

## Special Lecture in Niigata

### Social Work Education in the United States: Factors that Influence the Educational Preparation of Future Practitioners

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The purpose of coming together at this, the 33rd Annual Meeting of Social Work Education in Japan, as it is in the United States at regional and local meetings of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), is to re-examine our common purpose with fresh perspectives and through perspectives other than our own. As social work educators, we find ourselves looking for new and different ways to respond to changing situations, while maintaining the values and integrity that characterize our profession.

Social work education in the United States is offered at the baccalaureate, master's and doctoral levels in accredited colleges and universities. Baccalaureate programs prepare students for generalist social work practice, and master's programs prepare students for advanced social work practice in an area of concentration. Both the baccalaureate and master's levels provide a professional foundation curriculum that is the common body of knowledge, values and skills for the profession and that is transferable among settings, populations groups and problem areas. Baccalaureate programs must include a liberal arts perspective and the professional foundation content to prepare students for direct services with client systems of various sizes and types. Master's programs must include the professional foundation and concentration content for advanced practice. Professional social work education at the master's level requires the equivalent of two academic years of full-time study. Admission to a master's program in social work

does not require the completion of a baccalaureate degree in social work. The purpose of professional social work education at the baccalaureate and master's levels is to enable students to integrate knowledge, values and skills of the profession into competent practice.

#### **The Impact of Change**

Today in the United States, social workers are practicing in a globalized economy, with populations whose demographics are shifting in meaningful ways, and within a political atmosphere of downsizing, devolution, deprofessionalization, and privatization. The election results of 1996 and 2002 and the current legislative and military agendas that dominate the news, remind us that we are living in a period of change. In order to best educate students for real world practice, we are obligated to understand the effects of the political culture on our profession and on those people and communities that social workers serve. I will put this theme of change in context, by touching first on three Ds—deficits, devolution, and deprofessionalization—and then look at what we can do in response, for the future.

We feel budget strains in our own institutions, at home with our families, and in the lives of our students and clients. Demands for efficiency and for cost cutting affect social work in the labor market, with increasing challenges to professional control coming from the corporate and politically conservative sectors.

In the latter part of the 1990s, social work along with other professions had our clinical

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judgment and recognized competence usurped by outsiders. Managed care companies and other insurance corporations make judgments about professional medical, mental health, and behavioral health practice. These are removed from the clinical situation and do not always possess the appropriate professional specialization or credentials to evaluate competency. In the name of “cross training” and “management prerogatives,” decisions about access to care and who provides it appear to be guided primarily by the “bottom line.”

Downsizing and government deregulation accompany challenges to professional authority at all levels, as the United States has moved far to the “right” politically, ideologically, and economically. This is also a time of continuing devolution — the transfer of responsibility from the federal to state and local government. It is a period where government has abdicated responsibility to meet human need by limiting resources and entitlements and by lowering expectations about what government can and should provide its citizens. Accompanying this is the move to privatization, charity, and volunteerism touted by social and political conservatives as appropriate venues through which to meet human need.

“Compassionate conservatism,” the term used by President Bush as an approach to government, is manifested in privatization, downsizing, and deregulation in the human services. It places greater responsibility on individuals, families, civic efforts, and religious institutions to do more, often without the necessary resources, supports, and competent personnel. Compassionate conservatism is reinforced by the call for charity and voluntarism as answers to social ills. Yet this call assumes in its philosophy that it takes only a caring community to solve the social ills of the country. Juxtapose this with a downsized Federal budget for many domestic discretionary programs, and one finds the implication that “anyone with a good heart can do it.” This places the

onus on those clients and families already struggling, and diminishes the role of professionally educated social workers and other qualified personnel to help others make informed choices concerning their welfare.

As social work educators we are called, then, to prepare future practitioners to respond to the very real conditions of shrinking budgets and increased competition for resources. In partnerships with practitioners, we are called to change the very context in which we practice and teach. There are three areas in which to begin this work for the future: strengths, advocacy, and partnerships.

