

AN ASIAN PROGRESS

Being a Highly Personal Account  
of Professional Work

by

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Note: The views and opinions expressed in this paper  
are entirely those of the author and not  
necessarily those of the organisations or  
persons described.



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I first came to Asia in 1968, although I had been for some years on the Western fringes: Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and Cyprus. My Asia was made up only of what my friends in International House in New York in the '50s and my many students in the '60s had imparted to me when I taught at the University College of Swansea in the U.K. on the special courses for Senior Social Welfare Personnel from the developing countries.

The actual courses of my coming was laced with farce - as so many of the most important events of my life have seemed to be. Despite the field programmes, I had initiated for my students and the strange journeys we had shared into the countries at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, I had grown discontented with listening to what I had to say, and disenchanted with its relevance, and I determined to place myself in the "Third World" firmly where I thought what was important was happening. Cyprus had been one of my more successful ventures, set as it was between East and West, development and underdevelopment, Christian and Moslem, Greek and Turk, with eventually a UN Peace Keeping Force for good measure. When a UN post for Cyprus was advertised, I applied, was given an extraordinary interview and turned down. I was given the impression that this was because working with Government and a population of 600,000 seemed to my interviewers too exalted a height for me to manage. However, in turning me down they subsequently asked if I would go to Nigeria (population 30,000,000!). A little reluctantly I said 'yes', and found myself some months later appointed to Indonesia! (population 120,000,000!)

Indonesia had just emerged from a holocaust. The UN had been dismissed when President Sukarno decided to start his own unaligned International Organisation. Now UN personnel were returning and ironically found themselves in the hotel opposite the 30-story rusting skeleton of what was to be their competitors' (?) Djakarta-based secretariat.

Indonesia changed my life and altered not only my geography<sup>ILAC</sup> but also my personal and professional appreciation of the world. Somehow the centre of my understanding of everything was transformed. The 18 months in Indonesia (Java, Sulawasi, Ambonia, Sumatra, Bali) requires a book in its own right. Something of the confusion in communication east and west - was borne

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home to me in an early domestic happening. Having discovered some recognisable sausages at a colonial-remnant butcher shop in Bandung, we carried them to our Government compound in triumph. We enquired at the staff-house if they had a refrigerator in which to place our prize until we were ready to eat them. 'Yes' we were told and the sausages were given up, and then returned to us when we asked for them. A week or so later, when we had recovered from whatever sausage-induced poisoning we had suffered, I enquired and discovered that 'yes' there was a refrigerator and 'yes' the sausages had been inside, but, (and this as a terrific flash of insight for me) 'no' the refrigerator was not working and had not done so for seven or eight years! I gradually learned to put together strings of supplementary questions to any enquiry I made about anything, but again and again the vital question would evade me. Still, my Asianisation was under way.

Perhaps the outstanding events of an astounding period was in the work of inventing virtually instant field placements for everybody, that is, both the students and staff of the School of Social Work (S.T.K.S) in Bandung. It was to my mind <sup>95</sup> more important to get the classroom-bound staff out into Indonesia and its problems, as it was for students to be exposed to reality, however frightening it certainly was. They needed to be relieved of the abstract rehashing of the outdated and highly American-oriented literature which was prevalent at the time. The second most important experience seems to me to have been the method and journeyings we put together to reprepare the Ministry of Social Welfare Plan of Operations with UNICEF. This needed to be done on an emergency basis to meet the appalling needs of a land which had been torn by fratricide. Some of my best conducted seminars took place on the roof of the jeep, forever getting stuck in the rivers where the bridges had gone, and where we waited open-endedly in the great palm forests beyond Menadoh for appropriate-technology-oxen to pull us out. For me, I had given all I had to give; made many mistakes and established what Mrs. Memet (now UNICEF Representative in Islamabad), kindly and chidingly I suppose, called my "machine-gun method" ..... (worth pondering, and I have!)

So began my Asia addiction - often difficult to live with, almost impossible to live without. Within four months I was back again as a consultant along with Emma Batto, DSW of the Philippines and Virginia

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Tanner from HEW, USA. At the ECAFE/UNICEF Workshop on Social Welfare In-service Training where I first met Frances Yasas in person, although we already felt we had known each other forever from correspondence. Frances and I shared a deep interest in the uses of creative literature for teaching purpose and later we were to initiate the first seminar of this kind in the Philippines.\* However, for the In-service Workshop I contributed an enormously long paper\*\* full of long quotations from writings that I thought would not have been available to most participants.

The paper still reads coherently to me, considering I wrote it during my Christmas "Vacation" from teaching when the whole family was sick during a flu epidemic and I was smitten with chicken-pox. Christmas dinner was on January 12th that year! I remember the workshop in Bangkok as one of particular good humour, hard work and a lot of fun.

