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Tasks and Trends in Education for Social Work:  
An International Appraisal

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We all have a terrible habit in social work education of digging ourselves up by the roots to see how we're growing. We do it constantly and with great labour in our own Schools. We do it with even greater labour nationally through curriculum studies. And so let's go the whole way and in a brief period of time dig ourselves up all over the world to see how we're doing and what kind of growth we're making.

As we all know, education for social work in a formal sense began more or less simultaneously in the 1890's in Amsterdam, London and New York. But the odd thing is that over 40 years later, that is to say by the outbreak of the second world war in 1939, it had only spread to about 20 countries in all, mostly in Europe but also including Latin America, Egypt, South Africa and Australia, in addition of course to North America. The real population explosion in education for social work around the world as a whole did not come until after 1945. The first phase of expansion owes much to that great friend of social work the Belgian physician Dr. Rene Sand. The second phase to international action through UNRRA and the United Nations, to you of the United States through the Fulbright programme and AID, to the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the Catholic International Union for Social Service; and underlying all else to changes in attitudes towards social welfare.

In the last resort there can be no question that the growth of schools of social work since 1945 has happened as new countries have awoken not only to

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independence but also as they, and old countries too, have begun to ask that question which could only be asked for the first time in this century: "Why should there be poverty, squalor, ignorance and disease?" The immensely significant thing, so far as education for social work is concerned, is that the attempt to find answers to this question seems of necessity to involve public social welfare provision with social workers playing a key role in its implementation. The term poverty itself has of course expanded to include not only lack of basic material necessities but also attempts to forestall or control social deviance, neglect and isolation, as well as to improve in positive ways the quality of life in big cities or remote rural areas.

This expansion of education for social work by the founding of many new schools, and by curriculum improvements and extensions in existing schools, is quite spectacular if one takes one's stand in 1945 and then looks along the course of the 18 years since then. Perhaps the most significant thing about this expansion is that it is basically due to international aid and co-operation. The biggest contributor has of course been the United Nations, which has actually taken major responsibility for starting schools of social work in some countries as well as giving very substantial assistance to many more through the services of consultants and through fellowships for faculty members to study abroad. Its international seminars have also over a period of years brought social work educators together to clarify and deepen their thinking about the content and planning of social work education. And the international surveys of training for social work which it undertakes every four years provide the basic material with which to evaluate the development of social work as it struggles to become one profession, no matter where taught or where practised.

Very substantial contributions have also been made to certain countries, my own included, by the Fulbright programme and through bilateral programmes of technical assistance, of which the American AID and Canadian technical assistance are outstanding examples. Compared with these governmental international activities the International Association of Schools of Social Work, which Dr. Katharine Kendall and I are proud to serve, and to which all the United States and Canadian schools of social work are affiliated, looks maybe a little like the village general store compared with the city supermarket. But we also are proud of our achievements and notably in what we are. For the IASSW is the schools of social work and they are us: over 280 of them in 40 countries, from Canada to Chile, from Finland to South Africa, from Britain to Korea, from Puerto Rico to Australia and New Zealand. We have no funds for a paid staff and all the work is done by volunteer faculty members: this means of course that we cannot do many of the things that badly need doing. But, through experience in serving on our Executive Board, through our biennial International Congresses and through the journal International Social Work we do provide means whereby faculties of schools in very different circumstances can discuss together essentially similar problems and share experiences as they try to improve the quality of the preparation they give to students to help them face the tasks that confront social work as a profession around the world. We in IASSW do this also by giving information and advice to individuals and by consultations and visits by faculty members to other schools. Perhaps the most fruitful help of all comes through our international seminars, like the one which IASSW sponsored in Edinburgh last September when 70 faculty members from 12 different European countries spent 10 days together exploring the common and unique elements in education for social work with individuals, groups and communities. Another such venture will, we hope, be a joint seminar with U.N. in South East Asia in 1964 on teaching

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methods and teaching materials in schools of social work. Another seminar on the same lines is also planned for Latin America. These activities all represent volunteer efforts by the schools themselves. IASSW is essentially a mutual aid organisation which is only as effective as its members make it: but its growth since it was founded in Europe in 1929 shows the necessity for, indeed the inevitability of, a strong and virile international association to serve as a meeting ground for the schools and to help to raise standards at this stage in the development of our profession. The active interest and participation of faculty members in the United States and Canada is vital to the success of this world-wide movement. The debt of gratitude which the IASSW owes to certain individual people here is beyond all computing.

