute would be to trip up some of his fellow peers; he put his foot in front of them while they’re walking to make them fall. When I had asked Richard “Why did you do this to your peer?” “Don’t you know that if you do this to someone, they’ll fall and get severely injured?” His choice of action to the explanation I had given him was to run off even before I had finished the sentence. He behaved impulsively. Later on I had talked to Richard and explained to him firmly that this is unacceptable behaviour and it has its consequences. He understood the explanation and stated that he will not repeat this action in the future to anyone.

The third concerned behaviour: When I had given Kate (aged 14 years old) a tissue to wipe her mouth after eating her lunch, she was reluctant to take the tissue, she did not wipe her mouth after lunch and that would result in the skin getting irritated. I then proceeded to explain to Kate that she needed this tissue to clean up her mouth from the smears of food as it will make her look clean and presentable, it’s also hygienic. She understood the benefits behind this action and later on she was seen taking a tissue from the tissue roll and wiping her

mouth after eating. Also some other children that I had observed not doing so prior to this started to watching her and doing the same behaviour as her and wiping their mouths.

The fourth concerned behaviour: When Mike age 17 years old started vomiting into the bin during the lunch time the other children started to laugh at him. I intervened and told them not laugh at Mike and they need to respect him and rather than laughing, helping him in his difficult situation. I stated that “Everyone vomits at one point in their life. I don’t think anyone here would like it if their peers laughed at them while they were feeling sick, would you?” They all replied with a “no.” “Mike is the same as you, he’s your friend.” They then stopped laughing and started to show empathy to Mike.

The fifth concerned behaviour: Bill (age 11years old) and Brain (age 11years old) were drawing a picture on black card. I said to them some words of appreciation so as to encourage them in their drawings. While Bill hid his drawing and did not wish to let any child see it, Brain was happy from the praise I had given him and continued to do more drawings. I talked to Bill asking him why he was hiding his drawings. He immediately assumed that his peers would hate it and said “The other children won’t like it”. I replied “You could try showing it to them and see whether they will like it or not, also look at Brain, he’s showing his drawings to the other children”. Once Bill understood what I explained to him, he did not hide his drawings from the other children and gained the confidence he lacked.

The sixth concerned behaviour: Harvey (age 12 years old) during lunch, he came up behind another child and wanted to put the Ketchup from his dish on the back of the other child. I swiftly went to Harvey and told him not put the ketchup on the back of his tablemate. I explained that if you put ketchup on the back of his tablemate, it will make his uniform dirty, therefore he will need to change it and there is no extra uniform in the school and it will

be hard to remove the stain. Through a discussion between Harvey and I, Making sure I changed his mind about doing this behaviour to his classmate and instead to take his unclean dish and put it onto the stack to the side.

The seventh concerned behaviour: when getting their lunch meal: I have observed the children stand in a disorganized manner and kept pushing each other in a very hurtful way, when they come to receive their meal. To teach special education children the healthy and safe way to receive their lunch meal from the catering staff and to resolve these unsafe and unhealthy situations, I have intervened as follows, once the a group of certain class pupils called to go to the catering reception, I have taken the trays and distributed a tray to each a child and made them to stand after each other in an organized queue. This action makes the children hold their trays and wait for their turn patiently. They received their meal and return to their seats and table in a safe way.

The eighth concerned behaviour when getting their glass of water: I noticed that the children are sometimes too shy to ask for a glass of water. And so to solve this I intervened as follows; I went to each child and ask whether they need to have a glass of water during their eating lunch. Most of them they said yes, they would like to have a glass of water. They never ask for a glass of water even when they are very thirsty, until I take the time to come forward and ask them. They do not seek help themselves and ask for water at all. Therefore to apply the “voluntarily seeking help” approach here is not working out as it is not suitable with these special education children, because if these pupils are not asked whether they require some assistance, they never ask for it. When I asked them whether they needed water, they responded yes. When I asked in this method, they are encouraged to ask for water and do not feel the burden of being too shy to ask. Some pupils take the glass of water, once you have offered it to them.

