WITHOUT BORDERS: FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT STUDIES IN SOCIAL WORK

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"The idea of Social Work without Borders may be a veritable catalyst to authenticate our profession as a transformer of social reality. With humility and patience, we must discover, compare, analyze and understand the core of major issues that bedevil humankind" (Mohan, 2005).

Introduction

Development discourse is incorporated in mainstream professional education programmes to a limited extent only. This article argues that development education should not be confined to educational settings focusing directly on development studies but ought to be incorporated in other human services training, given that practitioners within the health and community services sectors are increasingly employed in the development sector as well as being exposed to calls to commit to global justice. Accordingly our definition of development is a global one. Social work professor Jim Ife in his recent breakthrough text clearly articulates the scope of a global agenda. We adopt the holistic definition of global development espoused by Ife that '...the oneness of all people transcends national and cultural boundaries, and the social and environmental policies of other nations are the legitimate concern for all' (2013: 45). We use social work as a case study of the potential for a profession to engage more robustly with an international agenda, with an emphasis on social work education in Australia. In doing so we acknowledge that many of the activities of social work are linked to strong cultural and social institutions that are practised in localised variations. We adopt the argument of Ife that '...the simple North/South, or developed/developing, binary is unhelpful... rather there are different regions with different issues and challenges'. This view is underpinned by 'understandings of solidarity that rise above colonialism' (ibid: 211).

Increasingly, social work expresses a rhetorical commitment to the 'internationalisation' of curricula alongside social justice and human rights tenets. However the commitment and practice of international development is not universally or consistently reflected in either social work education or social work practice. In this paper we examine whether a Social Workers Without Borders (SWWB) concept would boost social work education in fostering knowledge and interest in the development field and promoting opportunities for ethical international practice. We report on a scoping exercise conducted in Australia in 2012/13 that examined the prospects for the introduction of an international SWWB organisation. In order to set the context for this exploration, we first turn to the *Global Agenda for Social Work and Development* as an example of the profession's philosophical commitment to development and then examine critiques about what is in effect development-exclusion. We look at the state of play of internationalising curriculum with an emphasis on social work programmes and more specifically on social work field education practices (Work Integrated Learning). Finally, in presenting the results of a scoping study, we flag alternative models for how a SWWB organisation could evolve as well as the principles underpinning its mission. We look beyond the somewhat elusive and localised notion of social justice that is codified by the social work profession. Our call for social justice is global in nature, asking social workers to invoke an ethic of responsibility by working in solidarity with others to eliminate structural injustices and inequalities.

The global commitment of social work and its challenges

The *Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Commitment to Action* was launched in March 2012 by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). The Agenda was the culmination of a three-year collaboration by three international organisations representing social work education, social development and social work practice. The *Global Agenda* commits to promoting social and economic equalities through working with the United Nations and other international agencies, communities and other partners and 'our own organisations'.

Despite the lofty goals of social work international organisations and the *Global Agenda*, we argue that mainstream social work in Australia remains

disconnected from global justice and social development. The Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (AASW, 2010), though expressing a commitment to human rights and social justice, including concepts of social development and environmental management, is more inwardly focused than globally inclusive. Moreover, although localised *community* development is a feature of social work education, the dominant emphasis (and employment) is direct practice or casework. To overcome these deficiencies we adopt the language recommended by Jim Ife of 'internationalist community development' rather than 'international community development'. According to Ife:

> "Internationalist community development involves not only working internationally, but also working from the perspective of internationalism which implies ideas of international solidarity, the realisation that we live in one world, the necessity for the Global North to learn from the Global South, and the need for all people to work in peace and harmony" (2013: 209).

A challenge for social work in an international context is the neoliberal climate in which social work operates. Bryan (2011) poses the question of why the development sector endorses the ideologies and political-economic arrangements responsible for exacerbating poverty and injustice while at the same time encouraging people to take action to ameliorate poverty and injustice. This conundrum is applicable to social workers who experience co-option into managerialist ways of thinking, which creates a silencing of dissenting voices.

