INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

XIXth International Congress of Schools of Social Work

14 - 18 August, 1978

A COMMENTARY

on the Section D papers:

The Contribution of Social Work and Social Work Education to Social Development

by

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I note that this section of the Congress offers three background papers in contrast to the single paper for the other sections. Katherine Kendall has written to me that this is because:

"... there is no one person who could encompass the many different initiatives which could classify under social development ..."

It may be that our initiatives are many but I believe a critical matter for social work is that so far there is something very loose about our classification. The result is that often we are not clear what we mean, and what we must concern ourselves with, when we discuss "social development". "Social development" has a brave ring about it, but there is a tendency for us to merely rename our usual activities with a flourish, rather than to face up to the full implications of the massive extension and the far reaching changes in our profession which this declared enthusiasm demands. The commitment to social development is not a change of emphasis. If we are not to degenerate into mere talk, it requires a revolutionary shift for social work as a profession and in the practice of most social workers.*

Maxine Ankrarv reviews the literature from Africa and more widely, and offers some direction:

"The process of development is seen as a manifestation of change in the direction of desired and planned goals - social, economic, political. Social work is further concerned specifically with man and his development, in his involvement in defining and solving his problems, and his participation in the development of resources to meet his needs. Social work is also interested in development defined in terms of social and economic equality, improved and new institutions and attitudes, and social policy measures supportive of the betterment of man and society."

She emphasises the political implications and in this regard
quotes Peter Kuenstler (our Chairman today) on changing the structure of political power. In 1971 in Asia* I extrapolated from the literature and pronouncements five "roles" in relation to social development. Four of these address themselves to 1) Social Policy and Planning; 2) Social Justice; 3) Participation by the People; 4) Institution Building.** These were not, of course, entirely novel aspects of social work, but as I saw it they had to become the mainstream of our focus and activity if our social development aspirations were to be taken seriously.

It will be seen, therefore, that I find myself very much in sympathy with Ms Ankrah's stance... She requires that social work must enable the poor, rural and urban, to become contributors as well as beneficiaries of development in terms of defining objectives and in implementation. She also insists rightly that "new strategies must affect the rural masses."

However, now in 1978 her judgement is that Rigby-Williams' 1969 statement regarding social work and welfare in Africa remains characteristic yet:

"... they are still mainly concerned with picking up the social casualties ..."

I have spent some time on this because included in this section is David Chi's paper, which I find difficult to place, for it seems that Chung-Ang University Social Welfare Centre declares itself as attempting

"... to project a model of social development ..."

However, I think that this, by the above development criteria, the Centre as it is presently described is unlikely to do.

Let me say at once that I believe the sensitive care and
management of social casualties are important and should not be denigrated. Social work has a tradition and a responsibility here. Social casualties are inevitable, and likely to increase in conditions of rapid social change. It would be quite legitimate and honourable for social work as a profession to declare this "stretcher bearer" work as its central focus and to contribute its findings, insights, and considered opinions to those involved with the wider concerns.

Responding to this aspect in formulating my fifth development role, I put the matter thus:

"Social Work helping methods
... For our purposes we ask you to narrow down your thinking of what you teach to the emphasis which you give in imparting that the situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies and the gaps or the inconsistencies in our policy 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. It is this specific role of identifying such matters that we are asking about here ...
"

(Explorations, pp. 16-17)

There is need and demand enough in this fifth role alone for a profession to concentrate upon. But our profession has insistently claimed for itself a major and wider role in development, and we must therefore produce the organization and coherent action where our mouths have led us.

David might reasonably argue directly that the University needed field work experiences for its student which apparently could not be met by existing agencies and a solution was successfully found in a physical facility drawing a number of functions together - a University (in the possessive sense?) Social Welfare Centre. David thinks a familiar social work
jargon and might assist us if he would clarify what in operational terms he means by such shorthand as 'systematic wholistic approach', 'multi-disciplinary', and 'inter-disciplinary'. Physical close proximity does not of itself constitute an interdisciplinary contribution "to social development through the direct application of theories and professional skills" which David Chi rightly desires.

The paper comes nearest to a social development orientation when he lists:

"... the ranking of problems according to the most pressing..."

Problems A, "Environment", are curiously distinguished from B by the heading "Activity Related Problems". Problems A (non-activity?) we are told:

"... will require government intervention. Thus workers in the area will have to make representations to authorities to remedy the situation..."

Thereafter the paper does not mention these problems again. Perhaps David Chi will enlarge upon what he thinks "representations to authorities" etc., require from the profession and in terms of the social work education trinity - knowledge, attitude, and skills?

What too were/are the processes and mechanisms for involving the community in defining its problems for itself, for selecting priorities, and forging action programmes and projects? Did it have a say in deciding upon a Centre?

