

The search for compatibility between the cultures of academia and social work in producing practitioners in the context of a social development mission, and devising effective professional organisational linkage from social work experience to macro social policy issues.

CONTENTS

Page 1

Social Work's "Social Development" Mission.

Page 2

Social Work as development

Social work helping methods

- (1) *Social policies and planning in development*
- (2) *Ensuring social justice (with particular reference to more equitable distribution of national wealth)*
- (3) *The essential need for participation by the people in policy formulation, planning and implementation*
- (4) *Improving the social and cultural infrastructure by institution building.*

Page 3

Cultures

Page 4

Social work students as a sub culture

Page 5

Selection of students for social work

Page 6

Bridging the chasm - Supervision?

Page 7

The see-saw approach

Page 8

Research

Page 10

Professional associations¹

Page 11

Social worker research - an approach and sequence

1. Appreciation of the genesis, methods and objectives of practitioner's proposed research 2. Research methods 3. Collecting of data 4. Analysis of data 5. Social policy and programming planning (SP&PP) 6. Implementation strategies seminar 7. Implementation and field assignments 8. Evaluation seminars

Page 13

A summary of the approach

Change²

Page 15

References

Page 16

Annex

Kaunas October 2002

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**The search for compatibility between the cultures of academia and social work in
producing practitioners in the context of a social development mission, and
devising effective professional organisational linkage from social work
experience to macro social policy issues.**

Social Work's "Social Development" Mission.

To be honest I have despaired of conferences unless it can be shown what has been achieved for the time and money expended upon them.¹ However, for reasons of brevity I shall not dwell on here, in 1993 after a long abstinence from conferences, I went to an IASSW European Regional conference in Torino in northern Italy.

At that time, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the social work educators, after the emergence of the newly independent States, were excited at the prospect of showing Eastern Europe what to do. (None more eager I noted than the British who had experienced the active demolition of their Welfare State under the Thatcherite regimes). For three days I was uncharacteristically silent but then I could stand it no longer and stood up. I begged that the same colonial-like western intellectual imperialism mistakes should not be made as had been the experience in Asia a generation earlier. That impassioned appeal resulted in Regina Kulys (here with us today) asking me if I would come to Lithuania "and help to do it differently" Thus I arrived here in unknown territory early in 1994 and continued coming for the next six years.

This present conference declares "The time has come to evaluate the development of the VDU Center and the profession". I suppose it is also a time for me to ask myself whether it has been done differently. Of course I came with very ambitious ideas. Primarily, I ardently believed that social work had an international wide mission. That mission had emerged from a growing insistence in the 1960s that Western concepts had irrelevantly dominated social work and its education in the new and non-affluent developing countries. Social work's mission was now urgently required to play a significant role in "Social Development" Such a perspective had been expressed in a number of United Nations Ministerial meetings and firmly endorsed, I thought, by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW).²

"Social" Development would not be just the cherry on the top of economic development. It had to become a major goal of economic development, probably the prerequisite for the creation of resources and wealth, and certainly for ensuring social justice in their distribution.

¹ See in an annex to this paper a suggestion towards evaluating and making conferences action productive..

² By 1968 at the UN International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, 89 countries endorsed a recommendation that priority be assigned:

"..particularly in developing countries, to the developmental tasks of social welfare and therefore, to orienting social welfare training toward preparation for such tasks."(United Nations, 1968)

By 1970 the Asian Ministers meeting in Manila extended this concept more specifically;

"Curricula on social work training should be geared to social development goals and constantly examined, reviewed and evaluated in the light of the countries' changing needs".(United Nations, 1970)

At the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) conference in Manila at the same time (1970) the in-thing was to exult at the prospect of social work operating effectively "in the corridors of power" as the challenge of the 70's.

At the same time it became only too apparent that social work teachers and practitioners had little direct experience in operating in situations with a recognised macro social policy perspective. Quite what was being demanded in terms of a social development curriculum? I was privileged and overwhelmed by a unique United Nations assignment based in Asia to try and find out.

Social Work as development

The social work methods and teaching materials being taught at the time, casework, group work, and community organisation, were found indeed to be exclusively western derived. In inventing a six-plus country curriculum study, 'Exploration' (Thailand, S. Korea, Hong Kong, Pakistan, the Philippines and Burma) these methods were redefined in a development context as

Social work helping methods

The situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies and the gaps and inconsistencies in our policies and programmes. The social worker role then is to be alert and sensitive to this and to systematically report these matters and so to be contributing decisively to policy and planning in the normal course of their "helping" activities.³

In trying to further locate social work in this widening development context, guidance was sought by taking the current enthusiastically repeated key phrases to see what they actually represented to the social work educators and professionals in terms of roles to be taught and undertaken. These were distilled as:

(1) Social policies and planning in development (2) Ensuring social justice (with particular reference to more equitable distribution of national wealth) (3) The essential need for participation by the people in policy formulation, planning and implementation (4) Improving the social and cultural infrastructure by institution building. (Drucker 1972)

Although the very many educators consulted firmly supported the ideas of this development perspective it proved impossible to find coherent content appearing in curricula anywhere. I was left in much confusion. What was being taught were an assortment of abstracted "subjects" which seemed not to be interrelated nor based on practice experience derived from working in the priority needs of their countries.