A number of social workers advocate for social work's ethical and moral duty beyond our own contexts (for example Jones and Truell, 2012; Hugman and Bowles, 2012; Midgley, 2012). They argue that we need to speak with confidence about the contribution of social work and social development, including in debates about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), health inequalities, social protection and the physical environment. As stated by Payne (2012), there is no international template for social work. Payne highlights the importance of understanding the national political and organisational contexts and professional discourses of social work that inform the practice of social work in international contexts. Jones and Truell (2012) encapsulate the

challenges for social work, underlining the need for those involved in social work and social development to build the linkages between global trends and realities and local community responses. They suggest that social work practitioners increasingly recognise the regional and global connections in their work but still raise questions as to what international social work has to do with social work in their locales. As a counter, discourse academic Fred Besthorn has founded the Global Alliance for a Deep-Ecological Social Work with a focus on notions of global community and citizenship (Alston and Besthorn, 2013).

Internationalising the curriculum

In order to gain an overview of social work programmes in Australia with international reach, an Internet search was conducted of course content of social work degrees accredited with the professional body, the Australian Association of Social Workers. The search revealed that only six of the twenty-two universities offering accredited social work programmes included courses (subjects) with the title 'international development'. One of these universities also offered a language stream within the social work degree. Two universities offered double degrees in social work and international development. One university offered two separate courses on international development and a further course on community development as part of an undergraduate social work degree programme. Thirteen universities offered courses on international development in other degree programmes. Some social work courses had free electives that allowed students to undertake these courses.

These findings are not surprising given that the Australian Social Work Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) are specifically focused on preparation for practice within Australia. A keyword search of the ASWEAS document revealed no mention of 'international development'. In reference to the principles underlying social work education, the ASWEAS document merely contains the following statement: 'We recognise that some principles may differ from country to country because of the diverse nature of the international community' (2012: 2.0). Furthermore, social workers are required to have 'an ability to understand the context of social work practice at local, national and international levels' (ibid: 4.1.5). There is no elaboration on how Australian qualified social workers are to practice in these diverse international contexts

beyond 'knowledge of, and the ability to critically analyse social, political, economic, historical, cultural and ecological systems' (ibid: 6.2.4).

Internationalising the curriculum is an important and strategic initiative of universities worldwide. An internationalised curriculum has the potential to enrich the educational experiences of students by providing increased awareness for all students of issues of development and providing opportunities for study and cultural exchange. Ife cautions against the emphasis on process and in particular educational frameworks that teach stages of the project cycle making 'community development practice a case of following the rules of how to do projects'. He contends: 'This is classic modernity, trying to impose order, predictability, certainty and generalizability, and this is the antithesis of community development' (2013: 208-209).

Although generally lacking a transformative and political framework 'student mobility' is a major international activity supported by field education, study tours and student exchange (Bryan, 2011). Overseas field education is commonly known as Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and is a central component of the commitment of universities worldwide to internationalising social work education (Hokenstad, 2013). Initially focused on the health and social sciences disciplines, in the past two decades WIL has been offered to students in broad-ranging multi-disciplinary project teams operating within an international context. An extensive literature exists on the educational, psychological and social needs of students studying abroad (Hawkins and Pattanayak, 2009; Martin and Ling, 2010; Pettys, Panos, Cox and Oosthuysen, 2005; Rai, 2004; Razack, 2002). However, this literature is not balanced in terms of the needs of host communities and how learning will best occur. A focus has been on benefits to students in terms of their educational and life experience rather than on impacts on the community in which the international activity occurs.

The cognitive approach to teaching and learning is often used with mobility students (Martin, 2012). This approach to education was developed in the latter half of the twentieth century with an emphasis on the active processes learners use to solve problems and construct new knowledge. It is also known as problem-based learning. We argue that problem-based learning can be

detrimental in an international context that is focused on development due to the emphasis on short-term project outcomes. The emphasis is on what and how students learn rather than what they will produce. This is contrary to development principles and can have unintended consequences of replicating and reinforcing colonial practices. It particularly fails to challenge the lack of attention in the dominant international social work perspective to structural inequalities that impede global justice and to the privilege and power held by social workers from the global North (Deepak, 2012).

