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Final Report - IASSW International Project

International Social Work Week Conference – 10-15 March 2013

On behalf of the participants and as the PI of the project, let me first thank you for the International Association of the Schools of Social Work financial contribution and for encouraging us to implement this worldwide collaboration and to implement International social work week.

Title of the project:

"What and How Do We Teach, and How Do We Learn? A Reciprocal Research Project for Social Work Faculty from Asia, the Middle East, and European Countries"
- IASSW International Project - PI: Prof. Orit Nuttman Shwartz, School of Social Work, Sapir College. Email: orits@sapir.ac.il.



The conference was held at the Sapir School of Social Work. Participants included active partners in the reciprocal ISW project from Ethiopia, India, Germany, and the US, with Prof. Lynne Healy as the distinguished guest of honor. Participating faculty members were hosted for a three-day workshop, which included lectures and activities presented to the students and faculty members of Sapir College.



Participants in the Workshop:

Israel:

School of Social Work, Sapir College - Prof. Orit Nuttman-Shwartz, Dr. Rebecca Ranz, Dr. Nora Korin-Langer, Dr. Yochay Nadan; Dr. Michal Komem, Dr. Julia Chaitin, Dr. Eitan Shachar and Dr. Yitzhak Lander.

India:

The Matru Sewa Sangh Institute of Social Work, Nagpur, Maharashtra - Dr. John Antony Manchary and Dr. Geetha Mary Thachil.

Germany:

The Department of Social Work and Health at the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt - Prof. Dr. Michaela Koettig and Prof. Dr. Ute Straub.

Ethiopia:

School of Social work, Addis Ababa University - Dr. Wassie Kebed and Dr. Mengistu Legesse.

USA:

The Center for International Social Work Studies, University of Connecticut - Prof. Lynne Healy.

Summary of the activities held throughout the week:

The conference included workshops, lectures, and panel sessions for collaborative exploration of issues related to international social work. In addition, all the participants met students and faculty members from our school and had a tour of the region.

The professional workshops:

During this workshop, which included 15 hours of presentations and discussions, we succeeded in exploring the similarities and the differences in our social work curricula in general and our ISW curricula in particular. Mainly, we reexamined the definition of ISW which was presented by Prof. Healy. We also attempted to explore the nature of the process and educational activities that we as educators need to develop in order to transform ISW from an academic concept to practical knowledge and skills, and vice versa. More specifically, during the workshop we dealt with the definition of International Social Work and how it is (or is not) reflected in each country. Afterwards, we explored whether we have universal curricula, or whether each country has its own curricula that reflect the local context of the social work profession. At the end of the workshop, participants presented research findings and future ideas relating to methods, education, and collaboration.



Analysis of the narratives of the participants in the International Social Work Week conference revealed four main themes: the nature of ISW social work; human rights; Northern versus southern countries; and "exposure or change". The first theme, which related to the nature of the field of social work, focused the "what" and "how" of training in the field. The questions raised in the Conference included:

- What knowledge is required? Who determines that knowledge? How is ISW defined? Is there a need to cross borders and countries in order to learn about the field of ISW?
- Another question related to the definition of the field, including terms such as "indigenization" and "globalization", global social work, etc. Is this a matter of semantics and structure, or does it reflect substantive differences?
- Another question concerned the relationship between social work in general and international social work in particular. For example, what aspects of general social work and ISW are parallel, shared, and complementary (at the global, cross-cultural, and local levels).

With regard to the field of knowledge, several examples of participants' comments can be cited, as follows:

This event raised an issue that I have been very concerned with: What is international social work? What knowledge is required in order to train students and professionals in this field? What professionals will participate in developing and expanding knowledge, and what professionals will not? Who will receive funding for research and development in this field, and who will stay behind, without being able to progress and develop? Will countries / regions that can't afford the broad programs included in [the ISW] curriculum be unable to take part in international social work programs? Who's "in" and who's "out".

We wrestled with the definitions and elements of international social work. For example, a question was raised [us] hosting visitors from other countries is "international social work?" When one of the presenters from India said yes, a colleague from Ethiopia contested this. This brought us to a discussion

of border crossing—do we have to cross borders physically to be engaged in international social work?