The ninth concerned behaviour: It is of wrestling: I have seen a group of special education children (boys aged 14-15 years old) had always engaged in wrestling. They are particularly at risk. Wrestling behaviour has been widespread between these special education children. For example, they had taken the fallen and wet leaves and thrown them at each other in a particularly non-friendly manner. They also grasp one another firmly from the neck. This is extremely dangerous behaviour and it could hit critical point and can be fatal. There is a certain boy from all of the others. This certain boy has been always on the receiving end of the wrestling. (No. of children 4). Every time I had seen these boys do this type of behaviour, I have intervened as follows. I have asked these boys not to wrestle any more with the young boy. I have talked to him and asked him to not allow any of the boys to wrestle with him again and if so to report it immediately and to not be shy to come talk to a staff member about this. I asked him to try and possibly do activities and play with others that can raise his self esteem. I have identified two other good boys from the same age and year as him and asked him to try hanging out with them and spend his break with them. When the four boys came to wrestle with this other boy, I have always stopped them from doing so, trying to get both parties content in spending their break in a calm and safe manner.

Stories of Approaching Children Situations

To explain the distinctions between my approach and the approaches of special education personnel in addressing special education children, I offered some narratives. Each narrative has explained a specific type of situation encountered during my supervision of children at a special education setting.

The first Narrative: The first day, two boys (Jack and Hans, 9 years old) were going outside with their classroom assistant. When they came to cross the road, there was an approaching lorry. However, they did not stop. The classroom assistant said to them. You

will be punished due to this behaviour. One of them Hans was not happy and stayed putting his head on the playground table. Jack was playing. I went to Hans and give him a paper and pen to make himself busy, because the other children are playing and I do not want him to feel excluded, while he is in punishment. Hans did not look at the paper and the pen. After 5 minutes, he went to the classroom assistant and walked with her. On the second day, it was jack's turn to receive the punishment. He did not stay at the playground table. He went to climb the tree. My approach with these two boys was different from the approach of the classroom assistant. My approach was that the children wanted someone to talk with them first. Secondly, listen to them attentively and thirdly attempt to understand what the children feel (Sutton, 2018). Then I tell the two boys what you have done was unacceptable, and you should learn from it for the future and learn to be more careful and not to cross the road until you look right and left. If you see a car, then you should wait until it is safe enough to cross the road. Also these two boys were in need of some other manipulated activities instead of the missing collective activities that they already prevented from it.

The Second Narrative: Six days after the first day, the class I was supervising had two subgroups. They consisted of year 5 special need primary school pupils from the ages of 9-10. The total was 11 boys. Jason unintentionally shot the ball in Hans' face. It had a very strong impact on Hans' face. I went and helped Hans up from the ground. I gave him a pat on his shoulder and then the classroom assistant came and gave Hans a hug. I asked the classroom assistant to bring soft balls for the children to play with instead of this hard ball. I told her I will ask the Physical Education teacher to bring one. The classroom assistant said she has some soft balls. The class room assistant said the soft ball will make it difficult for the children to play with, since its so light. However, I said the soft ball is better and safer for the children.

The Third Narrative: After 7 days from the first day, all the children from year 5 aged 9 years old, at special need primary school came outside to the playground, leaving Jack behind. I asked the classroom assistant about him, she said he was in Physical Education and behaved badly. The way this bad behaviour was addressed was to make the child stand beside the fence of the play area. However, Jack went and set on the setting area. The classroom assistant told him to stand beside the fence. As he refused, she took him inside the school. After this observation, I talked with the main classroom assistant and asked her if someone can take Jack and get him to be heard, regarding his feelings. She said to me everyone in the school has role to do, however there is no one to take up the role of a school social worker. She assigned Jack's bad behaviour to his parents and their parenting skills. She also said there were many people who came to the school, to talk to the children through various techniques and subjects, such as music therapy. However, now they have stopped coming to the school due to COVID 19.

The Fourth Narrative: Eight days after the first day, I asked about Jack, the classroom assistant said he was absent today. He did not come. I was thinking about what happened yesterday as he stayed inside while the children were outside. Eighteen days after the first day, while the children were playing football, Jack was always pushing and pulling his classmate while playing (Jasen). Especially when Jasen is going to shoot a ball in the net. When I asked Jack to play with his classmates without pushing and pulling, he said this is a way of playing football. I told him that this is just playing and games, there is no need to push or pull your classmates. The classroom assistant said once this pushing and pulling started to deteriorate the playing and games, then we should just tell the children to end the game and return to the classroom. My approach was that I took Jack and let him talk about why he pushed and pulled the other children. This is my attempt to help Jack understand that this is an inappropriate way of playing football. Another situation was raised, once Jasen made a

goal, Hans and Jack started to fight each other. I intervened and explained to them not to be so serious, as after all it is just a game.

