Development of Social Work Education and Practice in an Era of International Collaboration and Cooperation

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The profession of social work places emphasis on cooperation through mutual interaction amongst individuals and communities. An increase in international cooperation in social work has expanded through research, mutual exchanges and discussion. The profession's growing international commitment is evident through initiatives from NASW, ISWD, IFSW, IASSW, and CSWE. Social work is being challenged to rethink traditional paradigms of practice and education to meet interests of a complex, diverse, and divided world. Social work practitioners and educators must be willing to stop out of traditional models of practice and examine new ways of viewing theories, concepts, terms, beliefs, values, and policies in the profession to serve a more inclusive model of practice. Social work is at a crossroad of assuming a world-wide and environmental focus to address social problems based on an interdependent economy that is globally driven. This conceptual paper examines the various views on the internationally accepted definition of social work.

Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple and often very complex connections between people and environments. The profession's purpose is to enable all people to attain their full potential, enrich their lives, and address dysfunction at micro, macro, and mezzo levels. The profession of social work emphasizes problem solving and positive change from a strength-based perspective. Social workers serve as change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families, and communities that they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory, and practice.

The increasing of interdependency within our world and the growing demand for international collaboration have resulted in the introduction of international concepts and global competence within the social work profession. The history of global social work is linked to the increase of social problems resulting from global interactions and economic interdependency of our world. For example, social work professionals have been increasingly challenged with the demand for services to assist immigrants and refugees. Other social workers have become pioneers in international work through extensive travel in order to assist in humanitarian and reconstruction efforts during or after major cata-

strophic events. As a result, there are many professionals in social work education that have embraced global ideals in curriculum advances, study abroad opportunities, faculty exchanges, and collaborations for research abroad.

International social work is a distinct field within the profession that seeks to advance the well-being of people globally. It is practiced across geo-political borders and at all social, cultural, and economic levels. International social work is development-focused and, at present, much of international social work practice occurs at the local, state, and provincial levels within individual countries. Advancements in technology and transportation have brought opportunities for increased human interaction within a much larger radius. These societal advancements have provided an impetus for the growing international field of social work.

Globalization has brought with it demands for control, domination, power, and vested interests. Indeed, this has brought unique challenges for internationally minded social workers. Our world has become increasingly divided and decisive by class, clan, religion, race, creed, gender, and caste (Day, 2000). These power lines and divisions have resulted in much greater divides between the small minority who hold power and control and the majority who do not.

With the shrinking barriers connecting our world through technology and travel, we have become hesitantly cooperative with those beyond our borders in how we work together as nations. Expanded discourses like international cooperation, globalization, and the concept of 'one world' or the 'global village' has emerged to maximize the welfare of the vast people who mainly are hitherto excluded from the processes and benefits of developmental initiatives. In this context, social work has been placing more emphasis on mutual cooperation through increased interaction among individuals, groups, communities, countries, and continents for human development as well as maximizing the welfare of people across the planet. Currently, cooperation in all forms such as local, regional, national, and international has become principal philosophies and focal points for debate and discussion in the social work profession and education.

The social work profession places an emphasis on mutual interaction among individuals, groups, and communities. In recent history, this has expanded to include exchanges, discussion, research, and understanding of the social work profession amongst countries and continents. As our world becomes increasingly smaller through globalization, international social work and interfaced cooperation have become an essential component for professional development as well as maximizing the welfare of people across our planet. The growth and development of social work as a discipline in the social sciences in developed and developing countries of Africa, Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe is the positive outcome of cooperation among both governments, non-government organizations, foundations, and voluntary organizations (Watts, et. al., 1995; Ginsberg, 2001).