Processes of internationalising social work field education

Pettys and colleagues have identified four different types of student mobility models in social work field education. These are: independent – the one time placement model; the neighbour country placement model; the on-site model; and the exchange/reciprocal model. The 'independent – one time placement model' is 'usually driven by student interest and/or experience in a specific geographic region' (2005: 282). This model is time consuming as new relationships are forged and all parties familiarise themselves with often complex field education and administrative requirements and reporting responsibilities. Project work is short-term and international students often compete with local students for limited placements. In developing countries local students often cannot afford to study abroad so the relationship can be one way only.

The 'neighbour country placement model' involves links 'with social work programmes which are geographically located close to an international border' (283). The 'on-site model' involves an adjunct faculty member in the host country who supervises the student. This approach has been found to be well suited to development projects. Pettys et al consider the 'exchange/reciprocal model' as 'the most intensive and demanding on the home university, both in terms of faculty time and university funding' (284). The home, or exchange university, is responsible for arranging all aspects of the student's field education placement including supervision and liaison visits. The requirements of Western universities are often more resource-intensive and can place a strain on exchange partners in developing countries. This approach works best when scholarship funding is provided for in-bound and out-bound students and the partnership does not clearly favour one partner. Successful

partnerships are often longstanding extending to joint research staff exchanges and joint learning and teaching initiatives.

With the exception of the one-time placement, all of these models are conducive to social work students engaging in development projects. The learning and teaching paradigm is 'experiential' rather than a cognitive problem-solving approach focused on short-term project outcomes. The emphasis is on collaborative processes based upon mutual trust and respect with a shared understanding and analysis of problems and possible solutions. Commenting on student placement experiences of Australian students in Bangladesh, Hawkins and Pattanayak extend this to 'students grappling with the absence of the personal pronoun "I" and an acceptance that they are there primarily to learn, not to do, and if delegated tasks by the agency appreciate their involvement and not judge from a western perspective' (2009: 142). Furthermore, they highlight different cultural meanings and applications of concepts such as 'privacy' and 'confidentiality' when development projects involve students living and being immersed in the community.

Igniting interest

Despite some hesitancy, lag and problematic paradigms, it can be said that in recent decades there has been some burgeoning of an interest in reframing social work in international contexts. This interest broadly takes two forms: first, as a lens through which to view local practice; and second, as a form of practice in its own right (Lyons, Manion and Carlsen, 2006). Although such deliberations take place in academic environments, they have not yet infused mainstream social work in Australia which remains locally focused. Even when working in local fields of practice with global resonance such as indigenous rights, refugee services or poverty-reduction, funding constraints, workloads and other restrictions tend to subsume social work practitioners who remain in the comfort zones arising from their social work education experience and practice expectations.

Yet changing cultures and demographics, globalisation, political-economic growth and increased environmental concerns have all played a role in the changing face of social work, and consequently social work practice must also evolve (Martin and Abraham, 2012; Reisch and Jani, 2012). Alphonse,

George and Moffatt (2008) argue that, as a result of globalisation, the nature of social work is changing and the profession needs to keep up in order to remain relevant. In reference to international environmental concerns, Australian social work academic Margaret Alston argues, 'our discipline must develop global networks and strategies and address our "blind spot" relating to theorising and practice in the environmental realm' (2013: 229). We argue that Ife's term 'internationalist community development' is aptly suited to international activity in social work due to its holistic approach and emphasis on sustainable reciprocal relationships. Reflexivity, consciousness raising and advocacy, and social action are the main activities moving beyond process to consider ideological and moral concerns. Ife contends, 'How dare people from the Global North go to the Global South to develop community!'

Critiques of international human services activity emerge in the literature. For example, Stubbs and Maglajlic (2012), focusing on post-war Yugoslavia, posit that international organisations frequently arrived without adequate prior knowledge of local culture or customs, often vied with each other for recognition and donor funding, and the services they provided were often focused on target groups based on the priorities of donors. Furthermore, they competed with local services that were already in place, making it more difficult for these services to develop and become self-sustaining. Among other concerns are those raised by Ochen (2012) who discusses interventions related to children following conflict in Uganda. He expresses the view that although most international organisations come in good faith, they are often unable to unify their organisation's guidelines and policies with local culture. He says that many organisations are fixated on short-term gains and measurable outputs at the expense of long-term improvements.

