SOCIAL WORK VALUES AND PRINCIPLES: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN INTERVENTION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTHS IN DETENTION

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A project with children and juveniles in a detention centre confronts social work students with their own perceptions and experiences of being direct or indirect victims of crime, with their own values and with integrating the values and principles of social work. Within an ecological perspective, past and present issues in the country's context influence perceptions and personal values. The project challenges these perceptions and value systems. Feedback include that students realise they should not judge the young people; that these youngsters have dignity and worth in spite of where they come from and the crime they committed; that they deserve respect and should be accepted for who they are. The article discusses professional values and principles in social work and provides a case study of dealing with undergraduate social work students' fears, emotions and prejudices in teaching and integrating social work values and principles.

Keywords   social work; values; principles; teaching social work; awaiting trial youth; crime

Introduction

Introducing social work students to real life and to the expectations for social work intervention is often challenging. The field of social work is uncertain, complex and risky and social workers and social work students experience different emotions in dealing with practice (Ingram, 2013). Teaching generalist social work and integrating practice and theory require exposure to fields of social work practice such as family services, mental health, health, youth services, child welfare and the problems of ageing, as well as probation services and other criminal justice services.

Social work values and principles are easily identified and studied. Yet, adopting and integrating values such as acceptance, unconditional positive regard, respect, equity, self-determination, a non-judgemental approach/attitude, as well as the

practice of concepts such as confidentiality and objectivity, are much more difficult/problematic (Litvack *et al.*, 2010; Toseland & Rivas, 2012). Preparing students for working with offenders demands intensive preparation as well as confrontation with personal values and prejudices as opposed to the expected values for social work. The following remark by a social work student clearly illustrates the challenge of expecting students to work with offenders:

> Why should we as aspiring social workers help (these) people who have terrorised our communities for so long instead of helping the needy who deserve our help more?

Whether social workers should refrain from intervention with people who in some way have violated their rights is therefore a valid question within the scope of social work practice.

Personal values and professional values

Decisions made regarding the above are based on moral and ethical values (Zastrow, 2012). Because these values play such an important role, social work educational programmes should assist students in clarifying their own personal values (Corey & Corey, 2006; Walmsley & Birkbeck, 2006; Galambos, 2009; Phan *et al.*, 2009; Lee, 2011); in questioning and debating values and ethics (Allen-Meares, 2007; Ross, 2008); in developing values consistent with professional social work practice and social justice (Weaver & Congress, 2009; Osteen, 2011) and in analysing and evaluating in what way these values influence professional practice (Galambos, 2009; Toseland & Rivas, 2012; Zastrow, 2012). Social workers readily proclaim that they are bound by certain values, usually directly linked to their societal context (Wilson *et al.*, 2008; Hochfeld, 2010; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). This gives rise to the following important questions: Are there general values specifically linked to social work? Should the personal history and contexts of social workers be taken into account? Are the general values held in a society not applicable to social work?

The terms *values* and *principles* can be defined variously. Toseland and Rivas (2012) refer to values as beliefs that delineate preferences about how one ought to behave. Values shape thinking and direct the actions of social workers through practice principles (Corey, 2012). Principles guide the everyday practice of social work and are personal or professed rules of action that guide the obligations of right conduct. Miley *et al.* (2009) identify principles in social work as acceptance, individualisation, a non-judgemental approach, objectivity, self-determination and access to resources, confidentiality and accountability. Hepworth and Larsen (1986) in Allen-Meares (2007) articulate that all people should have access to resources; that every person is unique and has inherent worth; that people have a right to freedom and that individual citizens and society as a whole should realise these principles.

Inculcating social work values and facilitating a critical examination of the profession's values in micro, mezzo and macro intervention are the responsibilities of social work educators across the world (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010; Corey, 2012;

Zastrow, 2012). While reflecting on and promoting the values of the profession is of critical importance, this is not easy to achieve in everyday social work practice.

Teaching social work in practice

Professional values can be influenced by exposure to a practice setting in the field (Allen-Meares, 2007; Krumer-Nevo *et al.*, 2009; L i t v a c k *et al.*, 2010). Because social work clients are often members of oppressed, vulnerable and disempowered groups, teaching sensitivity to diversity and empowering social work students to be culturally competent are of the utmost importance (Corey & Corey, 2006; P h a n *et al.*, 2009; Masson *et al.*, 2012; Prinsloo, 2012). Furthermore, South Africa's history of *apartheid* has had detrimental effects on personal, social, economic and political development (Mamphiswana & Noyoo, 2000; H ¨o lscher, 2008). Since social work students enter the field of study from a specific context not only of racial discrimination, poverty and unemployment but also within the current South African context of a high crime rate, it is imperative to stimulate the process of critical reflection (Perry & Tate-Manning, 2006; K r u m e r - N e v o *et al.*, 2009). A diverse student population is exposed to equally diverse client groups in their social work practice. Cultural sensitivity and integration of social work values and principles are thus of the utmost importance.

