

Field Instruction with Integration and Implementation of Indigenous Social Work Education.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of field work is ... to clarify technical instruction. Just as the botanist goes into the fields to study plants and flowers to supplement his text book knowledge, and just as the geologist turns from a study of books to the study of rocks, so the social worker goes from the classroom to the appropriate field work activity, using the field work as a means of clarifying and adding point to the classroom instruction (Manshardt, 1985:3).

Field instruction, a crucial component of social work education, is recognised as an educational process to facilitate integrative and experiential learning. Though the pattern and organisation of social work practicum have some universality, the micro-based practice model adopted in the Indian context has led to inappropriately designed field education programmes producing students unsuited to meet the developmental need of the Indian society. Efforts made to restructure field instruction to prepare students for macro-based practice roles have been too slow to find their way into the educational programme of most of the schools of social work in India. Major problems such as scarcity of field placements, non-availability of qualified agency-based field instructors, inadequate linkage between classroom teaching and field realities, and poor faculty position still prevail. Crucial areas for change in field instruction are examined and alternative strategies are suggested in the light of the emerging socioeconomic concerns of the country and recent trends in the profession.

KEY WORDS— Classroom learning, experiential learning, linkages, alternative strategies, trends

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INTRODUCTION

Social Work, being a practice based profession, has been responding to the immediate needs by finding locally viable solutions for local problems. Social work has also been engaged in dialogue and knowledge formation around the processes of globalization, liberalization, the affects of market forces and media in the lives of people. However, as an academic discipline, Social Work in India like many other disciplines continues to be Eurocentric and colonized for years. The second University Grants Committee review of social work curricula in 1980 introduced the syllabi for social work training engaging more with the Indian social realities. For long, it has been dominated by the American social science knowledge base, owing to the extensive use of their literature and faculty training, while there has been a dearth of indigenous literature.

One way forward for the growth of the profession is the recognition of social work as a profession amongst its users and the state. This necessitates a stocktaking of the indigenous knowledge base, the challenges and the opportunities available to strengthen it. Thus, Indigenous Social Work is a conscious step towards contextualizing Social Work Practice in Indian socio-cultural perspective.

Professional social work as it has evolved in India is a graft on the ancient heritage and not an independent transplant. As for the production of indigenous literature on social problems, welfare services, and the entire social work scene in India, the country has produced immense amount of literature on a wide variety of social work subjects almost from 1947, the year of India's independence. In terms of origin, initial efforts and evolution in the pattern of training, areas of specialisation, types of jobs and the status and composition, the professional social work in India has a very distinct model of its own. It has undoubtedly adopted and adapted a lot from other countries but it has a soul and a body of its own.

It is customary to date the beginning of professional social work in India to the year 1936 when the first school of social work was established in Bombay. But those who have studied the history and philosophy of social work in India know that there has been a long and ancient tradition of social work practice. The inspiration for it may have been varied; religious, humanitarian, secular or rational secular. There were several streams comprising charity, relief, social reform and institutionalised welfare services. Most of it was voluntary effort;

some of it had state support during intermittent periods of history. It was extended under official orders or administered with legislative support. It is too long and chequered a history even to be summarised here. But the cognisance of the fact that such a history existed (Wadia, 1968: 393-400) is essential to recognise an important point that when social work was launched as a profession in India, it was not a transplant from a foreign soil. Rather, it was like the formation of crystals in an already saturated chemical solution. It is a well known scientific fact that, suspending in such a solution a crystal picked from another lot previously formed acts as a catalyst to accelerate the formation of crystals in the solution. In other words, the emergence of social work as a profession was not occurring in a vacuum, nor was it being written, as it were, on a clean slate. There was an indigenous base already in existence and the process of professionalization (to change the metaphor) was in the nature of a grafting. This point gathers weight and lends conceptual and operational significance to the very act of setting up the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in 1936.

