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### Abstract:

This paper contributes historic information from Southeast Asia that previously has not been readily available and is thought important to current efforts to define international social work. The focus is on activities of social workers in several nations during the latter part of the 20th century, with particular attention to the *developmental* needs of peoples living in varied conditions and ethno-cultural contexts of the region. A series of undertakings that have to do with education and responsiveness are described where definition is prominent. What is social work's proper involvement with the poor? Is our primary role in these areas that of social development or is "remedial" work more our task? How do we prepare social workers for this work?

Key Words: international social work, Southeast Asia, social development, social work definition, work with the poor, "remedial" social work, ethno cultural context

### Social Work in International Context: A Long Search for a Definition

The development and adoption of the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training have been hailed as "...perhaps the most important accomplishment of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) during the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Healy, 2008).

The IASSW together with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) developed three important policy statements for the profession. In 2000 a new Global Definition was approved, followed in 2004 by a new Statement of Ethical Principles and Global Standards. These "...are the first comprehensive guidelines for social work programs, covering all aspects of programs from purposes to curriculum to facilities, organization and management" (Healy, 2008)

As far back as Abraham Flexner (1915) on through the Milford Conference in 1929, were raised defining issues such as whether or not social work was a profession, and struggled to emphasize social work as a "cause" rather than just a function, a perspective that is still significant today." (Flexner, 1915). Currently the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) has been conducting a survey to review the international definition of social work (*EASSW Newsletter, 2011*). The results will be presented at the joint congress of the IASSW, IFSW, and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) in Stockholm, Sweden, during July, 2012 (*EASSW Newsletter*). The matter of defining social work, well documented by Healy (2008), clearly has a long history, persists in engrossing the present, and seems destined for a continuing future.

This paper contributes an important historic perspective, as social work extended its definition into *development* and the international *globalization* process in Southeast Asia during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier reports of these efforts are archived in pre-computer files of United Nations organizations and can be difficult to access. Discussed here will be: the meaning of social development, the Western social work perspective as related to other cultures and history, different ways of learning, social work teachers (and students) as a sub-culture within universities, the skewed relationship of academic theory to social work practice, research, social workers as consumers and producers and the importance and uses of social work professional organisations.

It speaks volumes that in the present survey for defining social work only 4.5% of the respondents are practitioners (EASSW, 2010). The author's perspective derives from over 60 years of experiencing social work fundamentally as a practitioner from which solidly was created how and what to be teaching. Half a century of this endeavour has taken place on the international scene, including the United Kingdom, United States, throughout Asia and Africa, Eastern Europe, the Pacific Island States and with short-term assignments and experiences in Australia and Latin America. Assignments have been with social services, universities and training programs, United Nations agencies, governments and non-governmental organisations. The tasks undertaken have centred on the introduction of methods and skills, grounded in people-focused social work, to be used by potential change agents functioning within and from communities. The emphasis has been on how these change agents can and must use observations of the local realities of outcomes, distortions or absence of existing



programmes and social policy. They are taught how to influence and contribute to development by systematically assisting the community to convey their grass-root knowledge and to participate through appropriate decision-making structures.

#### Prologue: An Overview

Whatever was taking place in Europe and North America; it was not until the early 1960s that recognised social work schools in the developing and newly independent countries began to graduate 'professionals'. In the main they served urban-centred, 'remedial' organisations while declaring, as social work always has, that the poor were very much their concern. However, in 1966, in response to the need for indigenous teaching materials, the IASSW and the United Nations brought together Asian social work educators (Author, 1966). Invited to bring the case material they were currently using, no one brought a single item to acknowledge the condition of the poor either in the cities or among the rural masses. The report concluded: "Poverty as an observed cultural phenomenon in most Asian countries is striking because of its pervasive presence in the life of countless people who exist on the brink of starvation. Yet the handling of poverty in professional social work as an observed and cultural phenomenon in Asian case records is more striking in its absence" (Author, 1966).