After 19 days from the first day, I found Roddy sitting and crying. I went to him and gave him a loving pat on his shoulder and told him some encouraging and reassuring words. I asked him to come and jump from the 5 big stones in the garden. He came and did so. I asked him to come and try another activity in the garden. I also asked him to play with the other children including Paddy, who I was told by the classroom assistant was teased by Roddy. This was the reason for why she gave Roddy five minutes standing without playing with the other children as sanction. After Roddy went to play with Tom, Alan and Paddy, Alan came crying saying that Roddy was scratching him. Roddy said Alan scratched him first. After the classroom assistant asked Alan, he confirmed that he did it first. The classroom assistant told them to say sorry to each other and play far from each other. My approach was that I attempted to help them play together and have mutual respect for each other.

The Fifth Narrative: Twenty days after the first day, I found Paddy, Roddy, and Tom playing with each other. They threw a plastic circle on the Coconut tree. I told them they need to make turns for each other, instead of fighting on who will catch this plastic circle falling down under the tree. They followed this rule until Roddy came to me, saying there is some dust in his eyes. I took him to the classroom assistant. She said he needs to wash his face. I took him to the bathroom and waited outside while he washed his face. After I returned, I found Jack and Alan fighting as Alan had made a goal. Jack gave Alan a punch in his stomach. I held Jack back from fighting and told the classroom assistant. Jack went running to the gate and I followed him as he was opening the gate. I patted him and he returned back and walked with the other children.

The Sixth Narrative: On the first day of a new month, I found Tom, Alan, Roddy and Paddy came to two slides beside each other. Two of these children were standing at the beginning of the two slides. They were not allowing other children to use the slides. They were likely to hurt each other as well. I asked the classroom assistant to see so that we can decide what would be the best solution. We decided that the children leave the slides and stand for 5 minutes. During these five minutes, I got a pen and notebook from my pocket. I showed them how to slide and showed them if I put the pen without moving, the notebook will not move. If I moved the pen and the notebook, they will move after each other. This is the way they should play. We told them how to play on the slides. They played happily and appropriately.

The Seventh Narrative: Four days after the first day of the new month, while it was just children coming outside in the garden, I had seen Jack had been told to stand for 5 minutes. I brought a paper and pen and I was going to give it to him. However, in the past days, I noticed that he is not like his friend Hans and was willing to stand. He climbed the tree. The classroom assistant told me that giving him a paper and pen will not work out with Jack. I told her if we attempt and explain to him what we wanted him to do, it might work out. I did this action with other children yesterday and the day before. The classroom teacher came and took Jack inside the school while the other children from his class were outside playing. The classroom teacher was also unable to have her lunch break and eat her lunch as this is the only time for classroom teachers to take their lunch, when the children are in their lunch break with their classroom assistant. I spoke with the classroom assistant regarding the importance of a school social worker. She told me everybody has some input to do it with children. She told me Jack is not following the instructions. This is the major problem that Jack needs to be helped with.

The Eight Narrative: Five days after the first day of the new month, I found out that Jack did not come outside to the garden with the other children as he stayed inside with the classroom teacher. The purposed solution for Jack's problem of not following the instructions was detention and a long talk. Detention is a technique used by the teachers and classroom assistants to address the misbehaviour of children. This technique is to not allow a child to spend and enjoy their lunch time break with the other classroom children and stay inside the school with the class teacher. A school social worker is needed in this situation so that these children in detention can enjoy their lunch time break with other classroom children and their own issues and problems can be dealt with by a school social worker.

The Ninth Narrative: Eight days after the first day of the new month, I asked about Jack. The classroom assistant told me he stayed inside, while the other children were playing and enjoying their lunch time break outside. I brought out the "Hoop" for the children and they threw it on the pie tree and took turns after each other. They were happy playing. On the next day, I found out that my suggestions had been carried out. I noticed that a male classroom assistant came to supervise Jack and play with Jack, Jasen and another child. The other children came and asked me about the "Hoop". I told them it is still on the tree from yesterday. I took a stick and gave it to Tom. They each attempted one by one to get the Hoop from the tree. They also used the dried fruit from the tree and threw it on the tree so that they can get the Hoop. They found another game. The children made a circle and one child would go around the circle and "tip" each one of the children. This "tipped" child runs after him and "tips" him. If this "tipped" child was able to sit in the place of running child, this running child will do the same as the first child done. If he was not able to sit, then he will try the same until he is able to sit in the place of the running child.

