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Internationalising Social Work Education
The South African Experience

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The South African experience in internationalising of social work education is contextualised within the broader African perspective. At its inception, social work was primarily a white profession and developed according racial lines. The White paper for Social Welfare (1997) marked a turning point in the racially divided Apartheid welfare system by adopting a developmental social welfare policy for South Africa. The BSW programme was transformed accordingly by developing minimum standards for social work education and training. However, these did not sufficiently bridge the gap in minimum standards for field placement practice training and hence the development of professional standards for social work are ongoing. Lessons for internationalising social work education from the South African experience is embedded in a regulated profession; programme accreditation within a developmental approach; active engagement of schools of social work on a national, regional and international level, and continuous learning for professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

The South African experience in internationalising of social work education is contextualised within the broader African perspective. Africans have been sidelined by colonialism with the implication that their welfare was made subordinate to that of colonialists, resulting in African knowledge and skills being seen as inferior and consequently neglected (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo, 2008: 204). Social work education under colonialisation has been infiltrated by Western models (Oswei-Hwedie and Rankopo, 2012). Along with African social workers, social work educators "need to reclaim their profession, make it African-centered, embrace the diversity of the continent, and work together to revolutionize the profession in order for it

to be an integral part of African life" (Kreitzer, 2012: 189). This requires, "to critically think through their social work education and practice and to turn the critical dialogue into action concerning social work in Africa" (Kreitzer, 2012: 189). Social work educators in South Africa have made progress in developing cultural relevant education and are committed to promote social work in Africa and create opportunities for knowledge and skills transfer within and to the rest of the world. South Africa, as is the case with other countries in Africa, is host to many international social work students, especially in relation to academic service learning in South African communities. It contributes to an international learning environment from which social work students in South Africa benefit from.

All sixteen schools of social work in South Africa are members of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI), the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA), and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). South African educators play a leading role in ASSWA and in hosting international ASSWA conferences in South Africa. Furthermore, South African educators are also active in international social work education as board members and in providing leadership in global activities such as the development of global standards for social work education, adopted by IASSW in 2004; the social work definition adopted by IASSW and IFSW in 2014, and the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012).

Social work education in South Africa is regulated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), which is a statutory body constituted by the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978. Social workers have to register at the SACSSP to practice social work. The social work profession and the term 'registered social work' is protected by law since 1965 (McKendrick, 1987). The SACSSP serves as an umbrella body for the various categories of personnel in the welfare field and makes provision for the Professional Body for Social Work (PBSW). The requirement for a social worker to register with the SACSSP is a four-year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) qualification. Social work students have to register from their second year level at the SACSSP as student social workers in order to engage in social work practice training.

In this paper, the scene of social work education will be described against a brief historical background of social work education in South Africa. The focus will then shift to the adoption of the developmental social welfare policy that paved the way for transforming social work education and

developing minimum standards for social work education. The purpose of the BSW qualification and its exit-level outcomes will next be discussed, indicating that it provides the framework for internationalisation of social work education. Subsequently, the implications of a lack of minimum standards for field placements will be discussed in relation to the challenges it poses for quality assurance of social work education. The final section before a conclusion is drawn, presents some lessons learnt from the South African experience on international social work education.

HISTORY AND TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The social work profession originated from a concern about white poverty which culminated in an investigation by the Carnegie Commission into the 'poor white problem', resulting in a National Conference on Social work in 1936, which endorsed a social science-based, generic three-year training at university for social workers (McKendrick, 1987). At its inception, social work was primarily a white profession with a few universities admitting students of all races. By 1936 the direction for social Work education was determined; training would focus on social sciences; generic social work; both theory and field instruction; and social casework with an emphasis on restoration and rehabilitation (McKendrick, 1987). In 1987 the period of basic social work training for a Bachelor degree was extended to four years, defining it as a 'professional degree' and implying that it incorporates a honours degree status that would give immediate access to a master's degree in Social Work.

In 1959 through the Extension of University Education Act, the then National Party government created separate universities along racial lines (McKendrick, 1987). This had a devastating impact on South African society and in particular social work as the Act "provided for separate university education for African, coloured and Indian people and placed restrictions on the admission of students other than the few previously non-racial universities" (McKendrick, 1987: 184). This segregation was based on two principles: "they would provide separate but equal standards of education, and the nature of the education would take into account the customs, values, norms and traditions of the various groups" (McKendrick, 1987: 184). However, this did not happen and contributed to a deep divided social work profession and social work education with unequal standards. Although this dramatically increased the number of social workers in the country, especially black social workers (Sewpaul

and Lombard, 2004), these training institutions were situated in rural areas and lacked resources and capacity. Determining minimum social work standards would inevitably become an on-going priority in a post-Apartheid era.