The Impetus for Global Awareness in Social Work

Increased awareness of social work practice and education as predominately "Americentric" is a interesting conceptual paradigm. Hartman (1990) stated: "it

is a new world, a different world, a world that demands new responses and major changes on the international, national, professional, and personal levels." Initiatives through the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the European Association of Schools   of Social Work (EASSW) as well as the existence of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Social Work in Development (ISWD), and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) as well as international initiatives by the Council on Europe and the United States Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) demonstrates a growing interest in international commitment to humanitarian efforts. As early as 1992, a cooperative effort between NASW and CSWE resulted in the creation of a curriculum manual entitled "Introducing international development content in social work curriculum." This manual contained teaching modules for use by social work education programs internationally (Healy, 1992).

In more recent years, social work education has broadened to more widely held postulations of the western world, with conjectures equating non-sustaining economic growth with progress. Social work books such as Cox and Pawar (2012) and Tice and Long (2009) strive to integrate eco-friendly principles with social work practice. Given the substantial growth in international social work, what is needed at present is nothing less than a complete overhaul of how we view human interactions within a global context. The social work professional of today must have a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between international poverty and environmental sustainability in a social development model of policy and practice. The imminent threat of global environmental collapse compels the social work profession to adopt a truly comprehensive ecological framework and to take a more proactive position regarding the growing diminution of the earth's non-renewable resources. As a profession, social work will be called to examine creative international policies that support more balanced and organic forms of global social development.

Social Work Under Challenge

The profession of social work is currently under challenge. The traditional paradigms of policy and practice are not always in the best interests of a planet that is divisive, divided, and disparate in populace. Increased attention on global trends requires the social work professional to consciously adapt services in practice and policy that are international socially responsible. Social work educators and professionals must be willing to step out of traditional modes of thought and long standing comfort zones and examine new methods of social work practice through diverse theories, concepts, beliefs, values, practices, behaviors, policies, and realities that may not be familiar but ultimately meet the needs of the diverse people the profession represents.

On an international scale, social work educators are at the point of no return as the transparency of interconnections of societies and nations, interdependency of economies, and environmental impacts of global proportions become the profession's reality. Assuming a world-wide and eco-friendly focus and grasp on social problems as interconnected and the varied nations as inter-

dependent, professionally we must acknowledge that the new world focus in on global economics.

Our profession has not been without warning about these challenges. We have seen the international trends growing. Although some social work professionals are relatively new to the field of international social work, many others began to initiate these discussions decades prior. For example, CSWE sponsored a task force in 1956 with the goal of defining international social work. Further, CSWE co-sponsored a number of important curriculum development conferences on international social work in the 1960s (Estes, n.d.). Mary and Morris (1994) urged social work educators and professionals to get more involved in the many international exchange opportunities available through professional social work memberships. Attempts to identify our profession on a global scale was formalized in July 2001 when IFSW and IASSW adopted the following international definition of social work at their annual meeting in Adelaide, Australia:

> *The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work* (www.ifsw.org).

A few years later, IASSW and IFSW published the "Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training" at their annual meeting in 2004 (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004). These global standards were the result of the two international organizations bringing together educators and practitioners from around the world to identify and create these global standards that would serve as a guide for schools of social work. These global standards are currently widely used and recognized in social work institutions across the planet.

In establishing these guidelines, IASSW and IFSW sought to formalize and standardize what is taught across the globe about cultural differences, racial, religion, and ethnic contexts. This effort was an effort to establish a universal definition of social work which could span across the vast social, economic, geographic, political, cultural, and religious divides. In a short span of time, these standards were presented as simultaneously universal, with some allowance for local context and interpretation. This local and global divide was an effort to accommodate the rhetorical claim that these new global standards for social work education were in fact mere minimal standards and therefore flexible and open to interpretation within the parameters they established for international social work education programs.

The new universal standards set a benchmark for newly establishing schools of social work. Unfortunately, representation to this creative document was based on those social work academicians that could afford to attend and thus provide input on the global standards for the professional at the international conference in Adelaide, Australia. The result being developing countries and countries in transition should somehow adopt these core expectations for knowledge, skills, values, process, and professionalization of social work as it ap-

plies in context of the realities of those dominant groups who have controlled the profession since its inception.