Two years on, in 1968, social work educators, administrators and planners meeting in Bangkok reported "...that professional social work and social work education were still not sufficiently attuned to developmental needs and problems as currently defined in the plans of the countries in the Economic Commission of Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) region, and that greater efforts should be made to improve that situation" (Author, 1968b). Later that same year at the United Nations in New York, the

International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare from 89 countries endorsed the 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" (Author, 1968a).

Social work was increasingly being discussed in terms of prevention and improving social conditions in which social workers would have identifiable roles (Author, 1969). In 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" (Author, 1970a & 1970b).

#### Social Development

By 1970, social work had authoritatively had its attention drawn not only to the nature of the Asian situation, but also to the necessary widening of social work priorities and direction everywhere and proclaimed as "Social Development." Social Development would not be just the cherry on the top of economic development; economic theory at the time saw development as following along the lines of the experience of Western industrialising countries. The poor would apparently benefit through the economic laws of the "trickle-down" theory of wealth (Wilbur, 1990; Winant, 1988). The "social" had to become a major goal of economic development.

It was at this time that IASSW adopted this development stance as an overarching goal of its mission. Social work had seemed to declare itself once more emphatically as having a CAUSE, of contributing to a just social order. From the profession's unique daily perspectives of witnessing much of what ails people, it voiced

a resolve to vigorously turn attention to society and its aberrations. This would clearly require its involvement in areas of practice with a political dimension well beyond the existing familiar range of functions. However, it was only too apparent that most social workers had little direct experience in working in situations with activities oriented towards changes in social policy. Quite what did this widening social development perspective demand from curriculum, faculty, institutions, agencies and social workers?

It was this that the Social Development Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ECAFE) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) sought to discover in a six-plus country study, including Thailand, S. Korea, Hong Kong, Pakistan, the Philippines and Burma. What became known as the "Exploration" involved extensive cross-cultural discussions on curricula at universities, training institutions, and government and social service organisations (Author, 1972a).

Initially it was not possible to clarify a working definition of the newly acclaimed term "social development". It was decided to seek a practical investigatory approach by adopting the then repeated catch phrases. It was hoped that on exploration this would identify what these words actually represented to the social work educators and professionals in terms of roles to be undertaken and taught in the curriculum. For the study (Author, 1972a), Social Development was 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.*

Where to place familiar social work methods in this developmental framework was approached by reviving the old issues surrounding social work functions as a cause (Flexner, 1915),

5) *Social work helping methods.* It was recognized that the situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies, and gaps and inconsistencies in our policies and programmes. The social worker's role 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 (Author, 1972a). This approach, since discovered, is very much in line, with C. Wright Mills (1959), in *The Sociological Imagination*. "Know that many personal troubles . . . must be understood in terms of public issues . . . 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" (Mills, 1959).

In the course of the Exploration study the Asian respondents emphatically endorsed the importance of these roles as fundamental in defining developmental social work (Author, 1972a). It was most surprising to have found such a positive response. The values inherent in the social development catch phrases employed in Exploration were clearly not foremost in the traditional culture of the countries involved. In addition, the profound challenge of putting the fine words into service were immense considering that the countries in the study were far from democracies embracing participatory processes or even elementary country-wide welfare policy provision. Nevertheless, it was claimed that the values were to be found in what was already being taught.



However, to seek specific curricula detail of such was, at best, to be presented with outlines of a timetable showing subjects to be “covered”, but usually bereft of any specific material available to students.