These brief examples exemplify how human services including social work have been co-opted by a concept of international development that sees global inequality arising from technological and cultural differences between nations rather than historic and contemporary structural inequalities. This approach, argues Deepak (2012), results in government donors and international organisations becoming disconnected from the pursuit of goals that tackle structural inequalities. Furthermore, donor countries that provide funds for the developing world ensure they are aligned with donor country's

interests. This is nowhere clearer than in our own country of Australia where one of the clearly articulated goals of Australia's aid is to serve Australia's national interests (AusAID, 2013).

Despite the limitations in practice, there is within social work increasing recognition that countries must develop education, organisation and practices of social work that are indigenous or locality specific (Lyons, Manion and Carlsen 2006). Social work can be viewed at two levels according to Banks (2012). First, she posits, it is an international social movement, sharing a global language and standards. At the second level, it is a professional practice rooted in a particular nation-state's cultural, legal and policy frameworks. Yet as Leela Gandhi (1998) argues, postcolonialism continues to render non-Western knowledge and culture as 'other' through privileging Western epistemology.

Social workers crossing borders

Social workers, their agencies and policies cross borders, and so do the problems and issues with which they are concerned (Hugman, 2013). Nonetheless, a move to a global focus is not without controversy. Some challenge social work's claim of 'universal authenticity' as imperialistic due to the context bound nature of social work education and practice (Hessle, 2004; Tsang and Yan, 2001). Notwithstanding 'commonalities in theory and practice across widely divergent contexts' (Gray and Fook, 2004: 262), Gray highlights the importance of locating international student learning within a social justice framework that she posits involves recognising and valuing differences and similarities. This requires 'valuing dialogical processes within local contexts that does not exclude honouring existing social work knowledge' (2005: 233).

Given the limitations what can the social work profession do to advance the quest for global justice through local education? According to Michael Fine (2007), Carol Gilligan's work on care and caring as a distinct set of moral principles that challenge impersonal standards that dominate public life, enables us to set a moral standard for an ethic of care. Social workers need to ask whether the ethic of care that relates to the wellbeing of *particular* others, family members, friends, clients, can be extended into an ethic of universal justice.

Social Work Without Borders

We turn now to contemplate the potential contribution of a global SWWB as one vehicle for responding to critiques and for advancing social work's still tentative moral foray into the international development field. We do so while recognising that the terminology of 'without borders' has been extensively critiqued as a movement towards a borderless world. Although this concept was never achieved it has nonetheless been overtaken by the forces of globalisation and economic transnationalism. Economic globalisation has the danger of homogenising not only ways of engaging with the market but in ways that diminish culture and context. The abolition of borders for the flow of global capitalism is in danger of producing a unified Western perspective contributing to Gandhi's (1998) analysis that postcolonialism is another name for the globalisation of cultures and histories. This is reinforced by policies enforced by international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation that are aimed at fostering global economic integration (Deepak, 2012).

To overcome tensions and contradictions our concept of 'without borders' is confined to serving as a rhetorical device to move social workers in the global North, from complacency, contextual constraint and the status quo of education and practice to contemplating a position as global citizens in their work. Although WBOs are diverse, because they are relatively well-known in the public domain they are an accessible concept for social workers to grasp. As an organisation located within a specific profession, potential exists for influencing curriculum and practice through a more development-aware sector.