Crime in South Africa

South Africa has alarmingly high rates of crime and the incidence of violent crime affects the majority of the population (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2009; Wardrop, 2009; Breetzke, 2010). South Africans feel less safe and more insecure than people in other developing countries; either having been victims of crime or fear of becoming victims, combined with daily reminders of incidences of crime by the media, contributes to feelings of traumatisation (Louw, 2007; Wardrop, 2009; MacRitchie & Leibowitz, 2010). People in South Africa are direct or indirect victims of crime (Scho¨nteich & Louw, 2011; Bezuidenhout, 2013) and social work students are no exception, illustrated by the following remark by a female social work student aged 22:

> I walked back from campus. Two boys approached me and held a knife to my throat. They demanded my cellular phone and my money. I had no choice. I am so scared.

A male social work student (24 years old) was hesitant to work in the prison in the event of recognising someone from his home village. Holborn and Eddy (2011) reiterate the effect of living in close proximity to criminal offenders. To expect social work students to work with perpetrators, especially if they have been victims of crime, is challenging. Generalist social work practice cannot exclude certain populations. Would that be true to the social work values and principles of acceptance and of being non-judgemental? A correctional setting is a direct confrontation with the social work values and principles. However, what if one expects students, not yet senior and experienced, to intervene when they are scared, judgemental and often not objective?

When lecturers introduce the project to second year students, they react with shock, surprise, enthusiasm, curiosity and refusal: 'How can I be expected to work with someone that violated my rights?'

An ecosystems perspective

Miley *et al.* (2009) encapsulate the ecosystems perspective as coherent with the value base of social work in that it allows social workers and their clients to not judge themselves as lacking or deficient but to see the situation within the context of a challenging fit of person and situation. The ecosystems perspective discovers how human behaviour and interaction respond to different environmental forces and develop accordingly (Santrock, 2006; Williams *et al.*, 2006). This applies to the students and the country context in that the history of South Africa and the current crime rate has influenced and still influences perceptions, attitudes and personal value systems. Within the system of social service delivery, an adjustment is, however, necessary to integrate the social work values and principles, regardless of personal and historical influences.

Background of the project

Correctional centres in South Africa are overcrowded (Breetzke, 2010; Scho¨nteich & Louw, 2011). In 2008, the author became aware of the large number of children and juveniles/youths awaiting trial in the specific centre. For the purposes of this research study, the term *child* refers to any person under the age of 18 years; although it can refer to a person who is 18 years or older but under the age of 21 years whose case is dealt with in terms of section 4(2) of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008. Detention includes confinement of a child prior to sentencing in a police cell or lock-up, prison or a child and youth centre (Child Justice Act 75 of 2008). Children and youth in detention imply persons from 14 to 20 years detained in the detention centre.

The suggestion that students could have a valuable practice setting in the correctional centre raised questions such as 'Can second year students work in the prison?' and 'How can we expect students who may have been victims of crime or even have incarcerated family members to work in a correctional setting?' Students' own experiences with crime were extremely relevant and required careful consideration.

The theoretical and practice modules in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme run concurrently. Theory modules in the first-year BSW curriculum include a general introduction to social work from a developmental perspective. Social work values and principles and vulnerable groups in society receive specific attention. Social work modules focus on the process and skills in intervention with individuals, groups and communities. A module on family strengths and family disorganisation includes crime and incarceration.

Practice modules in the BSW programme at this institution are year modules with study units on self-development and the integration of intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities. The first-year practice module guides students with a basic understanding and integration of sensitivity to diversity by using the social work values and principles and allows for simulated intervention experiences in intervention with individuals and groups.

In the second year of the BSW programme, theoretical modules include models of community work and advanced theoretical information on intervention with individuals, groups and families and specialised fields of gerontology, substance abuse and offender care in both social work and criminology, compulsory for the BSW programme. In the second-year practice module, social work students must apply acquired knowledge and skills in practice. The study unit for self-development focuses on sensitivity to diversity, social work principles, values and principles in professional as well as personal interactions, self-development through self-knowledge, self-insight, self-confidence and professional behaviour and the ability to internalise life skills in everyday functioning and in professional conduct. Themes guide students to confront own prejudices, enhance self-awareness and obtain knowledge of and exposure to diverse client populations. Students receive the opportunity to both gain and integrate knowledge in group supervision and discussion classes.