Up to now I seem to have taken you leaping across time and space in a rather grasshopper kind of way. But it is equally necessary to take a look at the important issue of the nature and quality of social work education as such. This means trying to assess what is happening to it in the world in general as it grows more mature, or else begins to stir ossified bones, or to make sometimes laudable attempts to keep up with the Jones - whose address always seems to be 2, East 91st St., New York City or points West.

This particular issue of the nature of the curriculum and its quality is quite different for the old pre-war schools from the newly started ones. The curriculum pattern for the new programmes is one which you would recognise and which would not be too far different in structure and objectives from that which is familiar here. This is clearly brought out in the extremely interesting series of articles in International Social Work by Joan Smith on curriculum planning. A different situation and different problems exist in the pre-war schools of social

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work, particularly in many parts of Europe. In these schools the programme has tended to consist of a large number of lecture courses not necessarily related to each other in which the students listen, or do not listen, to lectures on a wide variety of subjects taught academically and without close attention to what the students absorb. The field work has characteristically been a one year apprenticeship, or in effect an untrained worker type of experience, which was nonetheless counted as part of the total length of the programme, though it lacked supervision in the educational sense. Where students can only afford very low tuition fees and cannot maintain themselves during field work, or where there are other sorts of investment in this kind of programme the obstacles to changing it to a modern, and much more costly, type of social work education may be very great indeed. It would be quite unrealistic to minimise the element of increased cost as a barrier to improving the schools' curriculum and field work. Viewed in this context it is astonishing that very many of the older schools have made great strides forward in the years since the war. The static state of affairs in some situations is, however, due not only to financial difficulties but also to national pride which results in clinging to what was pioneered in the past, even though it is outmoded in the present. There is still resistance to what are thought of as "American methods which wouldn't fit us: why can't we develop our own social work anyway?" But in fact they don't. Thus a number of the older schools have gone through a phase, and some are still doing so, in which dynamic psychology and social work methodology pioneered in the United States are alike suspect, and where old time teachers feel that their experience and their jobs are both threatened.

In some of these situations progress has come through gradual changes from within which by degrees have resulted in substantial curriculum reform; in other countries one school has started a new programme, not without dust and heat,

and by degrees the assumptions on which it was based have begun to be taken for granted and copied elsewhere; in at least one country a national review of social work needs has led to a wholesale reorganisation and expansion of the schools' programme. And finally in some situations lip service is paid to new content but it is taught by those who have not themselves learned it in any dynamic sense and who do not know how to apply it. In such situations there are almost no methods courses or field instruction and little contact between schools and agencies providing field work.

From this point on the difficulties with which schools of social work struggle are inherently the same whether in old or new situations. They all centre round the gap which exists between what is known at this present time about the best kind of education for social work and the actual possibilities of implementing this knowledge in the education of potential social workers. And of course these difficulties are related to the similar ones which exist because many employing agencies do not know how to use social workers or how to help them to consolidate fledgling skill, with the result that often training is largely wasted and adventuresome curiosity dies. But the best social workers carry on and go on learning in spite of all the odds against them. Indeed no praise could be too great for those of our colleagues in different parts of the world who struggle, often in situations of overwhelming mass poverty or administrative apathy, to fashion the profession of social work into an effective instrument of social reform.