Less than half a year later I was back again to the IASSW and ICSW Conferences in the Philippines, with seminars in Hong Kong en route. Manila was virtually underwater from a typhoon, water came through the roof but was erratic in the taps of the Grand Hotel. Distinguished ladies emerged into passage ways with hair all lathered, seeking an emergency supply of rinsing water, the hotel staff went on strike. ("Don't tell anyone because I am supposed to be on strike, but I can't let you make your own bed, Mr. Drucker!!!) It was the year of "the corridors of power" for social workers. Intrepid Filipino doyens giggled a little when they puzzled at the fuss and said that they had always been there!

Our Vietnamese colleagues seemed even more puzzled and eventually expressed their anxiety at the growing dangers of the advocated power-

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\* Rosita Luna-Fondevilla & Gloria Maranon, "Creative Literature in Social Work Education: THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIMENT" Philippine Department of Social Welfare and UNICEF, 1971

\*\* David Drucker, "Teaching Methodology & Teaching Materials in Social Welfare In-Service Training Courses" ECAFE/UNICEF, 1969



game plays. I spent every minute rapporteuring, ready for each morning. All the final reports had disappeared by breakfast time, the secretariat having worked all night. Miracles produced a new set by the plenary session. Ellen Winston (Commissioner of HEW, USA) as she packed in her room almost on top of the ships of Manila Bay, said suddenly, "David, you and I ought to write a book together sometime". I wondered, worn out but nevertheless ungraciously, what part of it I wouldn't be doing! I felt doubly ashamed when I received from Ellen a splendid appreciation, written high above the Pacific as she headed for home.

By the end of the year 1970, I had finally shed my British-based responsibilities and was on my way to Bangkok again as the consultant for what eventually became the "Explorations"\*, "Analysis", "Survey", "Research", "Study" and much else was suggested as a more fitting description, "more dignified", "more weighty really". "What do you mean by 'Exploration' anyway?", I was challenged. "I came believing you knew exactly what you wanted and I was to be the mere instrument," I replied. "I was wrong!" "I spent six weeks trying to see whether what was wanted and what I could do, had points of contact. I visited six countries (Korea, Hong Kong, Philippines, Burma, Thailand and Pakistan), sixty schools, six hundred people repeatedly, asked six thousand questions and I toyed with sixty thousand thoughts, and grew six hundred thousand times wiser and I hope humbler, and in six weeks I sat down and wrote what felt like six million pages. That is what I call an "Exploration"! The word stayed but as Tom Brigham rightly commented, the full title itself needed a summary ..... !!

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\* David Drucker, "An Exploration Of The Curricula Of Social Work In Some Countries of Asia, With Special Reference To The Relevance Of Social Work Education To Social Development Goals"  
ECAFE/UNICEF, Bangkok, 1972.



"Explorations" speaks volumes ? for itself. It attempted to find ways of turning Social Work into the mainstream of "Social Development" in the countries of the non-affluent world and challenged us to review once again our radical welfare origins. It attempted to start us towards finding a universal base for social work as an international movement, no longer distorted because of the absence of the voice and experience of the developing countries. - Countries surging with new-won independence and new technical possibilities and ready to attack man's age-old problems in their own ways. "Explorations" was in search of means with which to make creditable the over-abundance of philosophy pouring forth at that time.

Two matters I began to pursue. One was to see whether different Schools would try out one or other of the suggestions/recommendations so that the seminar planned upon "Explorations" would have at its disposal technically supported, and a well documented range of actual experiences. These would be a kind of "entrance-fee" for an International Meeting - an attempt to improve upon the more familiar opinions, set-piece country contributions, and whirlpools of talk. The other was to somehow map out the total foreseeable needs that schools would have to work at, to get the social development (Social Justice, Participation, Institution Building, Social Policy and Planning etc..... !) orientation we all seemed to be seeking; to see exactly who would work at each piece of the mosaic; and to bring together the whole range of possible support resources and donors, (international and bilateral, Government and Non-government) to "buy" a piece of a whole. The idea was of integration in a truly operational sense. Somehow, this was not to be. Administrative matters tangled up "Explorations" and despite valiant efforts at the Bangkok end, I eventually had to set out on my own but with UNICEF's moral blessing, to keep some of the concepts and action alive. I had meanwhile learned something important about asking questions, which was that a collection of answers were not enough and that something substantial needs to be given to those from whom one seeks information. The least one can give is to return the answers in a way which can be freshly and insightfully examined and will point the way to action and creative support and partnership. Asking questions seemed to me to involve a responsibility to

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Those who gave of their time and were driven to examine experiences which were often painful to think about, and made them uneasy about their shortcomings in relation to their high aspirations. Something substantial had to be given in return.