In the Southeast Asian schools of social work and social work training programs, the subject matter seemed to have been directly borrowed from standard courses in their parent academic institutions. Theoretical material provided was diffuse, limited and much culturally permeated, usually derived from Western observed and often questionably ‘scientific’ sources. In addition, such theory had no easily recognisable social work application even to their then existing “remedial” practice roles. As familiar surrounding conditions and indigenous social problems seemed rarely considered or referred to, and certainly not centered within the selected theory, the impression conveyed was that social work realities had little respected place or significance in intellectual concerns. This was reinforced by the very minor formal credit assigned if fieldwork practice was required at all (Author, 1972a). It was not found possible from course outlines to identify coherently what of the social development values were actually imparted and taught to students, let alone to understand what they might be able to utilize. An experienced Filipino teacher stated the situation significantly: “field practice is field practice and its rationale of putting theory into practice and integrating knowledge is not only unproven but under present conditions untrue” (Author, 1972a). This provoked the provocative comment in Exploration that,

Indeed a strong case could be made against fieldwork on the ground that it destroys the credibility of theory in the sense that the usual practice to be observed in agencies does not illustrate or reinforce what is being taught. This happens because

the agencies are responding to different influences and their practice is not what the theory derives from; the universities' theory derives from intellectual constructs based on observation, experiment and experience from quite different practice elsewhere (to the extent that it has a practice base at all) (Author, 1972a).

### Teaching Methods

A profound problem at that time was that lecturing was almost exclusively the manner of the teaching throughout the region. This was much in the time-honoured Asian tradition of sitting at the feet of elders (the guru) and learning by rote. This Asian way of learning is absolutely antithetical to providing an appropriate model for the kind of practice incorporating the apparently agreed social development values stance. Social work requires learning with and from the clientele (individual or community) and sharing objectives, planning and implementation (participation). A previous regional workshop had examined the challenge to introduce an appropriate modern style of professional social work teaching:

The elders and the younger ones, the teachers and the learners, in social welfare are sharers in a free exchange of experience, and set out jointly to give meaning to this experience and to fashion ways of reaching socially defined objectives. The old relationship between the keepers and the receivers of knowledge gives way and the status of teacher changes -- perhaps uncomfortably for those of us who painfully learned, earned or were given the right to become keepers. This also reflects change in the outmoded concept of welfare, that of "us" and "them" -- the givers and the receivers-- to a concept of we, the worker and his clientele being involved

together, identifying the problems and using their experience, skills, and resources jointly to reach agreed objectives (Author, 1969).

All in all, on scrutiny, the amassed documentation of information and findings from this Exploration odyssey (Author, 1972), together with correspondence from India, Taiwan and other countries and with experience gained from previous substantial work in politically and socially devastated Indonesia, left a confusing picture. What then could be constructively reported on how the existing social work was supposed to become developmentally relevant to the desperate needs of their countries and the appalling condition of their poverty-ridden people? What might be the way of devising an overall curriculum to impart the appropriate newly intended roles?

In a state of impotence to reach an outcome from the intensity of Exploration's work, it came as a revelation to accidentally find that the words "curriculum" and "curse" had the same generic Latin base! This image of curriculum appealed as very much analogous to the state of social work education that emerged from the information assembled for Exploration (Author, 1972a). It was understood immediately that social work teaching in academia (not only in Asia), starting from an odd assortment of theory and eventually going on to poorly related field practice, was taught the wrong way round. Of course we needed to begin with what we encounter in practice!

Other findings from Exploration had to do with "... linking classroom learning with learning in the field" (Author, 1972a). It would be necessary for the developmental social work curriculum to be designed by focussing upon the realities of practice. Practice must be at the very core of determining what and how the very wide range and diffuse



branches of knowledge from academic subject matter and its theoretical concepts were to be selected and taught.

This discovery had radical far-reaching implications. Essential attention would be needed to locate *practice* issues more centrally in the social work curriculum as well as "...securing profound changes in the relationship of social work courses/departments with both their parent universities and field agencies/services" (Author, 1972a).

In relation to the parent universities, the financial cost providing essentials for effective social work courses is a rarity. Elements for costs such as locating students in practice agencies; hiring and paying experienced practice supervisors; travel for field visiting; staff ratios for person-to-person work; providing sufficient time for social work teachers to spend on work in the field to keep them up to date with the shifting scene, to develop case studies, and overall, to keep theoretical work in line with practice needs are not what universities are prepared to finance.