As mentioned, another question focused on the **relationship between local Social work and international/global/cross-cultural social work**. The narratives reflect the tension that exists between the local and global fields, as well as their mutual impact on one another, and points of convergence.

The issue is, what is international and what is local? What does one need to know? I believe that more needs to be clarified and there are still more questions. For example, are immigrants part of this field? What about populations without any status? Or does it only include refugees, etc? Is field work training abroad essential? If so, why? And are we teaching the students what they need to know.

What position should we take? Every country has its own atmosphere. How does international social work deal with the dilemma of global versus local? India is very large, and even we are not familiar with the whole country. It's not like Israel .

Another area of debate involved the global and the local. To what extent are there tensions between internationalization and indigenization? We agreed that understanding the local reality is essential. Yet, the global agenda certainly requires international knowledge. One member talked about indigenization within an international context as a useful framing of the issue.

How is international social work distinguished from global social work? Is the essence of practice in each of these fields really different, or do their perspectives and theoretical bases derive from different bodies of knowledge? Is all practice that combines work in different nation states international social work? IF so, what distinguishes between international social work and cross-cultural social work or cross-cultural practice? Is it possible to distinguish between these concepts in theory and practice?

In this context, the second main theme was raised, which relates to the relationships between Northern and Southern countries. The participants, who were from different countries that represented the encounter between North and South, often found it difficult to talk about this issue openly and freely. This theme became part of the dialogue toward the end of the sessions in the conference, and included three main topics:

- Power relations between the North and South: There was a feeling that this was an implicit topic in the various workshops, and there was a question as to how much international social work replicates Western colonialism and imperialism.
- An emotional and dynamic dimension that accompanies the encounter between people from Northern and Southern countries – feelings of guilt and shame, as well as competition, excellence, and trust were the main issues that affected the dynamics between the participants from the different sides of the globe. The dynamics fluctuated between replication, correction, change, and acceptance.
- The importance of collaborative learning among participants from Northern and Southern countries in an attempt to create a joint, authentic, equal dialogue.

An example of the power relationships between the Northern and Southern parts of the world in the International Social Work Week Conference is found in the following statements:

I thought about the meaning of encounter; about replicating the main themes: Northern versus Southern countries, colonialism, glorifying the United States... I didn't bring it up in public, because I thought it only concerned me. Maybe it concerned others, but I didn't feel comfortable... As time went on, there was an atmosphere that broke down barriers. I was surprised by Wassie, who succeeded in bringing up the issue of Northern-Southern relations, power differences... I felt that even though time had passed, the topic was not yet ready for discussion. Nevertheless it was mentioned. We still have a way to go.

[Regarding] the power relations that are involved in international social work, including the history and relationships between Northern and Southern global contexts: In the sessions I attended, I felt that the discussion about power relations was primarily implicit. This leads to the fundamental question: Is international social work really international, or is it mainly based on ideas that were developed and conceptualized in the West, which are applied (or adapted) to other areas of the world? Does the knowledge flow in only one direction [from North to South], or is there a possibility that the knowledge will also flow in the opposite direction? What is the role of power relations in developing a concept of international social work, and how is the reflection of power relations (in the conceptualization, in the development of programs, and in practice) present and discussed?

The participants noted the important role of this theme in institutionalizing and establishing the relationships between the participants in the workshop, which concerned the dynamics between North and South.

Regarding the statement made by Wassie: In my view, this was a pivotal moment. I had the feeling that Wassie dared to upset the status quo and break the idyllic atmosphere in the room and shatter the illusion that all of us are the same... Going back to the pivotal moment, we can say that trust on the one hand and the exposure of guilt, shame, competition, and excellence [on the other] are issues that need to be addressed. The need to express trust that allows for learning was clearly evident, but there was also a need to recognize the guilt that quite a few of the participants felt – whether the guilt feeling was due to their activities (e.g., those who came as tourists with cameras ...), whether it was a feeling of shame and fear that "they will discover what I don't know", "they will discover that I'm not developed, and that I don't interpret Western knowledge correctly" ... [there is also] the need for globalization, transparency, and public disclosure that accompany current measures in academic scholarship and society... i.e., the need for forms of excellence.