Scoping study: Methods and findings

Many professions such as engineers, doctors, architects and even clowns, have formed Without Borders' organisations (WBOs). In order to ascertain the limitations and prospects of a SWWB group and to advance our preliminary ideas, a pilot study was conducted over an eight-month period from November 2012 to June 2013. The first stage was to identify social work activities conducted under the SWWB banner. The second stage involved an internet search of listings of WBOs to establish their roles and parameters. Although recognising its limitations, the most comprehensive listing was provided on

Wikipedia. A comparison was conducted of five of the larger organisations for doctors, engineers, teachers, architects and farmers. Data collection included information about these organisations readily available on the internet with data coded according to these categories. These categories were considered beneficial in informing the development of a SWWB organisation. Facets investigated included mission, values, structure, funding, and membership requirements, services and projects. Data that did not relate to these activities was excluded. A limitation of the study was the lack of consideration of how these organisations impacted on local sites.

Identification of SWWB activities to date

The initial review of print and online materials – searching for the term 'social work without borders' – in Phase One of the study produced limited results. It appears that, while the term 'social workers without borders' is used somewhat frequently, it is not in reference to a structured organisation. A blog for 'social work without borders' had a vision and mission in line with the definition of social work and the aims of the IFSW; however the links on the page did not work and it appears to have been non-operational since 2011. We were unable to identify the author of the page, while the structure of the organisation and the organisation's activities remained unclear.

The terminology of Social Work Without Borders is commonly used to denote experiences in the international sphere. An example of this is in an editorial for *New Global Development: Journal of Comparative and International Social Welfare (Journal of Comparative Social Welfare)*. The editor challenges international social workers to 'look beyond their careerist trappings', and suggests that the idea of Social Work Without Borders may be significant in combating this (Mohan, 2005). A further example is in the University of Toronto's *Reach* magazine in 2004, with the title Social Work Without Borders used for an issue featuring discussion of international social work undertaken by faculty members. Social Work Without Borders was used in the titles of papers and presentations with two examples including a presentation 'Social Work Without Borders: Place, Space and Pace: Their Influence on Research in Tanzania' and 'Social Workers without Borders: International Social Work in Action' about student, alumni and faculty member international social work experiences (Saint Louis University, 2012).

Existing 'Without Borders' organisations
We were unable in Phase Two of our study to locate literature that integrates the 'without borders' concept across professions. We do not see this as a deficit as each organisation has its own emphasis and mission. For example, Engineers Without Borders advocates the creation of systemic change through humanitarian engineering. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) offers humanitarian principles of medical ethics. Reporters Without Borders focuses on freedom of information and freedom of expression. Below we describe the work of WBOs as a starting point for social workers to begin dialogue on how such a group may look and what may be required for the idea of SWWB to become operational.

The initial concept of without borders organisations is believed to originate in France with Médecins Sans Frontières, founded in France in 1971 by a small group of French doctors following the Nigerian Civil War. Four of the five WBOs studied originated in France. Engineers Without Borders followed MSF in the 1980s and two decades later Architects Without Borders in 2007 and Farmers Without Borders in 2008. Farmers Without Borders appears to be a joint initiative between France and Britain. Teachers Without Borders originated in the United States in 2000. All of these organisations have international branches predominantly located in Western countries. All of the WBOs for doctors, engineers, architects, teachers and farmers provide practical assistance based on need, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict epidemics, natural disasters, poverty and exclusion. Development projects are conducted in partnership with local communities in Africa, America, Asia and Oceania, Europe and the Middle East.

All organisations provide education programmes to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged communities. Education serves local communities while at the same performing an educative function for students from each discipline. The priority however is to deliver a skilled workforce rather than source student fieldwork opportunities. All of the WBOs are reliant upon a skilled volunteer workforce committed to the organisational values. For instance MSF recruits 3,000 volunteers annually. These volunteers include doctors, surgeons, nurses, mental health specialists (including clinical mental health social workers), epidemiologists, pharmacists, logisticians (engineers,

architects, mechanics) and support/management staff. A minimum of two years' professional experience is required and a commitment to volunteer for nine months. Likewise, Engineers Without Borders generally require at least two years of professional experience with volunteers mostly engineers, architects and project managers. They must be aged over eighteen years and be available for at least twelve months. Members of Architects Without Borders include architects, interior designers, town planners, landscape architects and project managers.