Seeking a major effective role change and relationships with the field faced the additional problem that all the social work professional organisations in Asia at that time were run by social work volunteers in their very limited spare time. They were obviously not sufficiently staffed or developed themselves to set about this expanding perception of social work. Social work would need to establish effective professional organisation. "Institution Building", like much else, would have to start at home!

The need for another far-reaching change was also identified, in the manner of teaching. If social workers were really going to operate in the development arena, they would first need teachers to locate themselves in the new and unfamiliar settings. It was proposed that staff members of the schools be assigned to try out possibilities of the

envisioned developmental social work activities and locations by locating themselves within the field agencies, not at the university. This would entail an exploration of the dimensions of the tasks and identification of realistic assignments that might be set up for students. After an appropriate period the staff member would pave 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 would eventually introduce a worker designated to take over the established supervisory role in subsequent years. As the staff member's fieldwork and supervisory role diminished, he/she 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 preparing to move in the opposite direction into new area of practice -- thus the idea of a seesaw.

#### Research

Exploration also had much to recommend regarding the integral unity of practice and research and the role of the Associations of Social Work (Author, 1972a).

Exploration argued that primarily social workers should be eager *consumers* of research in order to examine, discover and extrapolate what it can tell regarding what we should do, do better, or avoid doing (Author). For a profession that in practice recognises it needs to act frequently, albeit with limited information, research from whatever source (anything better than guess-work) is to be welcomed. We have a responsibility to

identify from our practice and convey to appropriate resources what needs to be researched (Author). Paraiso (1966) and Mesec, et.al, (1999) have written in support of these ideas. Structural requirements for social work education related to research were identified (Author, 1972a).

1) Social work associations need to gather the experience and opinions of their membership to inform and support policy and decision-making bodies.

2) The main responsibility for identifying needed research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. It is the practitioners in their daily work who are faced with questions that require answers.

3) These answers are required not as fundamental truths but for practical application.

There are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with 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-emphasized" (Author, 1972a).

Few students will want to go on to become full-time researchers. Within the limited time in the curriculum available to students they would not be expected to produce their "own" research. As consumers they would need to be familiar with the range and the limitations of social research methods. They would need to understand the stages of research and how to make use of research findings (Author, 1972a).

As in the normal course of events research a practitioner will have proposed research topics, the relevant agencies would have a role in working through this phase



with the students. It was 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. From the students' perspective, they would have experienced how questions from the field are taken through all the stages to action and final evaluation. The students would have begun to appreciate the practical pay-off of research, savour 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. The implications of all this are that in becoming professional practitioners they would have a very strong life-long commitment to initiating research and the schools a responsibility for constructing a curriculum which will constantly relate to, and involve the students in, the cutting edge concerns of the profession (Author, 1972a).

#### Further developments on Exploration

Exploration became the specific focus of the planned UN Regional Workshop entitled the "Seminar on Development Aspects of Social Work Training Curricula" to take place in Bangkok, 1972. Originally it was to be required that, in advance, in the preparation for the Workshop the United Nations (UN) was to directly support and require those who were to attend to undertake preliminary work and so diminish the familiar talking shop quality of such gatherings. The preparation was intended to actively test out, and to report prior to the workshop, progress and problems in attempting to put into practice some aspect of the suggested recommendations. These were related to how social workers as development change agents might begin the task

of changing the nature of our own teaching methods, content and institutional structures of learning. Short-sightedly, the UN Headquarters in New York annulled the previously agreed regional UNICEF support for the preliminary work requirement part of the workshop. "Fortunately, in seven countries in the region, groups had met and produced reports on some of Explorations' recommendations which were distributed at the seminar, rescuing some of the integrative work that had been included in the original plans for this series of meetings" (Author, 1972b).