A major dilemma in every country is the small number of professionally qualified social workers in relation to the total number of persons employed in jobs with a substantial social work content. The vicious circle effects of this on social work education and on the outside world's perception of social work are

too well known to need emphasis. If social workers are sometimes regarded as nothing but persons on the lowest rung of the administrative ladder this is not surprising if in many social work jobs they are just that. Moreover we are also in a spot because social work is becoming fashionable in many places where it was either unheard of or else anathema not long since. This change springs partly from growing awareness of the range and complexity of the human relations aspect of social problems and some commitment to constructive measures in regard to them. This fits in with social work's claim to be able to help people towards a more accurate perception of current social reality and their relation to it, rather than interpreting the present in terms of the past, or responding unrealistically to current reality because of personal spectacles which distort its nature.

The problems of educating students to be able to use this knowledge which exists are manifold. Not least because the most highly systematised and readily teachable social work method is casework, whereas the need of newly developing countries is for well-grounded social workers able to motivate and guide change in groups and communities, and to translate their knowledge of human needs and responses into large-scale programmes, social policy and social planning. The new-found emphasis in social work education here in North America on group process, whether in multi-client interviewing, small therapeutic groups, or group and inter-group relations in institutional settings and local communities is a significant step in the right direction if social work is to be realistically oriented to developing services, whether in advanced or less advanced countries. Advances in methodology may even contribute to a breakthrough in those countries where social workers are women educated at a technical level, while those who direct services and frame policy are men, educated in the university, usually in law economics or political science. On the other hand in countries with very few qualified social workers



those with a university education who are available may go into senior administrative posts after the minimum of experience as direct practitioners. Or, worse still, they may have their social work education in another country very different from their own and go straight home to teach or to administer a service without ever having any substantial opportunity to test out and consolidate their practice skill in relation to their own country's culture and social and economic needs and possibilities.

In the last decade or so advances in the application of the social and behavioural sciences have made possible increasing refinements of differential diagnosis and treatment: as well as bringing within the orbit of social work types of disturbed or inadequate people previously written off as hopeless or given purely custodial care. To a considerable extent, too, that fine old casework question "who is the client?" is undergoing a sea change as social work replies that the client is often not only the individual or even the family but also the school, the prison, the hospital, the work place, the neighbourhood, or indeed some power group in the functional or geographic community. All these trends point irresistibly to more prolonged and more advanced education for social work. Yet the dilemma is not only how to provide this, a dilemma in all conscience big enough in itself, but also how to staff increasing numbers of universal public agencies with the social workers they need and are willing to employ. It is just because these agencies with universal coverage desire to give, or are being forced into trying to give, a professional service based on diagnosis of individual problems rather than blanket provision that social work education is faced by one of the biggest challenges in its history. So far, what has been achieved in different parts of the world is either a comparatively large number of social workers trained at a rather low level or comparatively few trained at a much higher level, with the rest given in-service

or auxiliary worker training or left to learn from the sometimes dazzling but sometimes dim light of Nature. In many such circumstances the real weight of a service may rest upon the shoulders of the partially trained or untrained. The third alternative of two types or levels of training is beginning to be talked about or tried out in some countries. In the meantime in many situations our social work equivalent of surgical operations are being performed not only by the counterpart of nurses but also by purely lay people. And when it comes to things like mother child separation this may be even more disastrous than removing an appendix with a carving knife on the kitchen table.

So far only one or two countries, for example Norway, have begun to look at national staffing requirements on the one hand and the resources of schools of social work on the other from the point of view of trying to estimate what it would take to match the one with the other. Many countries are moving into the mid 20th century in their social welfare provision but leaving the education of social workers at the horse and buggy stage, either in terms of numbers or standards or both. This disequilibrium between supply and demand applies not only to basic professional education at any level but also to opportunities for advanced study. The world's facilities for such study in social work are still to far too great an extent centred in the United States. Although the facilities for social work research and further study and practice are much superior here compared with anywhere else, it is highly desirable that other countries should begin to develop these resources for themselves. This applies with special force to a profession like social work which is so deeply embedded in the cultures of the peoples it seeks to serve, and which gives that service through social agencies which themselves express differing social philosophies.