The fact that the founder Director of the school was an American is always cited as proof of import of social work training and practice from the U.S.A. A little closer look into the circumstances that led to the establishment of the school wards off that impression and reveals its indigenous roots.

It was clarified that indigenous knowledge is local knowledge, which is unique to a given culture or society (Langill, et al 1998; Dumbrill & Green 2008). It was significant to understand views of great Indian thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra nath Tagore and Dr. Ambedkar who had access to the Western world and also the experiences of colonialism. They strongly felt that indigenous orientation of Indian education was a must. As regards knowledge and ideas from the western world, Mahatma Gandhi stated, We should keep our windows open so that all kinds of ideas flow in, but not such that we are swept off our feet, (Khora 2008). According to Tagore, narrow utilitarianism was not the ultimate aim of education. For him the education which was rooted in the history, economy and culture of the society was meaningful to ensure equality in the society (Mukherjee 1962). Swami Vivekananda who got his recognition first in America said, we shall add to our stock what others have to teach but we must always be careful to keep intact what is essentially our own (Mani 1965). Dr. Ambedkar had a vision of bringing equality in the society through education. According to him, it is the

education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery and it is the education which will enlighten the down trodden masses to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom."(www.lawyersclubindia). these thoughts of our great thinkers underscore the importance of contextualizing local knowledge.

According to these thinkers the literature emerging from the west was not irrelevant in itself. But there was a need to contextualize it in view of the history, culture and society of India (Khora 2008). A Brazilian educator and influential theorist of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1971), expressed that; The wisdom of indigenous culture can be used to supplement and complement the western conception through the inclusion of voices of the people to whom we serve and claim to research. There is a need to empower people to come out of their 'culture of silence' and participate in the production of new knowledge that changes their own communities (www.infed.org). Freire (1971) asserted that educational process was never neutral. People can be passive recipients of knowledge-whatever was the content-or they can engage in a problem- solving approach in which they become active participants. As part of this approach, it is essential that people link knowledge to action so that they actively work to change their societies at local level and beyond. A typical feature of Freire-type education is that people bring their own knowledge and experience into the process (Freire and informal education, www.infed.org). True education is a critical approach to knowledge tied to praxis. Gramsci (1971) refers to critical education as a means for an overall strategy for social transformation (Joll 1977; Mayo 1999). It is a creative exercise through spontaneous and autonomous learning with the teacher as a guide (Gramsci 1971). Gramsci's understanding of critical education inspired Paulo Freire. As per knowledge theory and critical theory constructivists consider learning to be an active process where knowledge is contextualized rather than acquired. Personal 33 experiences guide the construction of knowledge. Knowledge generators continuously test their knowledge construction through social negotiation.

As one of the roles of the social work educator is to develop knowledge, according to role theory, social work educators as knowledge bearers have to discover much from the expressions of the visionaries to comprehend the importance of indigenous knowledge to strengthen the social work education and practice to make it more contextual.

Since the social work profession and curriculum for social work education has evolved in the west, the models of education in all the developing countries including India also have western influence and this has implications even in the present situation (Reamar 1987; Ferguson 2005). Initially, the belief was that western social work had a universally relevant methodology and an international professional identity. This was, however, widely criticized as professional imperialism (Mayadas and Elliot 1997; Midgley 1981). This criticism probably led to the development of indigenous knowledge in developing countries including India (Shetty 1996). Concerning the availability and dissemination of IKB for social work education the views expressed by the Indian writers gives diverse impressions.

As pointed out by the experts the review reveals that there is dearth of indigenous knowledge and lack of its systematic dissemination (Pathak 1971; Gore 1981; Nair 1981; Nanavatty 1990; Kulkarni 1993; Nagpaul 1993); Desai, A. 1994; Siddiqui 1999; Desai M. 2004). However, the experts also pointed out that continuous efforts have been made by the social work professionals in developing indigenous knowledge by writing on various subjects to strengthen the social work education and practice in India.