The ten Narrative: Fifteen days after the first day of the new month, I asked about Jack. The classroom assistant told me he is staying with the classroom teacher. She told me the

classroom teacher is not getting her lunch, as the classroom teacher stayed with him and talked to him about his misbehaviour and not following the instructions. On the next day, I asked the classroom assistant about Jack, she told me he is absent today. The children later started to wrestle. I helped them to stop and instead play jump the stones and ropes. From the 16th day to the 24th day after the first day of the new month, Jack stayed with the classroom teacher during the lunch time break. The other children of the class went outside and played with each other. I asked the classroom assistant if I could stay with Jack and the classroom teacher could get her lunch. From the 24th day to the 25th day after the first day of the new month, I had seen a male classroom assistant take Jack and a ball to play with him during the lunch time break. I discussed with the classroom assistant and I told her I have seen Jack with the male classroom assistant. The state now is that the classroom teacher was able to get her lunch and break and at the same time Jack was able to enjoy his lunch time break.

The eleventh Narrative: While I am supervising the children with the classroom assistant, a girl (9 years old year 5, in primary school) came to the area of the children I am supervising. The classroom assistant asked her to go to her area. I took her and let her to go to her area. While I am walking with her, she said *"I hate Corona-virus"*. In the class, I am supervising a total number of children, consisting of 11 male children with ages from (9 to 10 years old). They are all in year 5, in primary school. There are two subgroups of children. The first group was included Jasen, Jack, Hans and two other children. This subgroup was interested in playing football. The second subgroup was involved Paddy, Roddy, Tom, Alan, and another child. This subgroup is interested in playing slides. In these two groups, one child in each subgroup wanted the assistance of a school social worker. On one day Paddy from the second subgroup was playing with his three cars on the slide. He was screaming as he wanted to slide his cars on the same slide the other children were using. A male classroom assistant and I attempted to convince him to use the other slide, which was nearer for him. He refused. The

main classroom assistant decided to end the playing session and brought all the children inside. Another situation related to Paddy. He did not play with his subgroup. When Roddy was making a row of stones on the wooden bar in the garden, Paddy came and scattered the row of stones from the wooden bar. I went and helped Roddy put the stones in the row again at the wooden bar. When Paddy was screaming, the classroom assistant took all children inside the school due to Paddy's behaviour. Due to Paddy's behaviour, the other children in the class were not able to continue their lunch break time, enjoying and playing in the garden. This is where the role of school social worker is needed. Paddy's actions, such as screaming as well as his non-cooperative behaviour can be dealt with by a school social worker. Jack also wants to be heard and to see what he is experiencing in terms of not following the instructions.

The Twelve Narrative: In this time, my supervision moved from the younger children to the older children at the playground. Their age was from 13 to 14 years old and year 9 and year 10 respectively. I made three observations; the first observation was that two girls (13 years old year 9) were sitting under the net of goalkeeper. The other two boys (the same age and educational year) wanted to push the net and were annoying these two girls. I intervened and explained to them not to do such annoying actions to the girls or to anyone. I told them you are friends and the same age and the same school, so treat each other the way you would like to be treated. The second observation was one boy runs after another boy who is screaming. I intervened and asked the boy who was running not to run and annoy the child screaming. The third observation was group of boys (year 10 -14 years old). They were sitting under the other net of goal keeper. One of them attempted to wrestle with another boy. The other boys were sitting and one of them is lying on the ground. I approached them and asked if I should bring a ball for them, if they wish to play football. The classroom assistant came and told me that today football playing is banned, because the children threw the ball on a car outside the

patch in the car park and this caused problems that is why the classroom assistant banned football that day. The classroom assistant said by making the ban of football day, the children can learn not to do this behaviour of shooting the ball on the cars outside the patch. My approach was to bring these children and listen to them, as to why they do such actions. Also these boys wanted someone to talk with them first, then secondly listen to them attentively and thirdly attempt to understand what the children feel (Sutton, 2018). Then I told these boys the behaviour of shooting the ball at the outside cars was unacceptable and explained the outcomes of such behaviour. They can then learn from this for the next time and make sure they don't repeat these actions as they have consequences.