It is difficult to conceive of social work as a profession whose preparatory and formulating learning and education derives fundamentally from other than a practice-based and value-laden foundation. Curriculum must in some way be examined and created as a "total learning experience" determined by the intent, behaviour and organisation of those responsible for the education or training, and what is done with the knowledge provided by the student's exposure and response to direct human problems. The static snapshot way of looking at curricula embodied in timetables is not anywhere near describing all that goes into the teacher-learning situation. That is, not just listing content, but attention must be given to climate, the living social institutional context and critically the culture in which the learning is specifically to take place. This was well put at a curriculum workshop in 1960,

³ Very much in line, since discovered with C. Wright Mills (1959), in *The Sociological Imagination*:

"Know that many personal troubles... must be understood in terms of public issues ... and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles - and to the problems of the individual life."

"... the focus needs to be on the planning of the educational experience rather than to outline study of content. The student will find many ways of picking up more content as he needs it if he has been helped to see its meaning and its relevance to social work".⁴

Of great (and continuing) significance however, the 1972 study, among much else, was to conclude that:

"The fact of the matter seems to be that the current machinery linking schools, supervisors, agencies, professional associations, policy makers, planners, etc, is not adequate to the task of producing personnel for the important developmental roles which are currently being canvassed. This lack of coherent machinery constitutes the major problem confronting the schools and the profession". (Drucker, 1972)

This past background and subsequent twenty years of wide experience and thinking, I brought with me to Lithuania in 1994, a country emerging from one set of political, economic, social and value systems seeking to establish different ones. Not surprising then, (having arrived in a blizzard at the end of February, in my very first days ever in Lithuania) although clearly reckless, I set out to construct the Centre's fieldwork programme. For the first intake of students the fieldwork was arranged as an eight-week block placement in one of sixteen different locations. It grew subsequently, to initial introductory visits to a wide range of agencies, leading to a three days a week practice period throughout the rest of the two-year master's programme. Nothing on this scale had existed previously in Lithuania, and although I am not aware of what has been happening in the two years since I was last here, I believe this practice commitment does not exist anywhere outside of VDU Kaunas. That it does not is perhaps, one measurement of how much we have not achieved and urgently remains to be done in effectively coordinating and linking the activities of social work schools in Lithuania and the Baltic States.

Cultures

A heavy fieldwork programme, out of the classroom, is certain to raise the eyebrows and much else of university professors and administrators. The social work students will spend, relative to other students, much time outside the hallowed halls among what ails our societies. They will have to handle the emotional impact of the great variety and turmoil of lives in a very troubled world, and they become actively aware of the difference between themselves and their student contemporaries in other departments.⁵ There is a culturally academically

⁴ This approach derives much from the views of Tyler, Ralph W.⁴ and David French "Building the Social Work Curriculum", Council on Social Work Education, #61-18-55.

"The climate or atmosphere of the school influences the student without conscious planning by the faculty", p 19.

"... if the total range of the educational programme is considered, these influences are more than the curriculum itself, but these powerful influences are not usually taken into account in considering the curriculum". p 20.

"the purpose of curriculum organisation is to maximise the cumulative effect of all of the learning experiences", p51

".... to consider the curriculum in terms of the learning experiences that individual students are having in contrast to viewing the curriculum as a total collection of course offerings, p 54.

French, David (late of Brandeis University) and my colleague in Asia.

"....the most fundamental effects on professional education in social work have come not from curriculum policy statements but from forces in the world of welfare programmes and policies. These forces enter schools of social work through....the field work experience of students, the consultative and community service activities by the faculty, the research activities of the faculty on social problems and social welfare programmes, scholarly-work,- reading and contributing to the literature of the field and participating in various forms of continuing education."

⁵ From the student's experience, credits for the time spent in highly taxing and time consuming work in the field, case recording, case conferences, and individualised tutorials and supervision, never get the same amount of credit points for sitting passively in a lecture hall along with maybe a couple of

determined student pattern of learning (compelling demand for grades, exams etc.) Confusion is apparent when students are placed and find themselves in the very different culture of fieldwork agencies where they are exposed to the characteristic way in which social workers set about acquiring, sensing, examining, speculating, conceptualising and making use of available fragmented knowledge. It is specifically this social work characteristic which needs to be fully identified, taught, demonstrated and practised.

Social work departments themselves notably seem to be the Cinderellas of universities and the students tolerated as a sub-culture, with the accent on sub, which they often feel keenly. As a sub-culture within the university they are reminded constantly of the pull of the usual in-house culture of student life.

Social work students as a sub culture

This being the case, it might be constructive to consider seriously the value and the creation of a reality in which students are specifically taught and function in a social work culture, and we educators to plan for it positively. In so doing the students would be preparing to comfortably accept their life-long minority place in society. It could be welcomed as a creative condition reflecting the role that the profession will hold in challenging entrenched pernicious aspects and injustices of contemporary society and proudly hold to their own professional intellectual and moral integrity.

How might this be attempted?

In social work we hold to such important premises as the notion of growth from within, self-determination and participation. This, along with the growing understanding that learning is far from a neutral intellectual activity, but is intimately connected with relationships, emotional involvement, social climate, and specifically when teaching knowledge applied in human situations it requires learning by doing. The nature of the curriculum and the selection of content, the learning patterns of students, as well as the methods of teaching, are therefore of primary importance. It is not just a matter of covering content and improving techniques; much is caught rather than taught and involves the whole student and the institutions in which he or she moves and is experiencing.