It might be salutary to ask in this context, as Ms Ankrah does in another:

"... whose purposes are being served...?"

in this Centre.
I hope David Chi will not take these comments amiss and I am sure we all join him in his feeling "that the practice of social work should always be action-oriented" and not a theoretical indulgence. This concerns Ms Ankras too, for she spends much of her paper arguing the cause of intermediate levels of education in social work and their practical contribution, and the discontinuities of this, with what takes place at the universities. Yet I detect that she is admiringly resentful of the status-conferring status-quo supporting and supported universities which receive such attention from governments, and she adds "the international organizations".

Underlying all this seems to me to be fundamental questions regarding the nature and tensions of social work practice: the necessary contribution towards the institution building required for new and appropriate social change oriented educational institutions: and the significance of social work practice and its emerging developmental theory within them.

My opinion is that social work has generally paid too high a price for the respectability of being University-based, for the fact is that

"The universities... are still very much moving to the rhythm of their past, that is they were set up to 'study, enrich and glorify' traditional culture." *

They are still much concerned with fixed and eternal truths, with knowledge located so to speak within the exalted person of the teacher (de "guru"), who certifies his disciples' science and the philosophy of science demands critical questioning, challenge to shibboleths and no authority within the world of observables and confirmable phenomena, and requires a democratic fellowship of students and teachers which is not hierarchical.
interpret; present; pass opinion; explain; question; discuss and compile. This is aimed at creating the capacity for education as a life long pursuit for self instruction and self growth and not just "taking in" courses.

However, the complex "developmental social science content" must of course be defined, selected and translated for specific social work purposes and the skills for doing so practiced and demonstrated by the teachers before we can place the responsibility fully on the students themselves.

Social science is as yet limited in scope and based largely on observations of western behaviour. We have grasped too readily the false security of the numbers-games and limited research methodologies. I find an incredible unwillingness for researchers to establish the raw material of analysis, concepts, and theory by amassing detailed descriptions of behaviour or of what social workers actually do. The developing world has yet to make its contribution to the social sciences by redressing the imbalance in which western findings have been accepted as more or less universal and applicable to those with very different thought patterns and societies. We ourselves clamour for 'image' and 'status' in tradition bound hierarchies without recognising the contradictions and realising our potential contribution for change. Our students perhaps need to be made aware of the 'minority' position that the profession holds in store for them. Image and status must be earned and not conferred, and our authority can come only from that which we can contribute and achieve, and not because we have somehow joined other status holders.

I have indicated just the surface of what we must do in institution building for our own educational purposes. Implied too is the need for institution building for a truly professional organization of social work to systematically address itself to social development. It is not enough for
individual social workers to join 'think tanks'. In Explorations I have commented that often such persons go into highly erudite technical circles on a personal basis only, without the full weight of the professional experience distilled and mobilised behind them.* One result is that Social Policy seems to remain inspirational statements rather than operational realities. Ms Ankrum tells us that Tesfaye in Africa points to the fact (as does my work in Asia) that there is little Schools of Social Work can go on in trying to trace stated Social Policy through the various operational stages to Manpower requirements for social service. Organised social work has a massive task to perform here. We will need to produce social workers who have been trained in the intellectual skills of being able to clarify the nature and implications of choice open to the community. In my 1971 study I found that almost no related field placements existed for exercising such skills, and Ms Ankrum gives the impression that the same is true for Africa.** She says that field work is very weak in the Region.

A vital area everywhere for institution building is the necessity for developing two way processes in planning and policy formulation from the community-up with support-down. Social work has surely a contribution to make here. Ms Ankrum emphasises the importance of community work and talks sweepingly "of placing social development workers throughout the structure". She sees progress

"if social workers really know what to do
with communities." !!

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* In Asmara, recently there was no professional who worked full-time in the organization of the profession per se.


On the same page she laments that "the literature is relatively silent on specific curriculum content." She concludes:

"... not many practical models for social work practice in rural areas are available ..."

Clearly Ms Ankrah has placed much on the social work agenda. I would emphatically support her plea:

"... that there is a need for more detail as well as analyses of the functions and roles of social workers ..."

in the project which have been reported.

I have been struck with the change in magnitude, content and style of Ms Ankrah's contribution in the last page, when she enumerates the issues of importance which we are asked to consider. Is she saying in her paper: "Look, this is what the pundits have said? Fine! But now, excuse me, this is what really worries me ..."). If so, then she is surely right, for the questions lead to fundamental and largely unanswered matters on which we have been intellectually ambivalent and operationally obscure.

"... Do social workers really want to opt out of the establishment - into which they are just gaining membership - in the cause of the poor and rural masses ...?"