The Thirteen Narrative: I found some boys (year 10-14 years old) sitting under the net of the goal with a ball. I asked them to bring the ball. I asked one of them to be a goal keeper and let the other boy to shoot the ball. I walked and found that one boy (year 9-13 years old) is lying on his tummy on the ground. I took his hand and helped him to get up. The second boy (Mark year 10- 14 years old) I supervised him when he was in primary school. He was very shy and wasn't able to talk and have a conversation. I talked to him and told him you have now grown up. He said yes. He started to talk and have conversation very well with me. With growing up, this child's ability to communicate, talk and start/ hold a conversation has improved greatly.

The Fourteen Narrative: During my supervision, I have seen one child (year 9-13 years old) sitting alone under the goal keeper net. I went to him and asked are you ok. He said yes. He also further said sometimes sitting alone is good. I told him if I found someone to sit with you is it ok. He said yes. Another boy (year 9 and 13 years old) came to me and asked me he wanted to play football but the children were excluding him and not allowing him to play. I went to the children and talked to them so that they included him in their football game.

The Fifteen Narrative: I have seen Mark (year 10-14 years old) was alone walking on the margin of the playground. Another boy of the same age was alone walking in the centre of the playground. Another two boys (13 years old, year 9 and 14 years old, year 10) were always walking alone and lying on their stomachs on the ground. An additional two boys (year 10-14 years old) brought book called Encyclopaedia of primary school and were reading from it. I asked one of them to read one page and the other read the second page. One of them said “I cannot read”. I told him to try. He made an attempt and read the word “Human”. I found another boy (year 4- 8 years old) was climbing the wall and the fence. I told him to come down until the classroom assistant came and he came down to the ground of the playground. When the children are going inside the school from the lunch break time, one boy (year 4 -8 years old) ran inside the patch and refused to go inside the school.

The Sixteen Narrative: While I was going to supervise the older children at the playground, I had seen a classroom assistant with the children going to the garden without the support of another assistant or supervisor. I went with her to support her and supervise children with her, because of safety and health matters; the children are supervised by two persons just in case a child wants to go inside the school for whatever reason. One person can take the child inside the school and the second person will supervise the children until the other supervisor returns. During this session, a girl (9 years old, year 5) asked me that she wanted to have white mayonnaise with her lunch. I told her it is good to have your opinion about your lunch food. I promise her that I will go to the kitchen and ask the canteen staff about what she wanted. I went to the kitchen people and asked them if they have mayonnaise for a child. They said that children are not allowed mayonnaise because the majority of children like to have red sauce and small number needs mayonnaise. I notified the classroom teacher. However, there are always individual differences between children and these individual differences needed to be taken into account when offering the lunch food for children. This

girl was always attached to the classroom assistant and she does not play with the other children as she always wants to keep herself with the classroom assistant.

The Seventeen Narrative: I went outside the school to the garden with the class room assistant to supervise the male children (9 to 10 years old, year 5 primary school). The class room assistant told me Jack (9 years old) threw some punches and hit other children so that he has to stand separate and not to play with other children as a type of sanction. I told her if a school social worker can appropriately deal with Jack's issue. He will be able to join the group of children who enjoy playing wrestling. This educational group work is the appropriate way to allow him to let his energy out appropriately (Sands & Solomon, 2003). She said yes, it is true. I told her any competent school social worker does so. I further said in the last year I have seen one of her pupils also singing. I responded to her if there is a group of children who enjoy singing like a school choir or singing club, it will be helpful.

Theoretical Framework & Knowledge Base Promoted by My Approach

During my supervision and approaching children and young people in the special education setting, I have promoted the following theoretical framework and knowledge base Childhood Studies perspective and Sociology of Childhood. For example, James and Prout (1997) proposed an innovative and unique framework that views childhood as to a significant extent, socially constructed; children are seen as active social agents. They are actively contributing to their social worlds as well as the lives of those around them. To understand and help these children in special education setting, I have looked at the child as 'being', the child is conceived of as a person, subject and social actor (Morrow, 2003; James & Prout, 1997). Also I promoted the model of the social child. The model of social child views children as comparable to adults of their status within research. This approach allows me to engage more effectively with the children in the special education setting. It is also allowing

me to adopt the view of child and that there is acceptance of children as social actors. The social child reflects the underlying notions of the sociology of childhood. It allows children to have a more direct voice in the production of sociological data such as indicated above; listening to these children's voices in the sociology of childhood has epistemological aspects. By attending to what children say, it is obtaining access to the meaning that the children themselves attach to their situation and experiences. Listening to children's views, insights to their reality are acquired. The reality experienced by children at special education cannot be fully comprehended by inferring and implying (McKechnie, 2004).