What the student can learn, retain, integrate and use imaginatively and creatively will be much influenced by his inner and outer experience in the learning situation. Much attention must therefore be given to the harmonising of the institutional structure of the teaching situation and its climate with the way in which the student responds and can be helped to respond to it (i.e. starting where the student is).

If the total experience of learning is as important a factor as we think it is in preparation for social work, perhaps, we should deliberately plan in such a way as to postpone substantive subject matter which requires memorising and the more academic skills. These could be put on hold until we have imparted and helped students to practice the learning skills that are commensurate with what social workers will need in gathering and handling information and knowledge. In this way we will make sure that when the more subject-oriented teaching is brought in, it does not reinforce the familiar fragmented subject-oriented academic learning styles but is perceived and processed through the new social work compatible learning style. This is not to say that each student learns in the same way; here an educational diagnosis will help us in guiding the particular student towards what he particularly needs in using his innate talents, etc.

Such a view suggests that we must give serious consideration to whether (if all other constraints could be dealt with) we might spend the preliminary weeks of teaching time devising and setting up learning exercises. These learning exercises would consist of "finding out"; "observing" (behaviour of people in social situations such as railway/bus stations, social service/hospital waiting rooms, nursery groups, lecture rooms, religious gatherings, conferences, political meetings, etc.); "describing"; "comparing with other students the observations regarding what was seen and thought significant"; "gather together"; "interpret what has been observed"; "present"; "pass opinion"; "explain"; "question"; "discuss"; and "compile"; activities. We would be setting out consciously to familiarise the student with a self-awareness of the new role of social work student (which will differentiate him from many of his fellow students in other departments) and commensurate with his potential role of professional social worker (which will differentiate him from the more generally held values and familiar responses of his fellow citizens). In a sense we would be setting out to deliberately begin to define, teach and set up a coherent sub-culture for the student and in preparation for the profession.

Selection of students for social work

Such a learning-exercises foundation for a curriculum might almost be seen as a protracted selection process. Students who are unable to satisfactorily acquire and demonstrate these ways of learning might well be advised early on to seek their education in a field more appropriate to their particular abilities.

Undoubtedly an approach of this kind requires a reconsideration of selection and admittance procedures; the role and skills of teachers; the time tabling, acceptance of these activities by certifying bodies; and alters drastically both what is currently included as our present ideas of sequence and content. In fact, new ways of learning become not just a method but also the content of much teaching.

It should be a firmly held social work view that academic capacity alone is an inadequate basis for working closely with people and with problems of society. Personal qualities and a latent capacity for sensitivity and creative imagination in the art of working with people must be insisted upon by the social work profession in assessing suitability for functioning adequately in the social welfare field. This insistence derives not merely on the religious antecedents, philosophy and values of much social work, but the technical fact that the person himself, his self-awareness, the potentially rich utilisation of his own life experience and its mysteries, his talent for purposeful use of relationships and the values he holds are considered a fundamental fund of knowing (instinctive, emotional, and intellectual) to be harnessed and to become a "tool" of social workers.⁶

⁶ Social workers have too quickly reached for theoretical fragments, and in the process forced reality into straightjackets, often leaving out what doesn't fit and forgetting the limitations of any theory and the narrow areas of effective application of such theory. Can it be that we "professionals" in particular have sought respectability by adopting a pseudo-scientific academic stance? Social workers I think have a scientific duty to describe and tell it how it is, or looks to them - external and internal perceptions, thought and feelings, confusion, mystery, and all. In my teaching I reach out constantly to the non-social sciences, the novelists, poems, songs, films etc. for material to provide understanding and to convey where and how to learn continuously; this includes the availability of a lifetime of learning to be mined from even the most inarticulate of our "clients"

. See Singer, Isaac B. and Burgin, R. (1978) *Conversations with Isaac Bashevis Singer*: "Every life is strange. ... This visitor.... is, after all, part of the big universe,..... I'd like to hear what he has to say. I am sure in his telling it, I will hear something which is completely new as far as my knowledge of human beings is concerned. ... The more you see what other people do, the more you learn about yourself. I say to myself, why don't they look into the human ocean which surrounds them where stories and novelties flow by the millions? It's there where my experiments take place - in the laboratory of humanity, not on a piece of paper." (pp 1-2).

Bridging the chasm - Supervision?

Social work has tried to deal with the disharmony and incompatibilities of academic institutions with its social work practice roots by trying to maintain substantial field work experience in social agencies, where students are said to be "putting theory into practice" "integrating knowledge" and so on. A more or less characteristic role has been invented by social work in the person of the "supervisor"⁷. It is they who are supposed to supply the bridging device between teaching and practicing institutions, theory and practice.

The literature is rich in material concerned with the function and development of this role of the supervisor. Much is expected of such a person and by and large the role is the focus of widespread dissatisfaction on all sides.⁸ Frequently the supervisor conveniently becomes a scapegoat, taking the blame from the agency for the naivety and unrealistic attitudes of the students and by the university for not properly demonstrating the applicability of theory.

One suspects that the separation of agency and school, practice and theory with the supervisor as scapegoat is functional. Bringing them together would too painfully clearly reveal the chasm of fundamental differences between the two and the unsatisfactory correspondence between values taught and service rendered - as well as the marginally related nature of the theory taught to the social conditions experienced by the agencies. This may well be the reason why true co-operation and collaboration are so difficult (including at Professional Association levels) and why all the energy that has gone into clarifying the role and "educating the supervisor" activities seemingly are attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable and do not bring the desired results. At least the separation allows the schools and the agencies to function coherently individually, rather than having to face the confusion that might paralyse coherent action otherwise. The penalty seems to be paid by the supervisor, the student and no doubt the public.