The seminar was introduced emphasising the base from which the Region was proposing to bring social work into the development process

Social work education had been largely borrowed from western conditions and was being used in societies that tended to lack institutions of a distributive, participatory, cooperative, decentralized and/or developmental nature. Social Work had paid little attention to rural areas. ...And declared that Exploration and this gathering were: ...the first serious attempt in any Region in the world to help social work education actually come to grips with the newly emphasized developmental focus (Author, 1972b).

The seminar ranged throughout the country material provided and the implications of the Exploration recommendations. The Filipinos had constructed a definition of Social Development.

Social Development is the process of fostering the growth and development of the capacities of the people in order to attain a better life for all. It embraces the provision of first, adequate programmes and services for the conservation, protection, and improvement of human resources; and second, of sufficient

resources and opportunities for raising the levels of living, and for ensuring a more equitable distribution of goods and services. It implies basic and institutional change. As a goal, social development refers to a positive social change within a given value system, a given point of reference and a given situation (Author, 1972b).

Intentions were firmly expressed to re-orient the teaching of social work in the direction of social development. Practical plans were outlined for the possible long-term implementation of the concept of the seesaw: social work teaching material: social work research: updating the role of the United Nations Social Development Division and its Advisor: and a UN planned regional social work training center in Manila. Among the actions proposed by the seminar were: 1) to work towards the establishing of effective local and national Associations of Social Work. ... and to use these as channels of communication and pressure groups for social action. Also, 2) ... that the Regional Training Centre planned to be launched in the Philippines, supported by the UN, would orient its activities to the social development role of social work. The seminar concluded on a sobering note with a reminder that the success of conferences and seminars lies not in producing a well-written report but in how far such reports are made effective by follow-up at field level. Also, that this seminar should not be yet another where there is no follow through on the recommendation and proposals made. It was requested that the seminar "should reconvene" after three years to feed back information based on evaluation of the projects planned and implemented as a result of this seminar (Author, 1972b). But, as indicated above, the pre-workshop support intentions had failed to take place. The much-anticipated United Nations sponsored Regional Training



Centre in the Philippines was short-lived. The Centre's early demise meant no structure was provided for the expected on-going action and staffing which might have long ago dealt with the seminar's outlined intentions in the search for a satisfactory social work developmental definition, specific roles and curriculum guidance that still concern and elude us today. Nor did the three-year-on review take place.

Explorations ended, but social work continued to work toward a developmental focus. Some ten years on, in 1981, Shankar Pathak, of the New Delhi School, an Asian voice, was to write:

It is surprising that even though it is now more than forty years since formal post-graduate education in social work began in this country, there is not a single book dealing with the historical development of social welfare in India. It was thus inevitable that a student of social welfare would know details of the history of social welfare in the UK and USA because of the preponderance of available literature and remain blissfully ignorant of the rich heritage of social welfare of his own country (Pathak, 1981).

In (1982) Tom Brigham compared five predominantly rural developing countries in Asia and continued to find that the social work schools were "...unrelated to country size, degree of development or socioeconomic situation [and] ...The predominant curriculum was the casework-clinical American urban model" (Brigham 1982). Two years later, he observed, despite that "...social work arose in the West to help a few marginal people to adjust to society; whereas, in most of the developing countries the poor are the vast and significant majority!" (Brigham, 1984).

In 1993, Brigham's findings prompted the Tata Institute of Social Sciences' *Indian Journal of Social Work* to bring out a special issue. The thrust of the Journal's issue was the "Social Work Profession in Asia." Tata in 1993 quoted Katherine Kendall, retired secretary-general of IASSW. In diplomatic understatement, she put it mildly: "Particularly in Asia, the effort towards indigenization of the curriculum to increase their relevance to the local situation seem to move rather slowly" (Kendall, 1993). In the Tata special issue a proposal for the theme (Desai, 1993) went on to say: "Whatever literature has been developed in the Asian countries, it has not been successfully disseminated even among the Asian countries. As a result, the exchange of knowledge has not taken place (except at seminars and conferences)" (Desai, 1993).