A vital need in every country is for social work research, allied to more general social research, to provide a basis for both teaching and practice, and directly related to the family and other patterns of life in the local culture itself, however rapidly these may be changing.

Another pressing need is for the study and teaching of administration, including group and inter-group relations, and aimed to relate agency policies and procedures to social work knowledge about effective ways of meeting human need. Another purpose would be to help social workers to become less inept as administrators, with consequent beneficial effects on their employment in administrative roles. These studies are crucial in any event but particularly where agency policies, and even varying standards of integrity, cut clean across the right of the client to adequate and impartial professional service. This has been recognised by the United Nations which is planning a series of seminars on advanced study with special relation to administration.

Schools of social work have sometimes been founded almost haphazard by little groups of private people with a minimum of financial resources though at the other end of the scale they have been carefully planned and financed as part of a total government social welfare policy. Some schools are directly under state or municipal auspices; some are schools of a university: others are provided by religious or political or trade union organisations: others are a branch of technical education; while others yet are ad hoc private institutions. Obviously their sources of finance will differ in all these differing circumstances, indeed schools under private auspices may even not get state grants for scholarships or other costs even though they may be training social workers for the public services. There are national associations of schools of social work in about 12 countries and usually

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any school with a programme of a given length is eligible to join. The Council on Social Work Education is the only fully fledged accrediting body in the world. In a few countries the curriculum, the student examinations or other matters relating to the schools is regulated by government decree. Sometimes this is the only means of raising standards and cutting off the lunatic fringe, though obviously it can also reduce everything to a dead level and make advance difficult.

The whole ideological, financial and administrative framework of the school affects faculty freedom and initiative in various ways. For example, if you are expected to teach for nearly 30 class hours a week your academic freedom may be inviolate but you are not left with much time for thought, reading, writing, research, discussion with colleagues, individual conferences with students, or contact with social work practice, in addition to leading a full and rounded life as a human being. From another angle, it is self evident that the quality of any teaching is affected by the receptivity of the learner. In some countries men and women students are recruited at a postgraduate level and many have also had work experience; in other situations the schools may have to recruit girls of 17 or 18, often from limited or sheltered backgrounds, who have only completed a secondary school education, based largely on rigid learning of facts without demand for independent thought and enquiry. The same range of difference exists in regard to field work. In situations where there are almost no social agencies it may be an exciting and indeed unique learning experience for faculty and students to work together to study a situation and try to meet need by the use of all three social work methods, often in urban slums or apathetic rural communities. But this is quite different from sending students alone and with little or no faculty support to undertake difficult assignments at a distance from the school. Perhaps worse still is the situation in some countries where well-established agencies have rigid

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old-fashioned practices, where students receive administrative but not educational supervision and where they may be learning in the class room general principles at variance with agency practice but with no attempt to relate the one to the other.

In blunt terms: not all schools of social work are producing social workers, and certainly not all social agencies want to employ or know or desire to know how to use social workers. Round the world there are a good many people who, as Adlai Stevenson once said in another context, need "to be carried kicking and screaming into the 20th century." In this connection it is also important to recognise that some economically underdeveloped countries may be in the vanguard of progress while underdeveloped social work areas are to be found in economically advanced countries.

To put it in a nutshell: what schools of social work most need is leadership and financial resources. The two go together because there are good and well-equipped faculty members in some schools who battle on steadily and courageously against overwork, lack of resources, misunderstanding and poor use of the students they train. In terms of decades rather than immediate results there is no doubt that they are laying the foundations of social work in the countries they serve. But they lack the resources to produce sufficient indigenous teaching material, to keep up with developments in the social and behavioural sciences, or to undertake social work research, and their schools cannot even employ enough faculty members to raise the level of field work instruction. In such circumstances it takes a good deal of pioneer spirit to be realistic about the actual situation yet continually to seek to change it, to give students a solid basis of practice yet to fire them with zeal for social reform in the midst of overwhelming social problems, often accompanied by administrative inefficiency and political inertia. But such leaders exist everywhere.