Lecturers thoroughly prepare students for the intervention in a correctional centre, accompany them on orientation and follow-up visits and debrief the students after the visits. Students reflect on the interventions through both structured and unstructured reports on experiences. Structured reports are assessed with standardised rubrics and lecturers address reflections in weekly discussion classes of 120 min each and in supervision. A continuous emphasis on integrating the theoretical underpinnings with the experiences in practice forms an integral part of the curriculum. When lecturers become aware of sensitive issues with regard to students' personal systemic contexts, the students are referred to the university's student support services in collaboration with the practice lecturer.

In 2008, students assessed the needs of children and juveniles awaiting trial in the detention centre. Prioritised needs were self-development, education, relationships and recreation. Students compiled a report and integrated data obtained from the questionnaires with theoretical references. In 2009, the students attended to the identified needs by presenting weekly activities on building self-esteem and relationships, building trust, stress management and anger management. The educational management at the centre requested that the project continue and be expanded to include more detainees. Since 2010, second year students annually continue with the project for the duration of the academic year, applying intervention with communities, intervention with groups and intervention with individuals.

Goal of the project

The main goal of the project is prevention of further crime focusing on self-development and improving social functioning. The strength perspective recognises that every client, and the youth awaiting trial in this case, has a capacity for growth and change (Miley *et al.*, 2009). Exposure to the correctional system in this way provides an ecological transaction between students and the offenders and their environment. Feedback from the centre management on the student involvement include that they observe a change in attitude and willingness to cooperate with the children who participated in the project and an improvement in well-being. This correlates with the developmental welfare approach where the individual is seen as someone with particular capacities whose challenges may be addressed through strengthening existing

skills (Lombard, 2007; H ¨o lscher, 2008; Patel *et al.*, 2012). Capacity building is an important aspect of the approach.

Lombard and Wairire (2010, p. 100) define developmental social work as 'an integrated, holistic approach to social work which recognises and responds to the interconnections between the person and the environment; links micro and macro practice and utilises strength-based and non-discriminatory models, approaches and interventions, and partnerships'. The project provides an excellent opportunity for the integration of theory, working from a strength perspective and using the developmental welfare approach.

Goal and objectives of the research

The goal of the research study was to explore students' experiences of social work values and principles in intervention with children and youth in detention. The objectives for the research were to contextualise generalist social work values and principles in intervention with offenders; explore the personal experiences of second year social work students in their intervention with children and youth in detention and formulate themes from the research results in order to make recommendations with regard to selecting practice settings for social work students.

Research question

The qualitative nature of the research necessitated a central question and sub-questions associated with the central question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Creswell, 2009). The question exploring the central phenomenon of the study was what is the experience of social work students of values and principles in intervention with children and youth in detention? The sub-questions associated with the central question focused on how the intervention with children and youth in detention contributes to the integration of social work values and principles and how the intervention assists students to reflect upon their own values compared to generalist social work values.

Research methodology

The research study focused on the experience of social work values and principles that the participants (the second year social work students) had in their intervention with the children and youth in detention, characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). An exploratory qualitative research design was used as it is flexible and open-ended and evolves over the course of the project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Applied research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) intends to address issues with immediate relevance, and in the case of this research study, the curriculum for the integration of theory and practice for social work at the university was informed in terms of future practice placement settings for students.

Permission to conduct research with students at the university was given by the Dean of Students and the Registrar of the University. The Research Ethics Committee of the faculty provided ethical clearance.

Research design

The primary research design was the collective case study to make comparisons and to suggest generalisations (Babbie, 2011) and was useful for investigating how the students changed over time, due to certain circumstances or interventions (Rubin & Babbie, 2001; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The second year social work students formed the collective case and their exposure to children and youth in detention was the intervention. The meaning that they attached to the exposure with regard to the integration of social work values and principles formed the data from which comparisons and suggested generalisations were made.

Research population

The population for the study was BSW students in their third year of study, 1 year after their exposure to the correctional setting. In the South African context, these students are in the age group of 20−25 years, thus in early adulthood. The group was diverse and included both male and female students from different cultural and ethnic groups. No sample was drawn as the whole group was approached to participate to explore the experiences of all of the students, and not only of students that reported a positive experience. Students had a choice to participate voluntarily or not to be involved. Twenty-two students, 4 males and 18 females, volunteered to participate and signed letters of informed consent.