Indeed! What an indictment of what emerged from all those expensively-mounted seminars and conferences of which the United Nations, the International Association of Schools of Social Work and others have been major sponsors. Can it be that the subject matter had proved to be untranslatable at the national and operational level or that a generation of respected conference-goers proved as expensively marginal to the needs of their profession as the profession seemed to have remained marginal to the needs of their societies?

Can it be that Social Work, as a profession possesses some ambivalence about whether it actually wishes to be involved in development? This is illustrated in the appalling absence of many social work projects in development work. We seem overwhelmingly to forget about some of the basic principles of this work, e.g. the need for community participation, the need for attention to social justice, the need for particular attention to the development of social policy and planning, and the need for

institution building. It may be that, we as social workers, may have insisted on being included in development work because we wished to deck ourselves in the splendour of being on the world scene but we have perhaps been unwilling to effectively take on much of the actual work in the field of development. See, for example, Jim Ife's 1999 East Timor Report. From the present author's own experience on field assignments the absence of trained social workers has been surprising.

#### Related Events in Broader Perspective

Several further events have taken place in recent years that suggest the dilemma of definition may be larger than only applying to international social work.

In 1998 Richard Cloward of Columbia University, as part of the celebration of the USA's social work centenary year, was invited to be enshrined in a 'Hall of Fame'. He declined the honour. Cloward might well have been too abrasive, but in this matter he raised important issues. In his letter to the journal *Social Work* he declared that instead of a celebration there should be a 'wake'.

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 (Cloward, 1998).



By the 2000s in the USA it was recognised that the matter of curricula had not been organizationally addressed by social work for thirty years. The University of Kentucky hosted the first of a series of three conferences aimed at designing a new curriculum. It was stated: "Three decades on, the agenda of our present Kentucky-initiated conferences suggests that the affluent West also recognizes that its traditional social work approaches and the attack on the issues such as prevailing poverty and social injustice remain inadequate. Wider areas of operation, organization, methods of education and extended skills of social work are required" (Kentucky Conference Announcement, 2001). The second conference was held at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Bridging Practice and Education: Reconceptualizing the Future of Social Work Education (2002). It declared "The wide range of problems both in education and practice call for a sustained, critical examination of the profession...(Tennessee Conference Announcement, 2002). The Tennessee Conference seemed to be poorly aware of what might have been learned from the previous thirty years of international development experience this present paper has been recalling. What did happen in Tennessee was the emergence of a new catch phrase. The term "evidence-based" was placed on a pedestal, almost idolized. Bruce Thyer, who edits a social work research journal, led the excitement. Although Thyer's rhetoric was difficult for some of us to fathom, he was listened to with astonishing respect and much attention by the whole conference membership. A hint at what was taking place showed up in the plenary session where it was reported how, in the Thyer-led group during the discussion time set aside for conference content, much of the time had been spent urging the participants to produce "evidence-based" papers for a new issue of the journal. Apparently there was

no sense that something could be learned from discussion of the conference papers we'd heard and the thoughts this elicited! In all it was alarming at how readily the conference membership was jumping on the evidence-based bandwagon, without attention being given to the many difficulties posed by this approach.

For those of us not located in the middle of academic social work, this came as something of a surprise. Evidence regarding the effectiveness of our work is certainly to be welcomed, but at this meeting there seemed to be no interest in evidence that is solidly based in practice. Following the long history of social work, we have learned to make careful and thoughtful observations of our client(s) and the situation they find themselves in, thinking about the pros and cons of various possible actions. Whether we are working with an individual or a community, we try to assist the client in selecting a course of action that will be most beneficial (and least harmful) to the client and the people surrounding them. In addition to carrying out clinical practice like this, we also teach in this way, using case material to help students identify important aspects of the situation and learn from their own experience. This seemed quite different from what was being suggested in terms of evidence-based practice, which in this case seemed to be that decisions for action would be made by the social worker, based on findings from populations of people faced with similar situations.