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One effect of the battle with inadequate faculty time, resources and administrative support is that in many countries very little indigenous social work literature is being produced or even translated. The result is that students have to learn from the social work literature of a culture which may differ substantially from their own, and often they do not get enough opportunity to test it out and question and discuss it in relation to their field practice. Moreover, where translations are not available they are reading a language of which they may only have a limited grasp, or else their study is almost confined to the teacher's spoken word. To emphasize the need for leadership and financial resources is thus in essence to point out how essential it is that concepts and methods developed in North America should be applied, tested, adapted and evaluated in other countries. This is of course happening in varying degrees in certain European countries and in parts of Asia and Latin America. One of the most notable examples is Israel where a combination of the inspired leadership of Eileen Blackey, a fine faculty and adequate financial resources has made it possible to develop a well integrated curriculum and to begin to teach in classroom and field practice the basic elements of social work with individuals, groups and communities. This teaching is related to the Israeli culture yet has a degree of universality which is already beginning to make an impact in Europe. In all but the most developed societies or specialized agencies the primary need seems to be for social workers with a certain level of competence in the use of all three methods and it is in the work done to develop this type of social work education that the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work in Israel may make a major contribution to social work education in other parts of the world.

In Europe there have been very considerable developments since the war. The seed sown by Marguerite Pohek when she was in the European Regional Office of

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U.N. has borne good fruit, demonstrating once again what one person can do, given determination and creative imagination. The result is that casework practice and teaching, based upon dynamic psychology and taught in the classroom and through supervised field work is securely established in half a dozen European countries and is spreading in others.

The next step is group work, or at least the extension of casework practice and the service offered by agencies to include conscious use of group relations. But here we are back where we were in casework around 1948 because in no European country are there more than three or four people with an American qualification in group work. The result is that the resources for supervision and teaching are almost non-existent, except in Holland, Switzerland and Greece. Nonetheless the big difference is that nowadays we know how to set about it. There are now many methods teachers and practitioners who are sufficiently well-grounded in social work education and practice to be able to develop social work with groups on educational foundations already laid. In other words, in a good deal of Europe social work as a professional activity has really taken root. The present day difficulties primarily relate to the great shortage of well-qualified social work teachers and supervisors. This will sound familiar to you. It is having the effect of slowing down improvements in the standard of social work education because in some countries shortage of funds or qualified staff means that the schools cannot improve their curriculum or the staff/student ratio as they know they should, nor raise the level of student supervision. Even where finance is not the primary stumbling block, the demand for expanded programmes of social work education to meet doubled or trebled demands for trained workers threatens to have serious effects on standards and once more leaves social work educators with almost no opportunity for research and very little time to produce professional literature.

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The urgent question, indeed, is how to use all existing resources of qualified social workers in ways which will add to rather than diminish these resources. This means very careful deployment so that through supervision, teaching and good recorded practice they may add to our store of knowledge and of more and better equipped social workers. In one way success can be as stultifying to a profession as indifference and neglect, with the obvious difference that to bask in the sunshine of being wanted has a good effect on morale. This immediately raises the question of evaluation. Certainly in scientific terms there is practically no evaluation of social work performance, with a view to feeding back the result into the schools' programmes. Curriculum study and revision on the other hand is a live issue in a number of countries and it is significant that schools are beginning to ask IASSW's help to find consultants able to guide them in this. Here once again American ideas have helped, since it is doubtful whether before Ralph Tyler's framework for curriculum planning got incorporated into social work literature school faculties had much idea how to set about a total curriculum study, as opposed to cutting down or adding to courses here and there. Even so, the actual use of his framework is, as we all know, far from easy, and one of the most fruitful ways of helping schools would be by means of international seminars and by providing consultation on curriculum revision. IASSW has indeed been asked to do this but such consultation projects are far beyond our budget.