Data collection

Because qualitative research relies on text (Creswell, 2009), participants wrote an essay of 500 words on their experience of social work values and principles in their intervention with the children and youths in detention. Essays were submitted anonymously and were used as personal documents to collect data. The advantage was that participants could consider their responses and pay attention to their language (Creswell, 2009). Information obtained from the documents was primary material and provided valuable personal meanings, contributing to the reliability of the research data (Babbie, 2011).

Research participants had the right to privacy and knew that their data would be kept confidential (Creswell, 2009). The author did not expect participants to write their names on their essays and was not interested in 'who writes what', but focused on the content of all the documents as synthesised in general themes.

Data analysis

Since this was a qualitative research study, inductive data analysis was used by building patterns, categories and comprehensive themes (Creswell, 2009). The data analysis involved open-ended data. Content analysis included a systematic process to quantify the frequency of elements or words in documents. Words in the documents were transformed into a quantitative and systematic form (Babbie, 2011). The author searched for the concepts (social work values and principles) taught in both the first- and second-year BSW programme in the documents written by the students. In reading the data, specific themes were sought, then analysed and then checked and compared with the literature on the subject. Codes were based on experiences of students as well

as literature on social work values and principles. Textual analysis added value when the meaning of the document content was interpreted.

Social work research should never physically or psychologically injure, embarrass or endanger participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2001; L e e d y & O r m r o d , 2005; Creswell, 2009). Participants were aware of the possible discomfort that may arise and that debriefing would follow immediately after their participation. Harm to participants was limited.

Results and discussion

The research data are presented according to three main themes. First, the initial reactions of students when they were informed that they would do their social work in practice intervention in a correctional setting are discussed. Second, the exposure to and experience of working in the correctional setting receive attention and third, the reflective feedback after completing the intervention is integrated within the context of social work values and principles.

Main theme: initial reactions

Students were scared.   As discussed earlier, the crime rate in the country is high and a large number of people are victims of crime. Citizens do not feel safe (Louw, 2007) and being victims of crime and daily reminders of incidences of crime by the media contribute to feelings of traumatisation (Wardrop, 2009; MacRitchie & Leibowitz, 2010). Zastrow (2012, p. 45) refers to the ecological approach that conceptualises 'dysfunctional transactions between people and their social and physical environments'. Social work students are not exempted from falling victim to crime and are very aware of the incidence of criminal activity and subsequent detainment. Their social and physical contexts have daily incidents of crime, even if only through media reports on incidences.

> I was scared to death because when I heard prison, I thought criminals, crime, murder, sexual abuse and more. There is a stigma attached to criminals, that they are always bad and always heartless. . . . and what if we go there and they hurt us.

A male student was honest about his feelings as a young male social work student who had to work in a correctional centre for males.

> . . . quitting the programme of BSocial Work was not far from my thoughts . . . In addition, the prospect of being a guy and being left in prison mistakenly was a feeling that gave me sleepless nights.

Nobody could expect the students to feel at ease and not be scared. Feelings were real and concrete. Rohleder *et al.* (2006) provide feedback on their experiences while doing community service as newly qualified psychologists and attest to feelings of fear and anxiety. Ingram (2013) and Rohleder *et al.* (2006) propose that emotions of counsellors and social workers, and in this case social work students, be expressed and acknowledged. The emotions will have a direct influence on confidence to approach the

offenders and necessitate supervision, debriefing and guidance. The emotional student responses were concrete and had to be recognised and acknowledged.

Students were uncertain. Another initial reaction to the information about their intervention in a correctional centre was one of uncertainty. The media often portray prisons as settings with gang activities and violence. The possibility of recognising a perpetrator in the correctional centre is a reality. Students are aware that correctional centres are overcrowded and that they have detainees who committed a range of crimes from rape and murder to petty thefts. In spite of preparation sessions prior to going to the centre, students still felt uncertain.

> I prepared myself mentally but I was still a bit uncertain of what to expect, because how should I approach the criminals, should I look them straight in the eyes, should I talk to them or just ignore them.

> (I felt) …uncertain of what to expect …relatively excited. … nervous and anxious. …nerves were high … nobody knew what to expect.