Conclusion

Seven themes have been identified; the appropriate way of children shaking hands, the impulsivity of children without considering the implication of their behaviour, the importance of children personal cleanness, children respecting each other's during their difficult situations, children expressing themselves and not hiding, children following the organized manner during getting their lunch meal and children expressing their needs and desires. I concluded that school social work is making helpful and useful contribution in the setting of special education. It has been found many and various intervention themes ranging from group work and setting up various groups (e.g wrestling groups and singing groups), food and nutrition and dietary issues, children walking alone and lying in the ground, physical education activities and the way children dealing with, specific behaviours of children (e.g. screaming and not following the instructions) and its influence of the continuity of playing sessions and lunch break time, children voice in terms of Corona-virus and friendship during the wrestling. The stories narrated and the behaviours identified offered direction and guidance in terms of improving and promoting children wellbeing and welfare in the special education. These stories narrated and the behaviours are the main remit of school social workers as they are well qualified to deal with them. For example the issue of

wrestling might cause some injuries for these children (Yard, Collins, Dick, et al (2008). According to child protection and safety and health regulations, the special education schools needs to prevent such possible injuries. Such prevention of possible injuries can be only done by the school social worker, because he has knowledge and the skills to organize a group of wrestlers (Sands & Solomon, 2003). They have also enlisted the professional who are able to help these children to wrestle safely and healthy (Grindstaff & Potach, 2006).

References

- Agresta, J. (2004). Professional role perceptions of school social workers, psychologists, and counsellors. *Children & Schools*, 26, 151–163.
- Baumeister, R. & Stillwell, A. (1992). Autobiographical accounts, situational roles, and motivated biases, in J.H. Harvey, T.L. Orbuch & A.L.Weber (eds.), *Attributions, Accounts and close relationships* (pp 52-78), New York, Springer Verlag.
- Grindstaff T & Potach, D. (2006). Prevention of Common Wrestling Injuries, *Strength and Conditioning Journal*.28, 20-8.
- Henderson, M., Cheung, S., Sharlandc, E. & Scourfield, J. (2016). The outcomes of educational welfare officer contact in England, *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(3), 399–416.
- James, A & Prout, A. (1997). Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood, London, Falmer Press.
- McKechnie, J. (2004). Children's voices and researching childhood in B.Goldson., M.Lavalette & J.McKechnie(eds.) *Children, welfare and the state*(pp.42-58), London: Sage Publications.

Megahead, H.A. (2019). Inclusion for Special Education in Northern Ireland. DOI:[10.31124/ADVANCE.7610927.V1](https://doi.org/10.31124/ADVANCE.7610927.V1).

Megahead, H.A. (2017). The Prosocial Behaviour of Special Education Children, *Ability NI and Klassability Magazine*, 7, 45.

Morrow, V. (2003). Perspectives on children's agency within families: A view from sociology of childhood in L. Kuczynski (ed.) *Handbook of Dynamics in parent-child relations* (pp. 109-130), Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.

Pryor, C., Kent, C., McGunn, C. (1996). Redesigning social work in inclusive schools, *Social Work*, 41(6), 658- 676.

Reid, K. (2008) the education welfare service: the case for a review in England, *Educational Studies*, 34(3), 175-189.

Sands, R. & Solomon, P. (2003). Developing educational groups in social work practice, *Social Work with Groups*, 26(2), 5-21.

Sutton, G.W. (2018). Discipline with respect in caring relationships, Springfield, Sunflower Press.

Yard EE, Collins CL, Dick RW, et al. (2008). An epidemiologic comparison of high school and college wrestling injuries, *American Journal of Sports Medicine*, 36, 57-64.

The real names of children mentioned here have been anonymous. They have been replaced with fictional and non-real names so that confidentiality, personal privacy and identity have been kept, maintained and never disclosed.