One meaningful word echoed in my mind: "trust". There is a need to build trust as a basis for reciprocal work, but the question is how. When we returned to the full forum, Prof. Healy opened the discussion and said: "We need to stop feeling guilty and move on". She meant that Northern countries can't continue living with guilt feelings about past imperialism and constant fear of oppression. That doesn't mean that there's no need to be aware of what happened and make efforts to avoid that situation but it should be without those restrictive feelings, which lead to extreme caution that doesn't always allow for genuine dialogue. So how do you release guilt feelings? When I told Prof. Nuttman-Shwartz about the events and their meaning, she mentioned a third concept – "shame". I think this term complements my idea – shame was part of the dynamics between the two parts of the globe [the "North" and the "South"]. [People from the] North are often ashamed that they have paternalistic feelings, and they replicate oppressive relationships. [People from the] South are often ashamed of the situation in their country.

In this open atmosphere, and in light of the desire to get to know each other and become closer, the participants highlighted the importance of the encounter between the North and South.

To me, the main strength of the working seminar was the cross-national discussion of the theme. Most scholarship on international social work and international social work education is Western or Northern in origin. Bringing scholars/teachers from India and Ethiopia into the dialogue was one of the most important elements of the seminar. It would be fruitful if the group can continue the dialogue by electronic communications for further reflections on the areas of universality and divergence of perspectives.

Another important theme raised in the Conference was human rights. Most of the participants believed that human rights is a major aspect of international social work, and even expressed a desire to continue exploring the topic. Beyond that, the participants indicated that human rights is a critical issue that should be dealt with not

only on the basis of theoretical knowledge but also in terms of practical implementation at a time when it is easy to stick to responses based on traditional attitudes and replicate existing patterns of power relations and behaviors that are accepted in North-South relations.

I was most struck – and encouraged – by the emphasis that all participants put on human rights, regardless of their home institution and country. The theme of the centrality of working for human rights within social work – for women and children, for refugees, and for marginalized and minority populations - was reiterated throughout the week .

Beyond that, participants commented:

Protection of human rights is a supreme goal. How can we do this without political action? Social work needs to be more political .

Personally, I am interested in doing research in the field of human rights. [I want to] try to see how one can understand and teach students about human rights in a historical and political context, and in terms of the local economic situation .

In the context of collaborative learning and exposure to others, the importance of involving Israeli students in the International Social Work Week was highlighted. This was done through lectures that the visiting faculty members delivered to the students at the Sapir Social Work School. In addition, the guests observed the Israeli students in various classes and participated in them.

I found that the experience of working with the students on this rather delicate topic was very fruitful. The students took an active part, they were open-minded and interested and their reflections reached a very high level...

Especially the level of the ability to reflect I [that] observed in the reflection groups I attended is something I will take home with me...

We also each had opportunities for interchange with Sapir College social work students in their classes. The students' discussions evidenced their wisdom and some of their comments deserve special attention. As one of the students put it when describing her international exchange experience, "we expand the boundaries of the profession and change our way of thinking." Another commented that "it is important for all social workers to learn to think more deeply about how we get to know about people." These comments were meaningful to me and I wanted to include them in my own reflections, as they also describe the outcomes of our working seminar .

The exposure to people from another culture, as well as the encounter with the faculty, students, and residents of the region and the opportunity to understand the Israeli context enabled participants in the Conference to recognize the importance of strengthening existing and new partnerships in order to develop knowledge in this field. The participants expressed the desire to strengthen and develop partnerships as follows:

Small groups spending several days together is qualitatively different than an international conference and offers much more opportunity for advancing knowledge in a specific arena, as well as for creating linkages toward new or strengthened partnership.

Those directly involved in partnership exchanges with Sapir also seemed to learn from each other. I wrote down in my own notes how one of the Ethiopian partners indicated that he gained new insights into the possibilities for mutuality and exchange through the presentation by the faculty from India.

Mengistu wants to be a partner [in this process], and would like to know what to do so that students from Ethiopia will have an experience similar to that of the Indian students... I was so pleased, and I saw this as an opportunity .