This was one of the reasons why I travelled under my own steam for three months through Indonesia; Philippines; Korea; to the UN Regional Planning Institute in Nagoya; sought out Mildred Sikkema on her cross-cultural field study work on the island of Guam; on to Hawaii; Washington; and New York; talking my way all the time. For a while it looked as though the whole project as a fairly long process with my on-going contribution had been salvaged. It was expected that the overall-attack on curriculum and field needs for a social development orientation linked with the supporting agencies' joint collaboration might be begun by a presentation and a planning meeting at the IASSW and ICSW meetings to be held in the Netherlands that summer.

These meetings in the Hague were significant for the magnificent address given by Richard Titmuss. He seemed bronzed and fitter than I had ever seen him. Alas, although we corresponded and plans were discussed for some work together, he died as he lived, lucidly and with great courage, soon after my return to Britain the following year. Plans for launching ARASWE were made at the Hague, too. However, my professional and personal hopes in relation to "Explorations" and Asia did not come to fruition there.

The Explorations seminar did take place and was remarkable I think for the sterling summarising and grasp for detail and concept by John Lawrence of the University of New South Wales. Resolutions and recommendations were duly passed. Frances Yasas continues to reassure me that "Explorations" lives. It is now six years since the seminar. The participants wanted to meet again after five to follow-up much of what was then intended, but I, and I wonder sometimes, if they, feel that so many bright possibilities have gradually tarnished. Nevertheless, as one door closes ....., I soon found myself off on a professional and personal adventure to surpass (and as it turned out, to rework and build upon) all that had gone before.



Frances Yasas, our very good friend and comrade. Pratap Basnyat, and I set off to the "land-locked and least developed countries", - to the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, to Afghanistan, and to Laos, with discussion in India which we felt had much to offer. Somehow amidst much good fellowship, a lot of laugh, and hours spent talking and scribbling in hotel lounges, airports, and peculiar corners, and with chalk, blackboard, and rescribbling on the 6th floor of the offices in the R.S. Hotel, Bangkok, we invented upon Mr. Kamayana's original chancing-an-arm project proposal, something which oddly became known as the Mobile Training Scheme (MTS) for the Training of Front-line and Supervisory Developmental Personnel in Land-locked and Least Developed Countries of the ECAFE Region. Long titles (long articles did I hear you say?) have been a recurrent problem!

MTS attempted to build training programmes from the bottom-up, beginning with the problems and situations in which "front line", "supervisory staff and trainers find themselves. The MTS strove to take educators and administrators ..... through the detailed step-by-step exercises of experiencing and collecting material which began with an examination of the problems in the community which were to be tackled. This led to a detailed and realistic job analysis broken down into the skills, knowledge and attitude required, and systematically we tried to link each element of the analysis to a unit of the educational objectives, practice, content and method.

It also aimed at establishing a growing inter-national team of expertise within the region for the construction of training programmes for any focus that Government determined front-line and supervisory staff would have to implement. I was invited back in Nepal to explain the MTS in detail at the Annual Panchayat Training Seminar, and then travelled across India, talking as I went at a number of Schools of Social Work. The summer saw me writing back and forth to New York and Bangkok commenting on the comments made about the MTS project. Meanwhile, I undertook some work for UNESCO in Paris regarding "Community Schools" in the Life Long Education approach which was then gaining ground, and also for the Dartington Hall Trust, in a project in Sicily where I met up with Danilo Dolci, who has been called the Gandhi of Southern Europe. I also invented

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and set up a small programme for training workers in South Wales for consumer protection. While attending the Nairobi Conferences in the summer of 1974, I received word that I was to join the MTS project, now approved and sponsored by ESCAP, and in time was back in Nepal. Here the MTS worked with the Ministry of Panchayat and gradually we began to concentrate on the needs and problems of promoting and strengthening grass-roots planning, that is, towards a system of "planning-up" and "support-down". This approach is one that the social development literature heartily advocates but for which we have virtually little operational experience. Thus it is we have such difficulties with training, and why we get diverted from training-to-do, and instead educate abstractly in subject matters and about things. An account of MTS was provided by ESCAP as one of the papers at the Jerusalem IASSW Conference and we can expect much more significant details from that source.

While working with over 50 Nepalese, "Panchayat Secretary" trainees in the field, it was decided to run a "Health Profile" - one of the many dimensions which it was hoped to put together so that the village could and would be excited to look at itself and thereby know-what-they-knew. They might then be ready to fit this together with what those from outside concerned with development contributed, that they knew and so create (with a common touch) a "bottom-up, support-down" local plan commitment and implementation.