The global standards for social work education were in effect an attempt to show that social work is trying to respond to the rapidly changing world and the various concerns surrounding globalization. It would seem that social work has at best had a minimal role to play within the new global economic order and yet as a profession, we have struggled to find where we fit in that new order.

Some social work educators debate that the notion of a global or transnational social work profession is futile. Social workers identify with human interaction, plans, interventions, and ethics in the local context. However, they also recognize a need for a shared depth of understanding of diversity and culture within the experiences of their geographical location, time and space. It is the understanding that comes from being native to that culture as a user of the language, religion, values, beliefs, and the very heart and foundation of our profession of being with the person in the moment.

Webb (2003) stated: "by ignoring the communitarian encumbered self, the global standards are insufficiently sensitive to the importance of language and culture and ignore the role the social work plays in maintaining local culture diversity (p. 194)." Some social workers have argued that to attempt to globalize standards in our profession is iniquitous as it is based on a unrealistic picture of human beings in time and space. It is argued that we cannot deny the importance of self, relationships to others and community as experienced and as part of the very fabric of one's identity, not the external possessions or outside abstracts of a global sense.

Further, professional social work organizations that try to institutionalize who we are have ignored the important role played by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that are constant in their global context work where change activities are more than the mere protection and regulation of aspects within peoples' lives. There is no nation or state, nor is there a perfect match between culture and successful social work practice. Yet, we as social workers practice within the varied parameters of a culturally sensitive context to the lives of others with whom we serve even though those parameters have become increasingly more nebulous, onerous, and ambiguous.

The current global standards assert to "promote the respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs, and religions among different ethnic groups and societies (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004, p. 493)." Little is mentioned here about the challenges of cultural relevance in social work education and practice as well as the dangers of applying ethnocentric and Americentric or Eurocentric ideals, such as the concepts of individual freedom, self-determination, human rights, and political empowerment. The potential value conflicts and contradictions are many within such a declaration. For example, some factions in Islam do not believe in organ donor transplants. So what does this mean when we consider "the impact of interacting cultural, economic, communication, social, political, and psychological global features (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004)." How does one simultaneously claim cultural relevance and cultural sensitivity to particular contexts? Is it possible to be tolerant of diversity to the point of radical relativism and yet

be able to maintain a need for homogenizing, standardizing, and creating universal and global standards for social work practice?

In many ways, we have created a global double standard. Our profession wants to move along with the current global trend, yet maintain a strong hold on the ideals of cultural relevance, indigenization, localization, and authenticity. In some ways, the opposites of universalization, globalization, and internationalization could transcend a new form of cultural imperialism. How can social work as a profession accommodate these two opposing views? On the one hand, social work takes on the high morals of criticizing homogenization, colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. On the other hand, our profession argues for cultural relevance, sensitivity, and developing practices in a socio-cultural context.

Is the current international response to social work as a profession much different to the last century when globalization was it spread from the west to the developed world through its colonization through civilized missionary work that replaced the local, indigenous healing practices, and communitarian values that worked for societies for centuries?

In some ways, the global standards for social work education are a leveling down process that seeks to impose a benchmark standard that requires diverse nations within varied levels of socioeconomic wealth and political stability to globalize and establish a standards or practice which is in essence the western Eurocentric or Americentric dominant world view. Culturally relevant social work practice is by its very nature localized and indigenized. Internationalizing is the process of forcing indigenous groups to adapt to the western world-view through a civilized and humanitarian process. In densely multi-cultural societies, how does anyone include the "traditions and culture of different ethnic groups and societies in the core curricula in social work education programs" (Sewpaul & Jones, 2003, p. 10) that is modeled in the international standards? So the question becomes, which cultures and societies' perspectives should we include and whose knowledge of how traditions, cultures, beliefs, religions, and customs should be included to ensure the social work profession is internationally inclusive?