Participants also expressed a desire to develop a model in India that will promote reciprocal work, a deeper experience, and exchange.

This was an opportunity for reflection, and for defining where we stand in this relationship. Training for Israeli students is provided in Ethiopia, and this restricts my perspective of the picture as a whole. What is missing is the part where our voice is heard. Why didn't we conduct a similar study together with Nora? Are we supposed to engage in a similar process of rewriting and reflection? Where are the boundaries of our cooperation? Maybe we should vary things and add more partners besides Israel? I hope this Conference will be a starting point, and that next year we'll take one more step forward.

You think this kind of experience (hosting Israeli students in another country) enhances sensitivity, and is it necessary? We want you to see our reality even when we know that we are unable to send our students to you .

The first part for everyone is knowing yourself – strong points and weak points. You always need to aspire to improve and support. That's a central question: What can I do to improve things? It was difficult for me to hear some of the things that were said, and out of a desire to understand, I hope we will be able to have a mutual dialogue when things are happening and not later, so that we'll be able to deal with them.

To summarize, as a result of the encounter, the participants expressed a desire for future cooperation and saw that the experience was not as bad as they had imagined, and they had been enriched by the encounter. The participants had also developed relationships that went beyond the Israeli school that initiated the program, and that involved each participant as an individual. Without a doubt, the encounter created diverse opportunities for cooperation, and allowed for exchange among participants from different parts of the world that transcended the definition of Northern versus Southern countries.

Lectures to all Social Work students from Sapir College:

In addition, the participants attended 17 different lectures with our students. This enabled them to learn about our generation of social workers. In addition, they had an opportunity to meet students and graduates from the ISW track.

More specifically, the meeting with the ISW track students enabled the guest faculty to hear the students' point of view about the definition of ISW and the relationships between global and local social work, as well as to learn more about the Israeli experience in their fieldwork abroad. This joint session enabled the students to share with their guests, and to hear from them how the exchange period looks from the "other side". All of the students and faculty members of the Sapir School agreed that this was an important, effective, and enriching learning experience.



Comments by Students after the Encounter

"It was a very meaningful encounter.... [it was] different]... it opened up [a new] world... In particular, I had a meaningful experience with the lecturers from Germany. I was surprised to see how much the past is still here... how complex history is... The guests were so excited, and we became so

nationalistic.... I didn't think we would talk about the army so much... about the meaning of being young in Israel... about the country..."

After the meeting with research students, one participant expressed the following thought:

"It was fascinating to see how the discussion about rights is an integral part of every area, including research... As researchers in the field of trauma, we prefer to conduct studies at the time of traumatic events.. [or] afterwards, and we're not so aware of the human rights issues involved... It's not just a matter of confidentiality and ethics... It's much more... There's a need to explore this issue more extensively in Israel too, and to teach more about human rights in the context of social work..."

"I wanted to really thank you for the organization of the international week. The experience of seeing social work on an international level was learning and enriching. The unique interpretation of every country to what is social work and the different issues that interest social workers in different places in the world enabled me to see the different cultures and colors that are in our profession. But in spite of all the differences there is one thing that unites all Social workers and that is the desire to make the world a better place. This has made me proud of being part of a big family the "Social Work family".

Following the meeting with faculty members from India, another issue was raised in regard to the status of women and the upheaval in attitudes toward women that is taking place in India as a country and society. The issue also came up following the interaction between the men and women students in the classroom – the discussion included topics such as equality, open dialogue, and getting to know each other.

Regarding the encounter with students from Israel, faculty members from Ethiopia were amazed by the open dialogue that took place between the teachers and students, and by the teaching methods (work in small groups in comfortably furnished rooms), where students were able to express criticism. These dynamics fostered a sense of familiarity and comfort among the students and faculty members participating in the sessions.

It was interesting to see the relationship that developed with the faculty members from Ethiopia, which was reflected in a familiar personal interaction that developed rapidly. (This might be because a large community of Ethiopian immigrants lives in Israel, or because of cultural similarities.) In contrast, with regard to the guests from Germany, the dynamics focused on retraumatization, conflict, nationalism, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In this context, as mentioned, the dialogue was affected by the complex history of relations between the Israeli hosts and the German guests.



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