This link between schools, supervisors and agencies was seen as one of those missing links in the conclusions of 1972. Clearly in starting up the field programme in Lithuania 1994 the selection of agencies and their "supervisors" was a matter of quickly finding and persuading wherever and whoever seemed possible, available and relevant, to social work concerns. A working partnership needed to be established between the Centre and the agencies. For a time this was done single-handed providing some support to the staff of the agencies and examining the experience of the students in seminars and individual sessions from the Centre. Somewhat miraculously, literally from the skies (by way of an airline) appeared an Australian trained ethnic Lithuanian social worker Lucija Valciukas who was engaged with United Nations funding to pick up and carry much of the field work programme. Meanwhile student experience supplied much of the content for classroom discussion. It was expected that agency fieldworkers would be provided with an opportunity to develop supervisory skills for the students. Later, as the Centre's graduates moved out into working in the emerging, and some newly invented, agencies they would swiftly join and be assisted by the Centre to become an on-going supervisory cadre for future intake of students.

By 1999 with Lucija's departure after some five years of valiant efforts, the Centre appointed one and a half graduates to undertake this work. But clearly they have been understaffed and grossly overworked in trying to expand the effectiveness of their wide and awaiting responsibilities. Nowhere does a University provide anywhere near adequate resources

⁷ One with vision which is super?

⁸ One respondent who expends a great deal of energy in the field sighed that she wondered whether all the time and energy expended on fieldwork actually paid off in educational returns. Another experienced teacher says that "field practice is field practice," and that its rationale of putting theory into practice and integrating knowledge is not only unproven but under prevailing conditions untrue.

of staff, supervisory personnel, finance, or academic credit for such a heavy load of practice. This understaffing of social work's "laboratory" out there in the community is a problem much related to the discussion above regarding the sub-culture place of schools of social work within an university institution and its academic culture. One result is that the distance between teaching and practice in social work becomes ever greater and unlinked. Weakness in close operational links between schools and practitioners in agencies, and between the schools themselves, results in no supporting constituency emerging which can be mobilised. The agencies who could be expected to welcome the stimulation of having students and the potential for strengthening manpower in their field, could be organised to influence power structures outside the university to bring about recognition of the need for adequate resources for social work education.

Such lack of linkages was identified back there in the 1970s. If there was to be a unity between academic teaching and the field, theory and practice, and social workers were really going to operate in the widening development arena, they would need to locate themselves in new and unfamiliar settings. Unfamiliar, that is to Western-trained teachers and to most available existing agency-based would-be supervisors who contributed altogether very different backgrounds, mandates and objectives. This situation obviously existed in places like Lithuania and Eastern Europe where graduates would not easily be finding established posts to fill, but would very early on take a lead in creating new social services, agencies and social institutions.

A way of establishing an ideal firm linkage between schools and agencies, theory and practice, I called the "See Saw Approach". Is it a realistic possibility for our profession?

The see-saw approach

It was proposed that staff members of the schools themselves be assigned to try out possibilities of the envisioned developmental social work activities. This would entail an exploration of the dimensions of the tasks and to identify realistic locations and assignments that might be set up for students eventually. The staff members would explore and practice the social work role themselves, and from first-hand experience draw up a detailed job description, based on an analysis of the tasks involved. Objectives and goals of the service or agency and the learning objectives and goals that students might be expected to achieve would be spelled out. In the course of the practice the staff member would keep a detailed record of happenings, to be worked up into case-material for teaching.

In identifying the theory, knowledge and skills required to function in this position, the staff member would check whether and where such matter appeared in the school curriculum. He would prepare to supplement the teaching, together with teaching materials, either to highlight and reinforce what was already being taught or to introduce new content. After perhaps a year the staff member would have paved the way for the introduction of students into the practice role, having prepared the setting and the agency staff to receive them.

The second phase of the school staff member's activity, having fulfilled the role himself, would consist of supervising the students' practice and learning. The staff member being familiar with the service requirements and the knowledge and teaching base, could then concentrate on the educational diagnosis of the student and the students needs.

The staff member would in time introduce a worker designated to take over the supervisory role in subsequent years by means of apprentice-type training. As his fieldwork and supervisory role diminished, the staff member would prepare to move back into the teaching role in the school.

Ideally it might be arranged for two members of staff to address the same areas of work. One would be moving through from practice, on to supervision and back to classroom teaching, while the other was moving from classroom teaching in the opposite direction - thus the idea of a see-saw.

Of course it was realised that there were dozens of problems inherent in such a proposal career-wise and within university and agency structures. However, we were supposed to be seriously adopting the role of institution-building, social policy, planning and so forth. In that case we need to demonstrate our ability to manage change within and between those institutions and structures including those of academia of which the profession had become a formal part. If we could not show skills there in participation in decision-making and bringing about change how could we make any claim to competence in society outside our home domain?

Research

It is certain that today research is an area which can be seen to illustrate well a continuing divergence and incompatibility of academia and social work. It seems that academia demand of social work students research, which, however inadvertently, diverts attention from critical social work concerns and the particular nature of social work learning and knowledge.