In a language, poetic, fascinating, unexpected, and wholly strange, emerged a collection of what ordinary people said about health and "health services". **Excerpts** of the village people's thinking and talking I collected together under six headings:

- 1) The Economics of Health
- 2) Attitudes
- 3) Health Posts and Services
- 4) Medicines (Availability)
- 5) Childbirth
- 6) The Healers, Conjurors, Sorcerers, Magicians, Physicians et al.

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and wrote a quick introductory paper.\*

The village eye-view had extraordinarily little relation to what was being discussed by the Central Government at their Country Health Planning. To my surprise, the material and the MTS method caught the attention of the WHO planners at their Regional Office in New Delhi (the management experts, system analysts, statisticians, economists etc. etc.) and I found myself being invited to join them in the Region as their "Social Scientist". I was to be their bottom-up man, in their very much top-down planning set-up. The planners were however, having doubts about their familiar approach and as WHO and UNICEF were about to launch their thrust for Primary Health Care with its fundamental concept of people's participation, my work seemed to fit their bill.

So, on to WHO and New Delhi and as it turned out, Country Health Programming in Burma, Bangladesh, and Thailand. Community Development approaches were now being inserted into the growingly receptive minds of some of those embedded in what Illich has called the "Medical Mafia", and the Director-General of WHO has called the "Disease Palace", i.e. the urban-based hospitals. These strongholds, Primary Health Care is destined to challenge and change. I made also a small contribution to such matters as malaria control, immunization, nutrition, nursing education, and training of primary health workers. In addition, solid effort was provided to the global studies of community involvement in health projects promoted by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Health policy.

Most exciting of all I think was my work with the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Science in Bangalore, India. Somehow I had gone full cycle to the psychiatric work which I had abandoned almost twenty years earlier. But now I was penetrating into

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\* David Drucker. Mantras And Medicine For Development. Mobile Training Scheme, Nepal, 1975



the villages of India with a medical team and working out with them the shape of possible primary health care psychiatry to come. However, the real innovation here, I think, was in beginning to demonstrate how medical men might reconstruct their roles, and the structure and 'style' of medical provision, to fit village needs, village perceptions, village institutions and the mainstream thrust for community participation in preventive public health and genuine social development and change. The general (i.e. not psychiatric) aspects of this can be found described in my paper "Village (Bed ?) Side Manners".\*

Now since the end of my WHO contract, I have moved on to Burma with UNICEF. Burma has cut itself off for many years from the enormous changes that Social Welfare and Social Work has undergone outside in the Region and has been constructing their own approach to development, economic, political, and social, through what is known as the Burmese Way to Socialism. Here I am assisting in tackling the training needs for Social Welfare to play its part in a community-based self-help thrust to establish and maintain "Converging Services" - (another version of "planning-up, support-down" as I see it). The Department of Social Welfare has also shown its interest in the establishment of a regular School of Social Work. Meanwhile, I have been toying (that's the word) with the possibilities of bringing the children of the rural areas into the planning process. I have been arguing that children should not just be seen sentimentally as beneficiaries, but already are useful and contributing members of society. (In South Asia alone, 29 million children are gainfully employed by ILO standards!) I have begun to outline the idea of something I call "I-Spy" games for children, which is an attempt to draw upon the careful research that children undertake quite unguidedly and voluntarily from their inherent sense of curiosity. I want to organise this into a pleasurable, exciting, but serious series of games which will contribute to, even spear-head,

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\* David Drucker. "Village (Bed ?) Side Manners", UNICEF Burma, 1978.



local level planning and community action. It seems to me particularly relevant in this coming International Year of The Child and a fitting way for me to be using my experience in the first year of my second decade in my Asian Progress!

This rambling instant article is merely the surface of a deep and profound pilgrimage that I have had the honour to live through, and work at, with my colleagues, friends (and sometimes adversaries!) in Asia. My efforts have been part of what I call "the craft of cross-cultural consultation". This, I believe, is a professional skill in its own right but is still in a very crude state. Unfortunately, much of such experience becomes the personal possession of consultants and is often undigested and idiosyncratic and sometimes becomes mere travellers' tales. I have long argued that we need to get together and share what we have all learned from practising this craft, document it, refine it, think about it jointly a great deal, compare and synthesize it to the skills of other professionals engaged in development, link it to our theory-building, and then add it to the repertoire of social work skills, and eventually teach it to the next generation who might then be more effectively perceptive and less quixotic than some of us (especially me) have been. How about it, ARASWE?