Social work as a profession continues its struggle with our fit in the newly globalized world. However, we need to be more aware than ever of the dangers that simplicity through standardization can create. The tendency to inhibit the profession's abilities to respond to local needs can impede our professions' future development.

Development of Global Standards for Social Work Education

The process of developing global standards for education and training in the social work profession is as important as the product or actual standards that are developed. In order to understand such an initiative it is important that the opinions, values, and beliefs across the global social work profession are considered and reflected in the development of universal standards for education. Given the centrality of the process-product dialectic, and the fact that the principles underscoring the standards come to light, out of the process, it is vital that the standards considered take in to account all global points of view in social work

education. Social work education, globally speaking, must consider the need of context-specific realities in given environments, communities, and societies in conjunction with the ambiguities surrounding the education and practice of social work professionals around our world.

IFSW and IASSW created a document that details a set of standards with respect to different schools globally and their core purposes or mission statements, program objectives and outcomes, program curricula including fieldwork, core curriculum, professional qualification of staff, social work students; structure, administration, governance and resources, cultural diversity, and social work values and ethics. As a point of departure, IFSW and IASSW created an international definition of social work as a profession. Further, IFSW and IASSW defined and detailed the core purposes and functions of social work on a global scale.

Many social work educators and practitioners in the international circuit are concerned that defining universal standards in social work education and practice will succumb to a western-dominated point of view. Given the western hegemony in social work education and practice, and that many western nations, have fairly settled and well established criteria of what social work is and what it means to provide good social work education and practice in their communities and regions (Payne, 2001). Such concerns are to be taken with great solemnity and not just as a supposition by a few professionals involved in international social work.

Much of what constitutes good social work education in Western Europe and in North America is founded on ethnocentric and egocentric premises. The majority of Western Europe and North American countries have specifically defined and, detailed national standards of social work practice that may or may not fit with the definition of social work education in under-developed nations.

Among international social work educators there is ongoing concern that context-specific realities. The resources available to individual institutions to meet the new global standards should be taken into consideration. In the development of global standards, it was noted that this should not create unintended negative consequences by disadvantaging some educational institutions. As much as global standards may be used to benchmark national norms and standards, as far as possible, regional, national, and international experiences and practices need to be incorporated into the formulation of establishing universal international social work standards for education and practice. The circular, interactive, and discursive processes in developing national and global standards should become and remain continuous, dynamic, and fluid, adapting to a rapidly changing world. The process and product dialectic in the formulation of the global standards for social work is crucial.

Social work education and practice is operationalized differently within varied global levels and even within various nations and regional boundaries with its control and status-quo functions being dominant in some contexts. As a point in fact, this would not be disputed by most in our profession. Lorenz (2001) considered the ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions of the social work profession, which have to be constantly negotiated and reevaluated to constitute its successes and challenges. It is, perhaps, these very dichotomies that have led to

the very rich diverseness of the local, regional, national, and international dialectic of social work education and practice that provides legitimacy for the development of global standards.

Growing Challenges for Social Work

Current interests in international social work education herald chiefly from the escalation of global interdependence. Many social work educators and professionals have discussed the issues of "internationalization" of social work as a method to address the new and complex social problems stemming from complexities of international contexts. The ramifications of a global economy for social justice is complex and is one of the most important challenges for social work in the 21st century (Polack, 2004). This is not to imply that international social work should be viewed solely on the basis of technological changes and trends that result in socio-economic interconnectedness over the recent decades.

As social work practitioners and educators, it is important to recognize that we have a history of involvement in humanitarianism across the globe, as evidenced by contributions of paraprofessionals and non-social work degreed persons involved in the United Nations, the Peace Corps, international NGOs, and International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movements.