Students were judgemental. Crime is a reality; falling victim to crime is a possibility; correctional centres are overcrowded and filled with perpetrators. Judgement comes easy. Hearing people say that the death sentence should be re-introduced to make people pay for what they do to others is common. When students hear that they have to work with offenders, one of the immediate reactions is to judge, even if they learn in their BSW programme that they are not supposed to do so. Miley *et al.* (2009) emphasise that social workers judge what people do but not who they are. In the case of the project involving awaiting trial detainees, students initially judge both the detainees as human beings as well as what they did.

> Because even though we are not allowed to be judgemental, it is believed to be and was the student's perception that people in prisons and detention centres have ultimately committed the crimes. I thought that they deserved to be there.

> It was not easy for me to feel pain for them… they should face the consequences of their action. I saw people in the prison as bad people who do bad things that harm good people … (they) must be treated badly the way they have treated other people. They don't have dignity because of their behaviour.

> They must be exposed so that people can know what bad persons they are. Their voice must never be heard because they are bad people who deserve to rot in hell, who don't deserve to be in this democratic world because people are afraid of them. My preconceived ideas about criminals rushed to the fore and I was expecting violent and rebellious individuals.

Students were shocked. Offenders and specifically sex offenders may be regarded with fear and disgust (MacRitchie & Leibowitz, 2010; Olver & Barlow, 2010), often

aggravated by the sensational media portrayal of offending, prisons and victims (Scott *et al.*, 2006; Varma, 2006). Scott *et al.* (2006) also mention attitudes about race as a factor that contributes to fear of youth offenders. The profile of the young detainees in the specific centre includes sexual offences, violent crimes and minor crimes.

> When we were first told … that we will visit the prison, I felt as if they were telling me that I was pregnant with twins in my first year at the university. I thought to myself, why lecturers would want to give us to these criminals.

> When I first heard about the community work that we have to do with awaiting trial detainees, I was shocked and I felt like this is the end.

Main theme: exposure and experience

Students understood and accepted the children and youth as unique human beings. Populations served by social workers cut across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Social workers need a depth of knowledge and skills to intervene with sensitivity (Carter-Black, 2007). Cultural competence and a practical familiarity are of the utmost importance to maintain high standards in service delivery (Corey & Corey, 2006; Allen-Meares, 2007; Carter-Black, 2007; Lee, 2011). Social workers with a culturally sensitive approach value clients' uniqueness (Miley *et al.*, 2009; Corey, 2012). Acceptance of and respect for this uniqueness are necessary for competence (Toseland & Rivas, 2012).

> No matter what I do I can never know exactly how they must be feeling or how they think, but the least I can do is always believe in their potential, and see them as human beings with emotions and behaviour and needs.

> It does not matter what a person has done, we (social workers) are there to try to understand and guide them towards a process of growth and healing. I found that many of the prisoners were largely products of bad life experiences and they often feel like there's no alternative to their life at present. Everyone has a story: all behaviour has factors which motivate it.

Krumer-Nevo *et al.* (2009) emphasise the necessity within social work education to stimulate critical thinking about the consequences of poverty on people's decisions and life choices. Students should be aware of their own contexts that may be privileged or not always privileged, and how these contexts influence attitudes towards the people that they work with.

> After spending a few more minutes in prison … I became more relaxed … It was such a real and peaceful moment for me because I realized that they are human too.

Students became non-judgemental. Social workers should not apply their own values in culturally competent practice. They should appreciate unique circumstances that

may provoke judgement and accept that their own value system would not apply to the context of others (Miley *et al.*, 2009). Acceptance becomes visible when the social worker affirms that a person has the right to have and express his or her own feelings and values (Corey & Corey, 2006).

> The student became non-judgemental towards the juveniles ... Being non-judgemental helped because they were free to communicate with the students. The student was attentive ... as the youth was worthy to be understood with a non-judgemental attitude.

Miley *et al.* (2009) postulate that social workers express unconditional positive regard and warmth and by doing so, clients respond to them. The students clearly became aware that when they treated their clients with respect and accepted them for who they are, without judging them, the clients felt free to open up to the contact. Students also realised the impact and necessity of both having a value system and applying the values in their interaction with social work clients.

> Values provided me with a foundation to deal with people ... that being non-judgemental ... lead me to a way of giving them a chance to speak out how they feel. I realised that as an aspiring social worker I was bound by social work values and principles such as having a non-judgemental attitude to our clients irrespective of their background.

> Going into the prison with a total non-judgemental attitude was very important. No matter what they did, or where they were, we are still equal.