Various attempts were made over the past decades to promote minimum standards for social work education. In 1937–1939 the first State Department of Social Welfare attempted minimum standards; however, there was diversity in the length of training programmes, and curriculum content. In 1938, a voluntary body, the *South African Inter-University Committee for Social Studies*, was established with the intent to encourage higher training standards. This body continued to operate until the 1960s when it was re-formed to the *Joint Universities Committee on Social Work*, now known as the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI). In 1965 a new National Welfare Act came into effect, with the potential to influence the nature and quality of social work education in two ways: social workers had to register in terms of the Act and the title 'registered social worker' became protected; making it the first legislative effort to prescribe to training institutions a core curriculum for the Bachelor degrees (McKendrick, 1987). A study by Muller in the mid-1960s found that standards compared favourably with social work training in Britain and the Netherlands (McKendrick, 1987). This posed a serious question for the relevance of social work in South Africa.

The common element for people to alter their present circumstances is democracy (George, 2010: 16). Given the political history of the country, it was inevitable that the South African democracy that came into effect in 1994 would have a huge impact on transforming the deeply racially divided social work profession. The White paper for Social Welfare (1997), which is aligned with the declaration of the United Nations World Summit for Social Development adopted in Copenhagen in 1995, marked a turning point in the history of social welfare service provision and paved the way to bring social work in alignment with national and international goals and thus positioning social work as a relevant role player within a democratic society in South Africa (Lombard, 2008). South Africa's developmental approach to social welfare evolved from the country's unique history of inequality and the violation of human rights as a result of colonialism and apartheid (Patel, 2005). The cornerstone and the premise for all policies and legislation in the South African democracy are entrenched in the Bill of Rights of the South African constitution, 1996, which enshrines the rights of all people in the country and affirms the democratic values of human

dignity, equality and freedom (Lombard, 2008). The developmental social welfare policy is thus firmly rooted in a rights-based approach to social development. In a first attempt to unite the social work profession, social work educators, practitioners and organisations acknowledged that they have failed citizens in upholding social justice and human rights (Lombard, 2005), and joined the welfare sector in acknowledging this omission in a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) in 1998 (Patel, 2005; Lombard, 2000).

Social work education and practice had to transform in response to the transition to a developmental welfare approach in South Africa (Gray and Lombard, 2008). Although there were a number of universities that reoriented their courses towards non-discriminatory social work, this change could only be enacted through social policy (McKendrick, 1987). The White Paper included strategic directions for transformation of social work education, but specific guidelines were needed to effect changes in social work education. (Lombard, 2003). Higher education reforms had a profound effect on social work education (Gray and Lombard, 2008). The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (1995) and its Regulations (RSA, 1998:17) made provision for the establishment of Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) to develop standards and qualifications. A Standard Generating Body (SGB) for social work, consisting of various stakeholders in the social welfare sector, was established in 2001 to develop standards and qualifications for social work. Through the SGB, social work education embarked on the transformation journey to meet the challenge of positioning social work education within a democratic, developing society (Lombard, 2003). The outcome of this process was a similar named qualification for the undergraduate social work programme in South Africa, namely Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), and the development of 27 exit level outcomes (ELOs) with their associated assessment criteria which were adopted by the SACSSP as minimum standards for social work education.

EXIT LEVEL OUTCOMES AS MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE BSW PROGRAMME

The South African Qualifications Authority Act 58 of 1995, replaced by the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008, established the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to register minimum credit requirements for qualifications, accompanied by a supporting quality assurance system (Lombard, Grobbelaar and Pruis, 2003). BSW qualification registered on

the NQF in 2003 was the first social work qualification in South Africa based on minimum standards, and became compulsory for implementation by all social work education institutions in 2007. The standards have to be reviewed every three years for re-registration on the NQF.