So far as student evaluation is concerned, there is undoubtedly far too much reliance on formal written examinations without sufficient analysis of what they test, and with much too little effective evaluation of the thing that really matters, that is the students' professional performance. This is unfortunately inevitable where supervisors have almost no time to supervise nor comprehension of all that goes into supervision. In these circumstances their reports are too frail



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and unreliable as instruments by which to determine the fate of any but the most flamboyantly unsuitable students.

An attempt such as I have made to pick out a few highlights in social work education around the world is bound to be full of contradictions just because the situation differs according to the stage of development in a given country or even in a given school. These stages of development themselves, however, can by now be fairly clearly identified. In the older schools the curriculum tended to consist of broad social science subjects, coupled with details of administrative procedures, and unrelated field work. The problem for them is to introduce methods courses and supervised field work and to relate theory and practice, as well as to change agency policies. In new countries all this must be started from scratch. Thus at the first stage in either situation it is desirable to send people who really know their own country to North America for professional education. As part of a total plan, there is also a need for consultant and other well co-ordinated services over a period of time until the new programme has really taken root and been accepted. This includes acceptance of the unfortunate fact that real professional education for social work is vastly more costly than social science lecture courses and apprentice type field work. And there are usually solid reality factors in the way of meeting these costs.

By the second stage there is in the country a sufficient minimum of qualified faculty members and supervisors and real understanding of what is involved in a good educational programme, together with experience of having pioneered this beyond its initial stages. From there on the third stage emerges. It is characterized by demands for wider interpretation of social work education, for the finances to employ more full time faculty members, for deeper study of

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social problems, and for means to expand and deepen total educational resources, whether in the schools or in field work, and including case records and other indigenous teaching materials. Time for study is as has been said a crucial issue for faculty members in schools which are expanding rapidly in relation to their teaching resources. Yet if teaching is to incorporate advances in knowledge it is essential to keep up with the best that is being written, in other countries as well as in the home country. Maybe even here in North America you are not always familiar with the good social work literature now being produced elsewhere. Sabbatical leave, writing, enquiry and research, curriculum evaluation, and provision of opportunities for advanced study all begin to be accepted as pressing needs at this third stage. Any school anywhere which has reached comfortable discomfort in this stage is probably marching alongside the North American schools, though there are signs that you are beginning to enter a fourth stage well ahead of horizons elsewhere.

It may have seemed negative to spend so much time discussing the problems with which schools of social work contend but in fact these very problems are the growing points of education. There is no problem of raising the level of supervision where this is not seen as an educational process; no problem of time and competence for curriculum revision where self-satisfaction reigns supreme; no struggle for better teaching of methods courses where these are non-existent or else a recital of dead generalisations; no honest bewilderment which comes from attempts to discover what relevance concepts like 'self-determination' or 'acceptance' may have in different cultural contexts where the students learn these concepts parrotlike without questioning the nature of the realities behind them.

One of the most hopeful features about social work education, both nationally and internationally, is this nagging sense of inadequacy this perpetual discontent with the status quo. These discontents in themselves imply a yardstick, a measure of the better achievements for which the schools must strive. It is also obvious that some of the problems to which I have referred are felt here too in North America. If this continent is much more advanced than the rest of the world in social work education and thus has more to give, this does not mean it has nothing to receive. And in any event the different levels of achievement of different schools are differences in degree not in kind. We are all part of the same endeavour no matter where abouts in the world our school may be. The stages reached by schools may differ but what matters most is that by now there is almost universal agreement about the basic educational pattern and content of education for social work. And that its purpose is to produce soundly qualified social workers whose standard of performance would be recognisable anywhere. This is beginning to happen, thus giving one more indication that social work is emerging as a profession. The thought I want to leave with you is that we are all part of this one world-wide endeavour, that in spite of all the obstacles, setbacks and hazards, we are steadily moving in the same direction, and that we all have a professional obligation to help the frail, the stragglers and the laggards along the road, both in our own country and internationally.