Friedlander (1975) acknowledged social work's need for a broader, global perspective in helping with the conceptualization of the social environment. It is no surprise that for many years social workers have taken it upon themselves to work for international social development agencies and non-government organizations in direct services, administration, program planning, and development. Social workers' commitment to social problems around the globe and the initiatives that cross borders and boundaries are not simply attributed to recent trends involving globalization. Social work professionals have been pursuing a long standing tradition to the principles of human rights and social justice in our world. It is important to point out that globalization is not a new concept but has been under many guises for centuries. What is new is the pace of globalization and the effects that globalization have on transforming societies and cultures (Ramos & Brair-Lawson, 2004).

The New International Social Worker

Social workers have played several roles in addressing social justice issues across the globe. These include poverty, inequality, human rights, slavery, sex trade, refugees, adoption, global warming, terrorism, and labor issues. Unfortunately, the work of social workers on an international scale has not been high-profile and often marginal when compared to other professions.

It is critical for social workers to take a stalwart position on the importance of international human rights. On a global scale, human rights have eroded due to increased military might on foreign soil, unprecedented detainment of suspected terrorists without due process or legal representation, and legislation that restricts people in the name of national security.

Of equal importance for social workers in the 21st century, climate change has serious implications for the future of the planet. Clearly, global warming will have a great impact on how social workers practice internationally. We can expect increasing numbers of climate refugees, changes in lifestyles globally, creation of new jobs, and elimination of others as well as a change in the way we conduct our day to day lives. The impact of climate change will be most evident for people in developing nations, the poor, the undereducated, the unskilled laborer, and the vulnerable.

International Social Work Curriculum

The 21st century clearly calls for global issues to be embedded in social work curriculum. As educators, we have a responsibility to help students grapple with the uncertainty of a rapidly changing world. The social work student should be ready to engage in contradictions, ambiguity, and discussions on the erosion of western lifestyle as we now understand it. This should not be construed as a negative consequence but an opportunity for dialogue and seeking creative action to unique global problems. Along with, this is the need to value and promote differences of opinion, diverse ways of thinking about our planet, and unique ways of approaching social work practice.

Rather than arming social work students with theories and models of practice to make them feel comfortable that there is a proscribed way of practice, we have a responsibility to help students think outside the box and accept that insecurity, uncertainty, and discomfort are characteristic of the human condition. The world is in crisis ecologically, economically, and politically. Social work education needs to help students understand the current global issues and to embrace the ideology that in times of crisis there are also times for new opportunities (Ife, 2007).

Conclusion

The current trends occurring across the world provide very compelling evidence of the demand for new approaches to social work education and practice internationally. These pressing current global crises include the dramatic rise in global poverty, disparity, and continued issues of extreme famine across the globe; the growth of political and economic refugees in the world; war, terrorism, and human rights violations such as the growing world problem human enslavement; global warming; global pandemics; and problems of homelessness combined with increased unemployment and underemployment. Many of the most challenging domestic social problems confronting social workers in the world today are rooted in transnational forces that originated in other regions of the world (Estes, n.d.).

Social workers require new levels of understanding and new models of practice if they are to contribute effectively toward the resolution of social problems that are rooted in worldwide social, political, and economic realities. At a minimum, these new models of practice must reflect an understanding of the transnational nature of the social problems that bring individuals, groups, and

other constituencies to the attention of human service workers. Approaches for the international profession of social work should be grounded on empirical evidence and offer constructive assistance within a broad range of social development solutions that can be applied to discrete social needs.

In an increasingly globalized world the relationship between local, regional, national, and international is becoming increasingly distorted. Social work practitioners often work within a localized context, yet draw on policies and practices devised across the globe. Similarly, those researching social work are increasingly drawing on the findings, methods, and ideas of researchers from different countries. Modern means of communication and increased ease of travel mean that traditional barriers to the exchange and development of ideas are less problematic. It is important for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers that positive dialogue, global exchanges, and research forums exist for the free exchange and mutual development of ideas.

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