The 27 exit-level outcomes of the BSW qualification reflect minimum standards and are embedded in the overarching values that guide social work education and training, namely, social justice and respect for all people (Sewpaul and Lombard, 2004). The BSW qualification was designed to produce social work students who understand the impact of the political and socio-economic context on social welfare and social work, and who consequently wish to approach poverty and inequality by tackling their structural causes and by linking micro practice within macro responses (Gray and Lombard, 2008).

The BSW programme constitutes fundamental, core and elective modules. The latter can be taken from Humanities and Social Sciences, Economics, Law, Health Sciences, Agricultural/ Environmental Studies or Arts. The wide spectrum of elective credits opened up the opportunity for social work students to train across a wide spectrum of contexts, including local, national and global. The broad focus of the electives and the rationale of the core focus of the BSW qualification's purpose, indicates its alignment with the Global Standards of Social Work Education (IASSW, 2004). The BSW qualification was designed within a development paradigm to equip students with:

- skills to challenge structural sources of poverty, inequality, oppression, discrimination and exclusion;
- knowledge and understanding of human behaviour and social systems and the skills to intervene at the points where people interact with their environments in order to promote social well-being;
- the ability and competence to assist and empower individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to enhance their social functioning and their problem-solving capacities;
- the ability to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the functioning of individuals, families, groups and communities by enabling them to accomplish tasks, prevent and alleviate distress and use resources effectively;

- an understanding of and the ability to demonstrate social work values and the principles of human rights and social justice while interacting with and assisting the range of human diversity;

- the understanding and ability to provide social work services towards protecting people who are vulnerable, at-risk and unable to protect themselves;

- knowledge and understanding of both the South African and the global welfare context and the ability to implement the social development approach in social work services;

- an understanding of the major social needs, issues, policies and legislation in the South African social welfare context and the social worker's role and contribution; and

- the skills to work effectively within teams, including social work teams, multi- and inter-disciplinary teams, and multi-sectoral teams (cf. Social Work SAQA Registration, SACSSP).

The underpinning focus of the BSW qualification on human rights, social justice and addressing social issues by targeting the vulnerable and the poor within a micro-macro national and global welfare context, creates a framework for internationalisation of social work education and a platform to collectively engage in a global agenda to promote and develop social work. Within this focus both social work educators and practitioners need to modify and redefine their theory and knowledge base to redress social injustice, poverty and racism (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo, 2008). Midgley (2010) adds that social work education should in particular emphasise training in theoretical models for emancipatory, transformational and social structural practice. Furthermore, training should prepare students for advocacy practice which is currently re-emerging as a force in both education and practice (Haynes, 2012); for their social change role in social, economic and environmental development; in dealing with conflict, violence and peace and the empowerment and liberation of groups who are excluded (Lombard, 2014).

Based, however, on the premise that internationalising social work education depends on understanding and responding to global social issues on a local and national level, social work education in South Africa faces serious challenges in relation to field placements of students for social work practice. Midgley and Conley (2010) allude that many social workers are involved in various development activities for which they have received little if any training. The point of departure for developmental social work

is to be relevant and context specific. That requires a conducive practice learning environment, and hence relevant field placements and supervisors to guide student social workers' professional development. The ELOs are directive, but lack specific minimum standards for student field placements with regard to matters such as the supervisor-student ratio, the nature and selection of placements, and the criteria and role of supervisors within the University versus the field placement agency. Huge discrepancies among universities impact on the quality of BSW graduates, which also have implications for these students' preparation for international social work education and practice.

CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

The following challenges that South Africa faces within its local and national contexts are relevant for regional and global contexts, and therefore important for the purposes of internationalising social work education.

Quality Assurance

Quality in social work education is determined by minimum standards that apply both in the classroom and in the field placement agency. The visionary words of Khinduka (1987), cited in McKendrick, 1987: 190), aptly reflect the importance of quality in social work education: "Perhaps the central issue for social work education in the 1980s and beyond is one of quality".

In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) makes provision for quality assurance bodies to monitor the implementation of the BSW qualifications' minimum standards, in collaboration with professional bodies such as the SACSSP. While waiting for the quality assurance process of the BSW to commence, universities undertook a voluntary internal audit by benchmarking their curricula with the minimum standards of the registered BSW programme.

Quality in social work education is determined by minimum standards that apply in the classroom and in field placements. The BSW qualification stipulates that fieldwork placements should occur throughout the learning programme in a variety of settings, ranging from observation and laboratory sessions to actual service delivery within a social service agency. How this is implemented in practice, however, differs hugely among the 16 social work education institutions, which raise serious concerns for quality

assurance and for the level and readiness for practice of entry-level social workers. This will also impact on placements of students in exchange programmes for international social work practice experience.