Although Teachers Without Borders is mostly aimed at teachers, students, community leaders and anyone interested in education can join. Farmers Without Borders is also open to anyone committed to the organisation's values and who possess designated skill sets under a general membership category. Members are predominantly farmers and corporations. The mission and values are clearly stated for all five organisations with some more detailed than others. All are committed to impartiality and neutrality offering humanitarian assistance and developing sustainable projects in partnership with local populations in distress without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, beliefs or political affiliation. In addition to the stated organisational mission and principles, all WBO volunteers are required to abide by their own professional code of ethics.

In terms of structure and funding, these organisations seem to be run in two parts. The first is the international or global arm of the organisation, and the second are each of the national level branches of the organisation. These national branches appear to run somewhat independently from the international part in that they are often free to organise their own projects. The international arm is focused on the overall running of the organisation and is responsible for admitting new national branches and providing guidance, but it is sometimes unclear which part is responsible for running aspects of the organisation. By far the largest, Médecins Sans Frontières has an international Board of Directors chaired by the president of MSF International. An International General Assembly comprises two members from each of the twenty-three member associations. These associations are individual legal entities bound together by an agreement to the MSF charter and principles.

Volunteers are recruited annually through national offices. MSF also has a number of affiliated organisations.

The organisational structure of Engineers Without Borders and Architects Without Borders is similar to MSF. Engineers Without Borders has an International Board with forty member groups that function autonomously but are bound by the Engineers Without Borders by-laws with governance requirements clearly detailed in the constitution. Architects Without Borders has a General Assembly comprised of representatives of member organisations that oversee organisational governance. Five members are elected from the General Assembly to form a Council to administer and coordinate the work of the organisation including financial management and annual reporting. Teachers Without Borders and Farmers Without Borders appear to be administered and managed centrally and have country representatives rather than member organisations. Both are managed by International Boards of Directors and Advisory Boards. Farmers Without Borders works in partnership with an NGO, Women for Change and a registered charity, Victoria International Development Education Association (VIDEA).

Private donations are the main source of funding for all of these organisations apart from Teachers Without Borders, which raises funds through education fees for the provision of online courses and speaking tours. Other funding sources for all organisations include donations from private organisations and government grants.

Next steps
The scoping study yielded foundational information to foster international development studies and practice in social work. Surveying WBOs highlights the practical nature of their work and the importance of a skilled and committed volunteer workforce. The model could be a stepping stone from existing and restrictive social work field placements given that the emphasis of existing WBOs is to provide humanitarian assistance and work collaboratively with international communities to develop sustainable projects, with international education opportunities secondary to this. A number of key factors were identified for successful WBOs that could be applied to social work and are perhaps the first steps to be considered in the development of a social work

body. These include a clear articulation of values in the organisational mission, a statement of principles, developing and maintaining a focus on the practical emphasis of development work and the development of appropriate organisational structures to recruit and manage a skilled and committed volunteer workforce. Relationships with prospective partners such as NGOs, industry and other WBOs would strengthen a social work entity.

A number of principles that go to the heart of social work values also need to underpin the quest. The first is to ensure that from the outset a SWWB organisation is inclusive. In order to establish such a group the database of the International Federation of Social Workers could be a starting point, but we believe it is also important to reach out to social workers in countries that are not members of the IFSW. We particularly want to ensure representation from different regions of the world and to ensure that non-Western social workers have an equal place at all stages of the project's development and implementation. Second, there is the importance of acting collectively. We would hope to join with other organisations that social workers encounter in the international domain. It is important to avoid duplication by carving out a role for SWWB that enhances existing activities in social work and related professions. Third, we aim to make social work more visible in the public domain, including in transformative advocacy endeavours. As social work may have lost its way in the maze of contradictory and competing interests, a SWWB concept could be a unifying force for instilling global responsibility into the profession.

Although we have given attention to the practical elements of WBOs for social work, there is some urgency to move beyond pragmatics. A Social Work Without Borders organisation can bring together people who can call upon social work educators to approach international social work and practice from a paradigm that engages more robustly with global structural forces and enables students and the profession to make the connections between personal suffering and structural oppression on a global level (Deepak, 2012). This approach has the potential to incorporate social work's commitment to social justice into a global ethic of responsibility.

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