Report on Standards for Assessment of Quality in Social Work Education. A National Seminar on Standards for Assessment of Quality in Social Work Education (NSSAQSW) was organized by NAAC and TISS in 2003.

The objective of the seminar was to apply NAAC criteria to social work education and develop minimum quality standards for assessment and assurance of quality in institutions for social work education. Manual for Self Study of Social Work Institutions (2005), which was an outcome of the proceedings of this seminar provided guidelines for capacity building and institutional accreditation. The document started with the definition and perspective of social work education and provided the concept and the minimum quality standards of each of the criteria of assessment applied by NAAC. The social work teaching-learning process requires knowledge that is contextualized culturally and shaped by the dialogical interaction between students and teachers. In order to make teachers role sensitive to facilitate learning rather than merely transmit knowledge following measures on standards for developing teaching and learning material were recommended (SAQSWE, 2003); -

-Faculty members were encouraged to publish articles/book reviews in the newspaper/newsletter/magazine, referred journal and edited book, and report printed on CDs.

- Faculty members were encouraged to present papers on relevant topics at seminars/conferences/workshops in India, through the UGC assigned Grant Procedure.

- Faculty-cum-student publications were encouraged.

- Utilization/Citations of faculty publications were reviewed every five years. - Faculty members were invited to refer to articles/books or to be members of editorial boards of other journals/publishers.

- Seminars/conferences/workshops were organized for review of field practices, research, social policy or programs and curriculum development with reference to particular issues at the state, national or international levels.

- Reports of the seminars/workshops were circulated in print form and put up on the website.

- The seminars/conferences and workshops led to follow up activities like preparation of teaching materials, policy documents, manuals, and so on.160

- Selected papers presented at the seminar were revised and referred for publication in the book form.

- Faculty members were encouraged to publish their papers in referred journals and books.

- Based on their research or field action project faculty members were encouraged to develop audio-visuals such as video films, slide shows, and posters.

- Faculty members wrote columns on relevant topics for newspapers or magazines.

In order to fulfil these measures on standards for developing teaching ñ learning material conscious efforts needs to be made at all levels by ensuring educators active involvement in knowledge development for contextual learning.

A landmark nation wise research by Desai, A. (1994) studied the students, social work educators and the educational process in 31 out of 34 social work

educational institutions which existed until 1977 in India. The study covered large number (1178) of students, 170 social work educators and 43 teachers from other disciplines. The study sought to understand faculty profile and their role as social work educator with the objective of finding out their contributions in the field, research and in developing teaching materials (published/unpublished). The study pointed out that only 18 percent faculty members were involved in undertaking research studies which was an area of building and up knowledge base. Some of the respondents reported that their participation in academics, administration and involvement with functional and statutory committees (at institution, university and, governmental level) in policy making /planning helped them to contribute in knowledge development. However, it was pointed out that overall the contribution of social work educators in knowledge development was very limited.

Availability of Indigenous Knowledge for Social Work Education in India:

Highlighting Gaps

The review of literature in this study showed that Indian social work professionals were aware about the dearth of IKB and made continuous efforts to produce knowledge for social work education and practice from the inception of the profession. However, the indigenous knowledge produced and used as reference is much limited, lacks theoretical background and practice models. ³/₄ Some of the important documents such as UGC Review Committee Reports published in 1965 and 1980, Encyclopedia published in 1967 (first edition) and 1987 (second edition), Bibliography prepared in 1997 and Curriculum Reports prepared in 1990 and 2001 are very old. These important publications need to be timely revised and published for fresh references and to understand growth of the profession. The only nationwide research study on social work education in India entitled Students, Educators and the Educational processes done in 1994 is very important but quite old to use as reference study. Similar studies need to be conducted to update and understand profile and status of ISWE and SWEs at regional and national level.