Prof. Richard Cloward⁹ (1998) of Columbia University, as part of the "celebration" of USA's social work centenary year, was invited to be enshrined in a "Hall of Fame". He declined the honour. Cloward might well be too abrasive for some but he raises important issues very relevant to our discussions. In his letter to Social Work (1998), he declared that instead of a celebration there should be a "wake". He explains:

"What I see on social work's centennial is a divorce between professional education and professional practice Graduate schools of social work, especially the better-known ones, are taking on the attributes of research institutes, with faculty venturing into the field of practice only to collect data. We need balance between practice and research, and as much integration as possible. What is happening instead is that the practice traditions of graduate social work education, including the tradition of close integration with social agencies, are being superseded, even extinguished, by this growing research."

It has been common for universities to expect students to identify their own research topics. I argue that such an academic requirement places upon the student an unreasonable and unnecessary burden. It is likely that students will not be too experienced in the overall state and cutting edge of the profession to make a useful choice or formulation. Completion of research projects, given the study time available for students, has commonly been a problem resulting in other demands of the overall programme being neglected. Whether students were engaged in research or theses, they should not have a totally free choice of subject matter.

The primary responsibility for identifying research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. It is the practitioners who are faced with questions that arise out of their daily work and require answers. These questions are not seeking answers to eternal verities but are required for practical application.

⁹ Cloward, R. (1998), 'The Decline of Education for Professional Practice' Letters, 43 (6) *Social Work NASW. Inc.*

Some 35 years back a research focus for social workers was well stated

"Social workers should be trained to make use of the findings of basic research in their practice as well as in the formation of social work conceptions. At the same time, they should provide social researchers with information as to the areas of basic research that would have bearing on social service. This is an essential co-operative relationship between the social researcher who tends to direct investigations to general social phenomena and the social worker who should translate into action and practical achievements the result of such investigations."

In operational research, which should be within the competence of social workers, the following topics .. (see footnote below) .. are suggested for priority, because they would provide important basic information for programme planning and implementation:

*Many other operational and organisational aspects of the functioning of social service can be the subject of studies that can be made by social workers themselves within the limits of their daily work activities. Besides the practical value of such endeavours, they also serve as "morale" builders and as incentives for free and objective communication among professionals."*¹⁰

Virginia A. Paraiso (1966):

Clearly this concept of the integral unity of identification of areas for social work research, practice and implementation activities can be seen very much in accord with the 1972 beginning to define social work in the widening development context, referred to above.

In any case, social workers themselves need not be researchers in the formal academic sense, unless this is to become their professional speciality.¹¹ Primarily social workers should be eager consumers of research in order to examine, discover and extrapolate what it can tell us regarding what we should do, do better, or avoid doing. In addition, as a profession we also have a critical responsibility to identify from our practice, and convey to appropriate resources like the Schools of Social Work what needs to be researched.

At its simplest, as a profession that in practice recognises it needs to act frequently, albeit with very limited information, research which tells us anything better than guess work

¹⁰ See Virginia A. Paraiso (1966)

1. *Contributions of social service in the promulgation of social legislation.*
2. *Differences between the written law and its operation in social service.*
3. *Effects of legal provisions on the operation of programmes and their compatibility with social work principles.*
4. *Social welfare needs of people in rural and urban settings.*
5. *Inventory of existing social service facilities and measurement of their adequacy.*
6. *Identification of elements that can be used as bases for comparative measurement of costs and effects.*
7. *Identification of elements that can be used as bases for determining priorities and allocations.*
8. *Identification of areas of relationships that social service is replacing with its activities, and an evaluation of the effects of such replacement, i.e., institutions for children on parent-child relationships, subsidised workers and communal restaurants on family relationships, mothers' clubs on mother-child and husband-wife relationships, etc.*
9. *Effects of programmes on the lives of beneficiaries - relationships, attitudes, behaviour and general ways of life.*
10. *Effects of local authority or its weakness on the development and administration of programmes.*

"Social Service in Latin America: Functions and Relationships to Development",

Economic Bulletin for Latin America, Vol. XI, No.1., April, 1966.

¹¹ Few entering social work with ideas of direct service would ordinarily want to go on to become full-time researchers. For them a specialised social science programme would be more appropriate.

is to be welcomed. Of course we ourselves have much to learn from non-social work colleagues, but we must reinterpret their experience from our own social work perspectives. We must begin to identify the questions we need answered, which spring from our own professional practice, and develop theory that can be derived from it. Social work research must be directed to social concerns and considerations.¹²

The implications to emphasise are that professional practitioners must have a very strong life-long commitment to identifying and initiating areas for research. This includes on-going full consultation with the educators to select from the subject matter priority questions - priority, that is, according to social and professional priorities and needs, and the likelihood of effective use of the material researched. The schools have the corresponding responsibility for constructing a curriculum in which the research component will constantly relate to, and involve the students, in the main concerns of the profession.

Such a linkage between practitioners and problems arising in their practice clearly requires a professional Association to undertake this role. Linkages which are operational and task-oriented still hardly exists anywhere, and in Lithuania (along with attempts to create an Association of Schools of Social Work) certainly had not flourished

Professional associations¹³

Associations of Social Workers would certainly need to play a major role in this matter of research and to vigorously become professional institutions for gathering together the experience and opinions of their membership to feed and support social workers on policy and decision-making bodies.

The Association of Schools and individual schools should be responsible for collecting from the professional practitioners through their associations the range and lists of subjects for research which would clearly state the problem and indicate the practical implications which are likely to flow from an investigation.