An attempt of the SACCSP in 2012 to do a quality assurance exercise of the implementation of the 27 ELOs across universities has been unsuccessful due to poor planning and implementation. In 2012 and 2013 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) undertook a review of the BSW qualification for purposes of programme accreditation. This was the first ever review for purposes of accreditation of the BSW programme that would give a clear standing on the quality of social work programmes and training in South Africa. The reports were released in 2014 and very few programmes got full accreditation. There were many reasons for some who only received conditional accreditation, which have nothing to do with the quality of the social work programme per se, but with criteria such as the employment equity profile of the staff component. Although the student social work profile in South Africa is fully transformed and reflective of the South African population, some training institutions are still challenged to correct the staff profile. The review has pointed out that South African training institutions are still battling with unequal standards and has to continue improving in this regard. The CHE accreditation process includes submitting improvement plans to the CHE. In addition, the CHE has, in collaboration with mainly social work educators, initiated a process to develop professional standards for social work, which will soon be released to broader social work constituency for consultation purposes. In addition, the SACSSP has embarked on writing standards for registration.

Minimum Standards for Social Work Practice and Field Placements

An analysis done by a task group of ASASWEI and the SACSSP based on data of eight universities clearly showed that minimum practice standards for practice training and field placements should be developed in relation to the following areas (cf. Lombard, Pruis and Harrison, 2010):

Lecturer–student Ratio

Having a lecturer–student norm is of critical importance to determine the number of students a school of social work can take in relation to their existing resources. In the absence of a norm, universities' intake numbers are influenced by the need for more social workers in South Africa in view

of social work being declared by government as a scarce skill; scholarships provided by government with a minimum entry level of 50 percent average in final year school performance; no or limited selection criteria; and financial implications for universities if student numbers decrease. This has serious implications for the quality of the programme and training; not only in relation to providing efficient supervision to the masses of students, but also in finding suitable field placements. Low entry-level requirements for a scholarship in social work provides a gateway to an university qualification irrespective of the students' motivation to become a social worker.

Selection of Field Placement Organisations

Field placements are frequently selected based on availability, convenience and accessibility, rather than on providing an enabling environment to meet the minimum requirements of the BSW qualification. Field placements for social work practice training should have an onsite supervisor to supervise the daily practice of social work students; office space and/or infrastructure, and the minimum administrative support. Furthermore, social work practice should reflect developmental intervention approaches, strategies and service delivery in order to meet the purpose and outcomes of the BSW qualification. This includes providing opportunities to speak out on social injustices and violation of human rights, and implementing anti-oppressive, reflective, strength-based and empowering intervention strategies.

Standards for social work practice should include minimum requirements for validation and accreditation of a field placement site; formal or informal signing of a memorandum of understanding between the education institutions and the field placement agencies; and a partnership based on clear guidelines with regard to roles and responsibilities of university-based coordinators and/or supervisors versus field placement agency-based coordinators and supervisors. Currently, in South Africa, selection of field placement sites ranges from being the responsibility of the students themselves, to being that of a practice education committee (combined effort by the university and practice supervisors), or of a university-based or agency-based practice coordinator.

Nature of Practical Work

The programme should stipulate a minimum exposure to practice and delivery modes to provide a mix and balance of practice experiences across year levels with regard to:

- laboratory programmes,versus field placements;
- engaging in voluntary programmes;
- observation, versus active engagement in practice environments;
- social work methods (should minimum exposure be prescribed, for example, work with individuals, groups, families and communities across year levels?); and
- generalised versus specialised social work field placements (for example, field placements in school and hospital settings deprive students of court work experience).

Selection of Practice Supervisors and Assessors

The Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 and the BSW qualification stipulate that student social workers have to be supervised by registered social workers. Supervisors can be situated in universities and/or in field placements. Even when a training institution provides the supervision of field placements, the field placement site should also have a registered social worker onsite. Due to the shortage of social workers, not all training institutions select field placement sites with registered social workers, as noted above. In some instances fourth year students were expected to supervise first year students while they themselves feel uncertain of how to provide guidance (Earle, 2008).