Surely one quality of professional social workers is that we carefully examine the options, thinking about pros and cons? We don't just jump into the fray, which is what seemed to be happening at this meeting. And, don't we know that many of the ideas we use every day in our work are poorly conceptualized, not allowing the construction of anything like a randomized controlled trial? Later, on a speaking tour of



USA schools of social work, the blunt statement was commonly heard "What gets researched is determined by the funding source". The author's paper (2002) included a section on student research in an appropriate practice-based curriculum. It was a far cry from the idea of evidence-based practice, but very much dependent on practice-based evidence. Emphasized once more, was that the primary responsibility for identifying research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. It is unknown whether anything was made of the findings from the Kentucky and Tennessee conferences or if the intended third conference occurred. Is there a record of these meetings, the papers, and the outcome? It is to be hoped that the current Definitions project will not have the same fate.

Later, Eileen Gambrill of Berkley, California, at a 2004 presentation at University of Oxford School of Social Work (U.K.), made no similar grandiose claims for her version of evidence-based work. It was welcome to read that the notice of her seminars stated "Evidence based practice is designed to integrate evidentiary, ethical, and application issues" (Gambrill, 2004). But what could be made of her declared "It is an alternative to authority-based practice in which decisions are made on grounds such as status and credentials?" (Gambrill, 2004). Such labelling of practice, and the contrasting claim for the alternative virtues of evidence-based work were surely misplaced.

However the evidence-based trend and its funding power can now be seen, for example, at Oxford where their 80-year experience of teaching social work has been discontinued because it was "not paying its way." Instead there is now a Master's degree in, yes, "Evidence-based Social Work." Its implications are very serious for the



profession and particularly for the educational developments (e.g. in the post-Soviet Eastern countries joining the European Union, and in Ethiopia), where Western-affluent-type standardisation is being required in order to give credibility to attracting international finance.

Social work colleagues have been sharing some despair with recent trends in the profession. In 2005, on the occasion of the inauguration of the new School of Social Work at Addis Ababa University there was the International Seminar on Social Work Education in Ethiopia: Global Challenges & Perspectives. Lena Dominelli (retiring president of IASSW) expressed social work as “immensely political,” mentioned a “lost cause” regarding social workers becoming functionaries as “technocrats” and “brokers” between clients and “providers” “in a developing money management-oriented British social welfare system” (Dominelli, 2005). She argued for a restoration of the original state universalistic system of welfare provision (Dominelli).

Many of the first intake of students in the new program were from the Addis-based relief services where in Ethiopia there is a strong historical connection to Sylvia Pankhurst. Pankhurst, a famous British suffragette early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century distinguished between relief and the cause of social justice. She had declared, “I wanted to rouse these women of the submerged masses to be, not merely the argument for more fortunate people, but to be fighters on their own account despising mere platitudes and catch cries, revolting against the hideous conditions about them, and demanding for themselves and their families a full share of the benefits of civilization and progress” (Pickard, J., 1982). She was to take up the Ethiopian cause against Mussolini’s murderous Italian invasion. Later, she was instrumental in setting up the Social Service

Society in Ethiopia itself. Her son Richard Pankhurst helped to establish the Ethiopian Studies Institute and her grandson Alula Pankhurst teaches at the University. It was therefore a very relevant opportunity to up-date the argument for social work as a development cause (Author, 2005).

### Epilogue

This discourse in response to the *EASSW Newsletter* (2010) and the continuing seeking of definition has covered much ground that this author has experienced and continued to write about, but most of it is buried in relatively inaccessible international pre-computer documents. The thinking and recommendations arriving therefrom are perhaps most easily to be found in that paper delivered in 2005 in (Author, 2005), containing suggestions for action needed to be included in any social work definition.

The social work task of 'institution building' remains a fundamental necessity for our profession's associations, particularly in relation to participation toward defining social work's role and purpose. This requires organising a solid pathway for practitioners, from their experience in the field, to create the research agenda priorities; and the methods and organisational mechanisms to communicate the practice perspective and relevant findings to the appropriate policy makers.

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