Working collaboration between practitioners and teachers in the judgement of priorities and needs clearly requires specific operational machinery within the associations.¹⁴

It would then be the responsibility of the academic social work research group to examine the proposed research subjects and involve the students in sketching in the broad lines of method best fitted to the matter under consideration. A judgement would be made whether it is appropriate for students to undertake the development of the research project.

The range of topics thus identified and examined is likely to give a much broader and practical view of social work and its priority professional concerns than can be expected coming from those with limited experience in the field, as is the case with most students. Indeed, the rationale for the choice of subject matter might well be presented by the teacher in the form of a model social analysis of a situation and problem that would demonstrate the specific need requiring research and the practical value of undertaking it. The element of choice by the student would take the form of a selection from a prepared list of such subjects.

¹² I was told recently quite bluntly at one distinguished American school of social work that what gets researched is determined by the funding source.

¹³ "Professional associations are not the only repositories of knowledge but they are the repositories of a very special kind of knowledge and the establishment of proper relations between them and the modern state is, today, one of the urgent problems affecting the future of the social services."

Titmuss, R. "Social Administration in a Changing Society," *The British Journal of Sociology* September, 1951, p. 193

¹⁴ The nature and operation of this machinery might well be the subject for workshops leading to assignment of specific responsibility.

In an exceptional case he/she might be allowed his "own" subject if as effective a case of professional need can be argued as is presented in support of the "official" list. In such an event the subject would be added to and becomes part of the list.

It can be seen that there are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners within associations in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with and between the schools, in order to produce this professional agenda for research. The need for relatedness of the research to the profession's progress, and the relatedness to the teaching to professional practice cannot be over-emphasised. All this cannot be achieved without effective professional associations and resources to carry out clearly defined responsibilities. The appellation "Profession" cannot be just borrowed finery.

Social worker research - an approach and sequence

What would be the effect of building into the curriculum a process along the following lines? (As students would be expected to become competent consumers of research, from this perspective, of course, they would need to be familiar with and understand the range and limitations of social research methods.)

Each accepted research project would be divided into a sequence in which succeeding intakes of students would complete one stage. However, they would become operationally involved with a range of projects in different stages of progress. They would be taught each of the stages of research, from statement of problem; formulation of a researchable subject; identification of appropriate method; data collection; analysis; implementation of recommendations and evaluation (the latter carried out with the initiating agency of the problem). They would be actively contributing one of the succeeding steps to a range of work-in-progress at each stage. Each stage would be taught as a mini-course in its own right.

1. Appreciation of the genesis, methods and objectives of practitioner's proposed research

Initially at stage one, social work students would start from examining a practitioner's identification of problem, and the envisioned significance for implementation of answers to the research questions. They would be taught the general skills of formulating research questions, the processes of coherently collecting and connecting information and ideas, and how to present these cogently and consistently in intelligently arguing a case. This should be a major teaching objective and could be met by reading a range of research papers, and making presentations of such materials at discussion seminars.

2. Research methods

Identifying the appropriate research method for a selected topic and devising work plans and schedules. (These selected topics and the schedules, questionnaires etc. would be prepared to become the task of the next intake of students.)¹⁵

3. Collecting of data

On the research topic for which the method and work plan had been devised at a previous stage by a former group of students.

4. Analysis of data

Collected by the earlier students

5. Social policy and programming planning (SP&PP)

The function of the SP and PP seminar would be to identify the new knowledge which the research material (or theses) supplies; to work out its implications for practice, policy (or alternative policies); and follow through from these to realistic considerations of

¹⁵ Research need not be an individual undertaking. Small groups might better collaborate, with a check to see that each student was contributing a fair share. (Professionally, it is likely that social workers would - and should - work together in such endeavours and this collaborative skill is as important, if not more useful, than the more romanticised lonely academic effort to which we often subscribe).

programme or changes in programme, manpower requirements, new or refined job descriptions, training needs, factors of timing, finance, etc.¹⁶

Interpretation of research and recommendations for action should be seen and differentiated as skills in their own right and quite distinct from research skills.¹⁷ This being the case, it must be acknowledged for curriculum planning purposes as a separate stage. Teachers would provide the seminar with resources as discussion developed in relation to each research project, (such as where relevant the teacher's added carefully selected material produced by other researchers along with relevant public documents etc.). Experts and consultants would be invited to talk on specific matters as they arose in the process of formulating policy and programme related to the problem under review, which the research had focused upon. Much theory could be elaborated upon as the seminar proceeded with its practical focus and provides opportunity for illustration and illumination.

Should it be found that supplementary information or testing of some assumptions is required, such matters would be referred back to the current research list and in time both sets of material would be returned to a SP and PP seminar.

6. Implementation strategies seminar

This seminar would be provided with the research material and the SP&PP policy and programme formulation produced by the preceding seminar groups and would have the function of working out implementation "strategies".

The seminar would need to collect information and find out about the actual decision-making processes at the various levels of action relevant to implementation of the specific matter under discussion. In this way the working of power groups and individuals, and techniques in exposition, in gaining support from others and in selling ideas would have to be explored.

The seminar would analyse the various courses of possible action and ways of proceeding examine arguments for and against, the implications of one strategy as differentiated from another and make judgements in regard to the effectiveness of different approaches and techniques. It would be the task of the seminar to spell out in detail what would need to be done with whom, when and how, and what materials in what format would be needed and be appropriately delivered etc. in order to have specific programmes initiated or altered. A realistic social action programme would then be formulated,

The Implementation Strategies Seminar should begin to make it professionally habitual to carefully think out and think through co-ordination and properly supported persistent multi-faceted and well-timed approaches.¹⁸ The profession needs to draw upon an increasingly sophisticated practice constantly refined by experience and informed by growing theory devised from social analysis, diagnosis and outcome of planned action.