Special efforts were made by Desai, M. in the IJSW (1997) issue to compile an Indian bibliography for the period from 1936 to 1996 and examined indigenization of social work literature. The literature was classified into different categories. Such types of efforts need to be made timely to up-date indigenous knowledge. Very few, only six scholarly studies are conducted on

social work education and practice by the social work educators as their PhD studies , such studies on knowledge base for social work education and practice needs to be undertaken more in number by the educators and scholars.

Review of Literature showed that peer reviewed journals published by the ISWE across the country are around thirteen. However, it was noticed that only IJSW was reviewed occasionally to assess the availability of knowledge produced by the professionals for social work education and practice. Similar review of other journals also needs to be undertaken from time to time to assess the quality and contributions of indigenous knowledge produced by the journals. Professional associations adequately contributed knowledge by producing research reports, editing books and conference papers up to 1986. Thereafter, the associations are not active in organizing academic activities and did not produce any knowledge in the organized form. Few SWEs had developed a high sense of commitment to their work by developing knowledge to strengthen social work profession. However, amongst them; those who wrote and published were very few. Name of same writers with same profile appear repeatedly in the books and journals as authors. Incidentally, these authors were associated with old ISWE from urban area. New young writers from ISWE from the urban/rural and interior areas did not appear in the review of this literature.

Creative literature and anthology of contemporary short stories on specialized theme to reveal value of an interdisciplinary approach to social work education was developed only once as social work knowledge since inception of social work education. It is expected that, anthologies of this kind in different regional languages may be prepared to meet local need as social work knowledge. From the international studies it appeared that even the social work practitioners contributed quite a lot in knowledge development, whereas Indian studies showed that knowledge base was developed by the social work educators alone and practitioners did not contribute in this area. There was some material available in the regional language related to social work knowledge. But very little of it was about social work strategies and techniques. Attempts made by faculty members to write in the regional languages can be strengthened further.

The Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work (which was later renamed Tata Institute of Social Sciences) remained the only school for professional social work education for ten years between 1936 and 1946.

Interestingly, it is after India's independence, that social work education in India was profoundly influenced by the American ideas through the following developments.

Firstly, after independence, influence in social work education came primarily from greater exposure of Indian social workers to American social work education through increased sponsoring of study tours and appointment of American trained social workers on the faculties of the schools of social work in India. American influence came most systematically through the US government's Technical Co-operation Mission and the Council of Social Work Education Exchange Programme. Under this programme, during 1957–62, American social work educators came as consultants or conducted faculty development programmes in the Indian schools of social work. In exchange, faculty members from Indian schools of social work went for study to the schools of social work in the US (Pathak, 1975: 176–77).

Secondly, as a corollary of the above, one important source of American influence in social work education in India, was the extensive use of American books and journals in schools of social work in India. Though the need of indigenous study material has been urged by social work educators time and again, the situation remained unaltered, as pointed out by Nagpaul (1986) and Desai (2002) in an analysis of social work study materials in use in India in 1972 and 1986. Social work education in India was a generic programme in the pre independence period (1936–46). The introduction of specialisations in social work emerged in the post- independence period primarily under the American influence and partly due to the felt need (Desai, 1985; 1987). Hence following the Factories Act, 1948 in India, emphasising on the need to have labour welfare officers in factories, a need was felt to have a cadre of trained personnel and hence the Personnel Management and Industrialisation specialisation was introduced in the curriculum.

Social work education in India has now been recognised as a moral and practical activity. The endeavour of exploring the “indigenous value base for social work practice” faces a number of theoretical and conceptual difficulties. One is the dialectic between universal norms and a particular cultural understanding (Guba, 2002) that besets our discussions of the need for developing an indigenous perspective on social work values. Thus we highlight the need for a critical-hermeneutical analysis that will enable us to see the

balance between insider-outsider perspectives. Indigenous base of social work education or indigenisation of social work education in India demands a cultural competence on the part of professionals.