The responses from students confirm the change in attitude from judging that all people who committed crime are bad people who deserve to be punished to accepting them as unique individuals who made wrong choices. Moreover, they became aware of the detainees' personal strengths and resources as well as the strengths and resources in the social systems of the young detainees (McNeill, 2012). Poverty, HIV and AIDS, droughts and violence challenge South African families (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007). Yet, survival is possible through family strengths such as resilience, having social capital and indigenous knowledge. The spirit of Ubuntu (humanity) emphasises empathy, sharing and cooperation in an effort to resolve common problems. Students became mindful of these strengths and resources in the offenders' social systems. Regardless of the exposure, directly or indirectly, to crime, students realised their responsibility to integrate a non-judgemental attitude in their professional growth as social workers.

Main theme: 'We believe in you'

Students became aware of clients' capacity to grow and change. Differences between people, in this case between social work students and awaiting trial detainees, may pose a challenge to the ability of the students to show acceptance and to emphasise the client's right to independent thinking (Miley *et al.*, 2009). Core values of the social work profession are that individuals have the right to be different from others and have the ability to grow and address their own problems in their own way (Wilson *et al.*,

2008; Galambos, 2009). Students received a real-life experience of the developmental welfare approach with the focus on existing skills and capacity building (Lombard *et al.*, 2012), explicit in the following verbatim responses:

> I believe that everyone is entitled to a second chance, because everyone makes mistakes and each one of us has the ability to change. Thus this experience changed my perception completely. Seeing the desire and longing of my client and many others to change their ways and get out of jail, I was faced with the reality of the value which states that everyone has the capacity to grow and change.

> This made the student realise that if one wants to work with people you truly have to believe that people have capacity, this includes making their own decisions and the ability to change. The student has grown through realising that people are important, no matter their status, characteristics and situation they should be treated with dignity, worth and respect. People have the potential to grow, change and develop when they are helped.

The developmental welfare approach and working from a strengths perspective regard the individual as someone with particular capacities whose challenges may be addressed through strengthening existing skills (Lombard, 2007; H ̈o lscher, 2008; Patel *et al.*, 2012). Capacity building is an important aspect of the approach (Miley *et al.*, 2009). Intervention with the youth awaiting trial provided the students with an opportunity to experience and integrate the value into a concrete belief in the detainees' capacity to grow and change, in contrast with the initial reactions of fear, anxiety and judgement.

Value of youth awaiting trial project

Social work programmes theoretically teach students about values, norms and principles and include study themes for self-development. The project discussed in this article provides students with the opportunity to experience the confrontation with a challenging scenario, namely a correctional facility in a country with a high crime rate. Reflecting on own value systems and integrating social work values and principles lead to words such as non-discrimination, being non-judgemental, unconditional acceptance, respect and viewing every individual as a unique human being transformed from theoretical words to reality.

> I had a great and a challenging experience using the Social Work values and principles because they helped me discover my inner strength and weaknesses and also to be aware of my own feelings, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, values and principles so that I don't inject them to my clients.

> The experience I got from doing practical work in the prison opened my eyes to the meaning of these words. I learned how to be non-judgemental, how to treat people of whom I had predetermined ideas, as normal people and human beings. I learned how to accept a person unconditionally, not the act he has committed, but him as a human being. All these principles became a reality to me the moment I got

the chance to put the theory into practice, the moment we walked into the prison and got in contact with the detainees.

Conclusion

Challenging situations are embedded in the field of social work practice and upholding the core values and principles of social work is not always easy. Research conducted by Osteen (2011) confirms social work students' experience of incongruity between their own values and the values of the social work profession. Exposure to and experience of challenging situations as discussed in this article, with guidance by social work teachers, can assist social work students to integrate professional values.

Feedback includes that the children and youth awaiting trial gain hope and realise that they have better futures ahead with improved self-esteem. They realise that contrary to the belief in the streets that *Crime pays*, it does not. The project provides the opportunity for students to integrate theoretical knowledge on intervention with communities, groups and individuals. Most importantly, students become aware that every human being has potential, and not only needs to be individualised, respected, accepted and not judged, but to be assisted in believing in their own strengths and to grow according to their potential.

Although students are confronted with the harsh reality of crime, offenders and correctional centres, the engagement in the specific setting, with continuous guidance and reflection, provides an excellent opportunity for teaching values and principles for real life.

> The experience was worth more than words can say, as the professional growth experienced through working with real life human beings, and being able to incorporate that what we've learned, can never be replaced with any theory!

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