7. Implementation and field assignments

As in the normal course of events the research topic had been proposed by a practitioner, the relevant agency (agencies) would of course have a role in working through this phase with the students.

The research material and the implementation strategy seminar formulation documents would be handed over, if appropriate for a student worker or group, as a

¹⁶ It has been observed that recommendations in student research frequently seem to be unsophisticated in content and insufficiently thought out in relation to the way in which things might actually work, happen, or can be brought about.

¹⁷ Laying the foundation for them becoming active consumers of research.

¹⁸ It happens too often that results are expected from isolated efforts such as writing letters, demonstrations or similar activities which are not thought through, co-ordinated or widely supported.

subsequent year's fieldwork assignment. Under appropriate supervision and support, one or more students, depending on the situation, would be involved with the agency in following through, documenting their progress, their success and failure. In this process they would be evaluating operationally, by the outcome of their efforts, all the stages of the research work that had preceded. It would provide very substantial hard information of what was done and achieved or otherwise i.e. "case material".

Amongst many other purposes, the overall experience could be used as a basis for the development of theoretical constructs leading to an indigenous-based action theory and against which broader derived theory could be illustrated and examined, providing a growing armamentarium of understanding and techniques.

8. Evaluation seminars

Finally, all this material and experience gained from the research project would become available in teaching skills and in evaluating projects right through from topic proposal to completed action.

A summary of the approach

In the course of adopting the curriculum changes discussed in this paper the schools would have been involving the students, practitioners, and the teaching staff in practice and in theory-building at the same time.

Students would immediately see the relevance of the steps of identification of problems, and have experienced a hands-on role in how questions from the field are taken through all the stages and specific focus of research and progression into action and final evaluation. They would no longer think of these processes as "subjects" to be inflicted by academics, with research as a major hurdle in which their efforts only merely culminate in academic accreditation. Although they would not have had to take responsibility for any one topic from start to finish, they would have begun to appreciate the practical pay-off of research, savor the excitement of having contributed to knowledge and change and precipitated organised action. They would understand the importance of providing research topics from the field when they become practitioners and where they belong in contributing to an overall professional identity. In the controlled learning situation the student would be fulfilling the role and trying out procedures that he might be expected to continue for the rest of his professional life, one in which continuing learning (for which the school programme was only the prototype) would become a built-in professional habit rather than - as is often the case - an isolated episode for students and an unfulfilling burden for academics.

It is also anticipated that the professional practitioners and the schools would be drawn together in identifying need, pursuing research, creating and contributing knowledge, enhancing professional skills, and translating them into action.

Change

A curriculum that included the chain of activities outlined above obviously would have implications for teaching institutions, current curricula, and students and teachers alike. It would be time-consuming, and would demand profound changes in the relationships between the institution, associations, the community, and the staff and students. It would hardly be possible to add it to what we presently have, for it requires a "cafeteria" ¹⁹style curriculum rather than the more familiar "set-course banquet", and would require much from teachers and the practitioners.

¹⁹ As in a cafeteria (ingredients, prepared dishes (modules) available from simple to complex but as far as sequence goes determined on a when-you-need-to-know basis.

However, if the many obvious (and probably many not so obvious) difficulties could be ironed out, such changes would present advantages. It offers an integrating mechanism for both practise and theory and, if done imaginatively, could begin to deal with the problem of what our selection should be from the enormous range of content and theory related to social problems and human behaviour. We could perhaps minimise core content in exchange for core activity and alert the student to the immense possibilities of what remains, placing emphasis on the learning skills of how, where, when and through whom to find out the content when it is needed. Such an approach will serve them best in the long run as more and more data and more and more theory mount up and as conditions rapidly change. This seems more rewarding than trying to decide upon a semi-permanent curriculum content when so we can know little of the future direction of the student's professional life.

What we would be attempting is to impart a professional method of learning, in the few years at our institutions, which will start students on the path of finding out and doing things methodically for the rest of their lives. This kind of knowledge cannot grow obsolete and "irrelevant" so quickly as so much of our teaching has in the past. Hopefully then the essential value of theory and the need to know what is happening elsewhere will follow from a firm base of seeing, doing and knowing what is happening directly in one's own domain. This then becomes accessible to the student out of his growing self-confidence, whereas currently he is inadvertently undermined by the emphasis on academic alien ways of doing things in alien situations, which tends to leave theory rattling around unconnected in the head, an abstraction from alien experience rather than an integrating conceptualisation of much that is hands-on familiar.

After thinking through the full implications of such an approach, perhaps schools would be interested to try out some of the suggestions made in this paper. More fundamentally, it might be an instructive exercise to begin to construct (at least for theoretical purposes in the first case) not a model curriculum (an activity about which we have much misgivings) but a model teaching-learning institution. The aim would be to discover ideally what kind of structure, relationships and ambience might best serve to impart the nature of social work and its practice²⁰. Then we would be able to plan for each phase of moving towards such an ideal.

Kaunas October 2002

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²⁰ A most penetrating discussion of institutions, and their relationships to the nature of knowledge, to which we owe a great deal in this area of concern, is to be found in Werner Stark (1958), "The Sociology of Knowledge", Routledge Keegan Paul.