CONCLUSION

Social work education in India has thus undergone six phases till date. Although discourses do talk of multiple trajectories, broadly they could be incorporated in the following phase oriented development. The period from 1936–46, was that of American and Eurocentric influences. The period from 1947–57, which was also the early postcolonial era for India was the period of the beginning of indigenisation and state influences on social work education and curriculum. This was also the phase where state and establishment activities and interests in welfare activities played an important role in the development of thematic specialisations. The period from 1957–70 was also the growth of specialisations, indigenous knowledge development and the insertion of justice and rights discourses in an essentially state welfare oriented scenario.

The next three decades continued this trend. Post liberalisation in the 1990s and the withdrawal of state actors from several welfare activities, social work education in India has to respond to the demands of being a crucial non- state voluntary actor in Indian civil society. State withdrawal, global political economy dynamics and market dynamics spearheaded several people's struggles and structural issues. Hence contemporary social work education has to rise to challenges of structural hegemony and cultural diversity. This has to be done in keeping with the social work mandate (global/local) as well as in tandem with rights and justice discourses. One of the great strengths of social work education in India is thus its capacity to link the structural and the personal. The injunction from the anti-capitalist movement to 'think global, act local' provides a fresh basis for social work education in India to actively make the connections between the neoliberal global agenda and their day-to-day experience. There is considerable overlap between some of the core values of the anti-capitalist movement and critical social work education values in India. The core is to appreciate a world of diversity and hence social work education in India is worth defending. A new paradigm can be invented with elements of traditional social work, radical social work and the experience of new social movements, both user-led and anti-capitalist, in a kind of Hegelian synthesis.

Social work education in India today is at the juncture of becoming that material force.

Too often the knowledge generated from practice is not written and published, and hence not available for practitioners, educators and learners to use and further develop in the form a new model or theory. For any knowledge to be valuable in social work, it has to be relevant to the issues regularly encountered in practice.

On the other hand, practice also needs to inform knowledge so that existing theories can be revised where they are at odds with the experiences of practice to make the knowledge rich and contextual for indigenous practice.

Some of the core epistemic concepts of social work education in contemporary India then are:

- Attuning to diversity and identify the intersections between ‘race’, ‘class’ and ‘gender’ in order to develop a wider non-oppressive, anti discriminatory form of social work theory and practice
- Ethics of care and justice as embedded in praxis with themes of: empathy, equality, addressing power micro politics and self-disclosure
- New ‘client-worker’ relationships in terms of a dialogue with ‘clients’. People are encouraged to locate themselves within their social context and connect with others experiencing similar difficulties. This also entails linking personal change with social change
- Commitment to critical self-examination, plurality of opinions and diversity (not fragmentation in an individualistic sense)
- Commitment to egalitarianism, letting people speak for themselves; seeking changes which will transform social relations; recognising the existence of a ‘community’ and concepts of power and powerlessness within personal relationships
- Celebrating cultural diversities as playing a valuable role in criticising dogmatic positions (cited from Jaswal and Pandya, 2014: 185–186).

Professional social workers are found in every facet of community life in old age homes, orphanages, schools, hospitals, mental health clinics, prisons, corporations and in numerous public and private agencies that serve individuals and families in need. Social work is not just about doing good deeds and helping the under-privileged. Over a period of time, it has evolved into a profession. Correctly it is not a 'conventional' career. But with issues of disability, drug misuse, poverty, mental ill health, problems associated with aging etc. rising constantly, social work has become a vital need of our society today. If you are willing to take up a profession for emotional fulfillment and if your purpose of working is not just financial, this would be the ideal career for you. Social workers require new levels of understanding and new models of practice if they are to contribute effectively toward the resolution of social problems that are rooted in worldwide social, political, and economic realities. At a minimum these new models of practice must reflect an understanding of the transnational nature of the social problems that bring clients, client groups, and other constituencies to the attention of human service workers. They also must be grounded on empirical evidence and must offer positive guidance concerning a range of social development solutions that can be applied to discrete social needs.

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