Does she suggest that the establishment is antithetical to the cause of social work? If so, what are the full implications of opting out and what should be the nature of what we might opt into? Latin American social work addresses some of these issues in its cry for liberation. It complicates matters but can it tell us how organized social work education can operate with frankly anti-establishment objectives?

Quite rightly Ms Ankrah requires of us to begin to answer from our professional experience and value base whether we dare take risks, and mentions something which we have politely
avoided at these international congresses. How could (should?) our social worker colleagues practice their social development roles under the conditions of minimal and sometimes cynical participation which are common to elitist regimes, and often synonymous with military ones? Conflict strategies can rarely be practiced within the protection of the law, and bloodshed is only too frequent. Her question, how do you make a relationship of 'unequals' productive for social development? goes further than her context of university and intermediate level education. Ms Ankrath leaves the real cry from the heart to the very last line:

"Can social work education educate in commitment and caring?"

Commitment and caring seem to me highly personal matters. Educators and experienced social workers must husband what exists of this precious moral quality in students, encourage it and help graft on to it competence, skills and stimulate and applaud any expression of what has been called the sociological imagination.

But these are areas which are nurtured by example. As individuals and as a profession our commitment and caring must be continuously exercised and observable, with any weariness, rat race behaviour, and occasional cynicism kept very much in check. When we, the culture-carriers of social work, become effective human, daily models for our students and earn respect from our colleagues in allied professions, when we can demonstrably forge our complaints, sense of failure, and the seeming chaos and confusion about us into some kind of order, and devise systematic courses of action, perhaps our students will not take into their own professional persona a feeling of the second rate and of impotence, but will find pride in their minorityness and their being forever in the front line, of necessity battle weary...
The Mobile Training Scheme (MTS) has attempted a radical approach towards establishing the foundations for a variety of training programmes, starting from fundamental premises, many of which have been raised in discussion by the other two papers.

The MTS enunciated its philosophy, attempted a diagnosis of the failures and shortcomings of training and social work education as its impact could be discerned in Asia, and invented a methodology. One of the outstanding ideas, behind the MTS was to set up a process and an organization through which training in the social development arena would belong inside development activities rather than an adjunct to it (i.e., inside line administration and not stuck out on a separate training arm on the chart or in separate institutions). It was to have an indigenous base which would nourish creativity and innovation and would produce an expanding corps of expertise. It was to attempt to link up many things in which rural communities could become their own researchers and determiners of their own priorities in local development planning and implementation, in genuine partnership with those who could display what might be possible from sources outside. In addition MTS would be able to take some steps in developing an increasingly effective practice of what I have called cross-cultural consultation, which would become a specific international contribution to social development.**

The outline of all this can be found in the Project

Mobile in the sense that the original design was to orchestrate the members of the team, international and national, through several of the least developed countries in Asia, in an ongoing manner for several years.

The need for this was expressed long ago and a meeting chaired by India’s Ambassador at the Manila Congress in 1970 actually addressed itself to this — but as far as I know nothing further has transpired.
Development Mission Report,* which described itself as a "professional technical document."

Beginning with the problems and situations in which "front line", "supervisory staff" and trainers find themselves, the MTS strived to take educators and administrators

... through the detailed step-by-step-exercises of experiencing and collecting material which will begin with an examination of the problems in the community which are to be tackled leading to a detailed and realistic job analysis broken down into skills, knowledge and attitude required and systematically link each element of the analysis to a unit of educational objectives, practice, content and method.**

Curriculum development was to be linked and derived from stimulating grassroot participation in planning and in influencing policy formulation, all the while keeping the specific social, cultural and political context to the fore. This was to be a version of the Explorations recommended "see-saw approach", in which education would swing from practice through several interim stages into teaching and back again.

In practice the team of internationals and nationals were organized in eight basic groups, with their functions spelled out and interrelated: 1) Steering Group; 2) Role performing groups; 3) Role analysis group; 4) Action research group; 5) Teaching methods group; 6) Teaching materials group; 7) Projects and technical collaboration groups; 8) Policy development groups.**

Actual examples of all these functions now exist and we should be able to ask the MTS to detail all aspects of the

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** Ibid. Appendix 4: A Methodological Approach for the Mobile Training Programme.
methodology and give us a full account of itself — shortcomings and all — as was originally intended. Without this, the MTS will not have done itself full credit (enough material already exists for dozens of stimulating papers') and until it does so its considerable contribution to social work, social work education and social development must remain an unrealised potential, not reproducible and unavailable to be improved upon elsewhere.

I think that judgement might declare the MTS beginnings as crude. However, all innovations are bound to be crude; that should not obscure the richness of its possibilities, and its implications for social development where it is needed most.

I fear that in the space available to me I have not done full justice to the three papers and our subject matter, but trust your discussion will take us all many steps forward.

D Drucker
August 1978