It is therefore important to have standards with regard to supervisors' location (university- versus practice agency-based); their academic qualifications; years of practice experience; years of experience in supervising and training of students; their own continuous training to keep them updated on theory, models and approaches that the students are expected to know and apply in practice; and their role in mentoring and tutoring students.

There should be clarity on practice supervisors' role in assessment and what criteria apply. If assessment is done by both the university and the agency, should they both engage in the formative and summative assessment (for example, with regard to monitoring and evaluating work in progress and final evaluation in an oral examination of practice work), or should the university take the sole responsibility? What minimum qualifications and experience in assessment are required, and who is responsible for continuing professional development of supervisors in practice?

Available Infrastructure for Student Placements

Field placement agencies differ with regard to providing students with office space, transport and stipends, which raises the importance of having minimum standards in these areas.

Integration with Other Category Workers in Social Service Delivery

In strengthening the capacity of social workers in South Africa, the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) stipulated the appointment of other categories of social service personnel in South Africa, especially in light of an "over reliance on professional social workers" (RSA, 1997: 32). These include social auxiliary workers, child- and youth-care workers, community development practitioners, and youth workers. Social auxiliary workers, who work under the supervision of social workers, have been in place in South Africa for many years. Their two-year training programme is work-based and they register with the SACSSP from the onset. Social work students have to be effectively prepared to work along these category workers in the social welfare sector; whilst at the same time protecting the scope of practice for social workers.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM SOUTH AFRICA IN PROMOTING THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Regulation of social work as a profession promotes social work education in many ways; it protects the title 'registered social worker'; it requires minimum standards for social work education and professional registration; and regulates professional conduct of social workers and student social workers. Furthermore, professional recognition positions social work as an important role-player in social development. This recognition, however, should be supported by a political mandate and directed by a specific social welfare policy that is, in the case of South Africa, embedded in the developmental approach (Lombard and Wairire, 2010).

Programme accreditation at an education body such as the Council for Higher Education, ensures quality social work education and training programmes. However, professional standards that regulate practice are critical for effective social work practice.

A well-organised and recognised association for schools of social work such as the ASASWEI provides a platform for social work educators to speak out on matters of concern in social work. ASASWEI also

strengthens regional collaborations with social work training institutions through the Association for Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) and internationally through the International Association for Schools of Social Work (IASSW) as earlier stipulated.

It is, however, important that national and regional bodies such as ASASWEI and ASSWA, join efforts in developing relevant social work curricula inherent to the continent, but also relevant for international social work. Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo (2008) emphasise that being relevant and context specific, does not mean that social work students in Africa should not, and do not, want to be trained for international social work practice, as their students in Botswana demanded in a shared curriculum development exercise.

Strategies to address a shortage of social workers, such as scholarships for social work students, must be well-planned, not only for the purposes of increasing the number of social workers, but ensure quality trained social workers that will conduct themselves professionally and uphold the core values of social work.

Social workers should adopt a life-long learning strategy to keep abreast of contemporary issues relevant in social work. South Africa has a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy which requires that social workers acquire 20 CPD points every year in order to renew their annual registration (Lombard, Pruis, Grobbelaar and Mhlanga, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Developmental social work requires a connectedness with the local, national and international environment. Internationalisation of social work education builds on understanding the core values of social work and the social issues relevant to social work within the local, national, regional and global contexts. The BSW qualification in South Africa was developed to prepare students to become social workers who will be able to "act as advocates and watch-dogs for the poorest and most marginalised members of South African society; to help people identify the impact of social and economic oppression and exclusion; and to engage people in social action to alter socio-economic structures" (Lombard, 2003: iv). However, there are, as indicated in this paper, embedded challenges in achieving this goal, which are inter-connected and challenges for social work in Africa and internationally. These challenges need to be addressed on national, regional and global levels to promote international social work education and practice.

While most social work education institutions in South Africa have international exchange and collaborative programmes for both staff and students, there is huge scope and a role for South African training institutions to further shape international social work education and practice. ASASWEI can play an important role in promoting the internationalisation of social work education in better preparing South African social work students to work in diverse contexts, and, in turn, host social work students in South Africa, allowing them to learn from the rich and diverse context of the people and country. Active engagement in the development of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development will strengthen ASASWEI's efforts in keeping social work education and practice locally relevant and internationally informed, and in ensuring that social work is recognised as an important role player in social development across continents.

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