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Annex

One of my hobby horses (nagging ideas) for an evaluation process to see if conferences really pay off in action?

It would take perhaps a scheduled half an hour for people to write and you would need to give them a sheet of paper and an envelope.

There is a lot of social rather than work in social work conferences, and courses. I advocate that all participants be required to write themselves a letter after these 'good for travel agencies' 'sprees.

The letter will say - Dear(myself),

These are three important things I have learned from this conference.

From these, this is what I will do and put into some action when I get back to my job back home.....

signed(me).

A copy is kept for the evaluators of the programme activities. One copy (they themselves having addressed and stamped the envelope) is sent to the participant some six months later, with a note asking

1. What actually of their self-identified implementations of their learning have they actually done.
2. If you have, tell about it so that others may learn.
3. If you did not, why not? Did you misjudge the reality of your situation? Did you come up against unexpected barriers to action? Please explain.

Something can be learned from that and might become the subject area for another programme.

4. Give a warning that ...If no reply is sent to this follow up, then perhaps they should never again be invited to spend public money on apparently what turned out to be a pleasure trip with no pay off to society!!!

SPP223 Social Work and Society - Community

Augustinova, Jitka	Pass
Formankova, Lenka	Withdrew from class?
Hancarova, Blanka	Pass
Hroudova, Miroslava	Pass
Jansova, Eva	Pass
Lopourova Veronka	Pass
Pospisilova Silvie	Pass
Szczepanikova Alice	Pass

Class Contributions (written)

1. Describe a time when you went to some kind of social service for yourself. Tell how you felt, where you were received, how you were received, (write the conversation as fully as possible) How did the visit come to an end. Was it helpful in a way you expected.? What are your thoughts regarding how useful such a service is from your point of view. If you have never been in such a situation!!!! Interview someone in your family or a friend to tell you the above things.

2. Bring to class anything you find in a newspaper or a magazine that tells about a social service situation or problem which might illustrate the way in which people experience public policy as delivered by those who are supposed to be implementing it

Outline of Micro, Mezzo, Macro paper for the course.

3. Take a social work example from your experience, or perhaps something from the newspaper cuttings on the noticeboard, Spell out the possible social work activities at the Micro, Mezzo, and Macro levels.

Material Provided.

To illustrate MMM The Infants House

To illustrate SW Telephone skills

- Maintaining and securing social and household base
- Support of other social services
- Policy arising from cases (LCC interview material)

Areas of competence

(To be used as a guide by the supervisor in arriving at an overall grade)

Assessment should be indicated as follows;

5 Outstanding; 4 Above Average 3 Average 2 Below Ave. 1 Unsatisfactory

X No opportunity to observe.

Comment should be added where it is relevant to the assessment.

Competence as indicated by work with Centre's Supervisor

1. Timely submission of written work5..

The student has written relatively copiously and has presented her material regularly.

2. Quality of Journal ?.....

The journal has not identified social issues as was intended but has been more of a running diary. As an average determined by work of other students this would be graded as a 3. However, if graded in terms of its utility for teaching purposes it would be a 1.

3. Quality of Case Material ...2.....

The student is a dedicated and committed person who draws strongly on her religious faith and virtues. The case material demonstrates her relying very heavily on her powers of persuasion and the goodness of her values. Her sincerity is constantly projected so that it reflects back in a conviction that all manner of things will be well. People will give up drinking....will care better for their children etc. There is very little in terms of detailed work plan and virtually nothing in terms of process and what is said by client or worker reflecting what the true feelings of children or families might be in the situation.

4. Use of Supervisory Time3.

The student is attentive but seems not to have moved forward in her grasp of what is different to her present mode of operation and what is required.

5. Participation in group discussion3.

Not very active or initiating debate

6. Assumption of responsibility for own learning3

There is little indication of what theory has been utilised

Competence as indicated by the work at the agency

8. Understanding of Agency Function4.....

The residential facility has its own very strong orientation in "rescuing children" and teaching the tenets of the church. The student understands this very well indeed and but has no perspective of what it might developmentally become.

9. Relationship skills with colleagues4.....

Within the institution the student has the highest recommendation.

10. Relationship skills with clients2....

Within the circumscribed situation in which the student works she no doubt does very well. The problem is that the relationships promoted by the institution are different from those which are being focused upon in social work teaching.

11 Capacity for Independence3.....

Within the firm framework of the institution and its concept of relationships with the community the student operates with independence but does not seem to separate herself sufficiently to operate independently beyond this ambience.

12 Organisation of work & establishment of priorities2....

Work is organised very well, but the priorities are not those of the professional social worker

13 Use of other agency and community resources3

Again within the limited orbit of her operation this is acceptable but to move into the arena where other agencies are at work is not really observable.

Sense of professional responsibility

14 Understands the knowledge base of social work ...2....

The practice gives little indication

- 15 Upholds the ethics of social work with commitment
to social justice and the responsibility to
contribute to the development of services2..

There is a sense of social injustice perhaps but the development of services not emanating from the situation in the current placement is not demonstrated.

- 16 Ability to evaluate own beginning level of practice
objectively and to assess professional growthX

- 17 Understands the need to continue to develop
practice skillsX

This needs to be discussed further in relation to this assessment. It remains to be seen whether student accepts and is prepared to develop her practice in a setting which challenges her present level of skills and widens her repertory.

Agency Liaison