We must draw from our profession's strengths — the Power of Social Work, and the National Association of Social Workers encourages us. These strengths lie in the diversity of our practice; our commitment to social and economic justice and working with underserved populations; our commitment to self-evaluation and research; and our adherence to a strong code of ethics. As educators, we need to analyze these trends in social policy courses; to develop field placements in new and alternative settings; to conduct research and evaluation to demonstrate the strengths and limitations of existing and proposed programs; and to advocate for humane and effective policies, especially for socially and economically oppressed communities.

Social work educators and practitioners need to analyze these forces in policy courses, and to respond by making their presence felt in state and local government buildings, in the op/ed pages of local papers, and in public forums. We need to develop case studies and alternative models for the classroom and field that address the complex scenarios that blur the distinction among public, nonprofit, for-profit, and faith-based responses to social needs and social problems.

We exercise our strengths — we demonstrate the Power of Social Work — in advocacy for our clients, for our students, and, now more than

ever, we must do so for our profession. As social work educators, we are expected to be leaders.

We set examples for our colleagues and students first by being engaged and second by getting them to engage. During last year's opening plenary session of the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Bob Schneider, founder of the advocacy group Influencing State Policy, led the audience in an apt refrain, "Policy affects practice, practice affects policy." We must continue to take this to heart by showing others that the continuum of social work practice lies in our engagement with the forces that affect our clients and that affect ourselves. This begins with strengthening students' ability to think critically, to be able to gather information from a range sources and to evaluate it with sharp judgment. It continues throughout their education by interaction with an engaged faculty and challenging experiences in their field placements.

Calls such as this are challenging to our profession, but social workers cannot effect change alone. We must do so by joining forces, both within our own ranks, with other professionals, and with members of the public we serve. Given the three Ds — deficits, devolution, and deprofessionalization — it is clear that new models for gaining financial, institutional, and community support are needed. We cannot respond to shrinking budgets by seeing ourselves in a competition for resources — whether between disciplines or within our own discipline.

In our educational communities we need to strengthen our links to community agencies, to business, to government, and to the public. With these links we foster economic and social strength and improve the educational opportunities for students. But we can only do this if we demonstrate for them the value of the profession, the Power of Social Work. How do we do this? In social work education, we articulate the outcomes of student learning. There is a history about assessment of learning outcomes in Ameri-

can social work education that may be of interest to you.

### **Assessment in Social Work Education**

In 1919, the Association of Training Schools for Professional Social Work was formed with seventeen charter members to establish professional standards for social work education. In 1932, the Association adopted accrediting procedures and a curriculum policy to guide the development of graduate programs in social work. This curriculum policy outlined four basic subject areas. It wasn't until 1944 that the four areas were expanded to eight (public welfare, social casework, social group work, community organization, medical information, social research, psychiatry and social welfare administration). In the early years, social work education did not focus efforts on a systematic examination of the outcomes of educational experiences for students.

In 1952, the Council of Social Work Education was recognized by the National Commission on Accreditation and the United States Office of Education as the duly-represented accrediting body for graduate social work education. CSWE as part of the accreditation process, developed a Curriculum Policy Statement that required the curriculum to be constructed in such a way as to permit an integrated course of study with a balance of subject matter and progression in learning for all students. This two-and-a-half page curriculum policy mandated the social work curriculum areas of social services, human growth and behavior, social work practice and field courses. It did not address educational objectives or evaluation of student outcomes.

Ten years later, the 1962 Official Statement of Curriculum Policy for the Master's Degree Program in Graduate Schools of Social Work required the curriculum to be developed as a unified whole with the major components of social welfare policy and services, human behavior in the social environment, and methods of social work practice. The components described the

broad areas to be covered in class and field instruction. Also included in this curriculum policy statement were mandates related to program evaluation and student assessment. In the Introduction, it stated, "Each school is also expected to establish procedures for self-study and continuing evaluation of the effectiveness of its educational program." This curriculum policy statement served as the primary introduction to the expectation for the development of program goals, educational objectives and the establishment of procedures for evaluation of the educational program. The 1969 Curriculum Policy For The Master's Degree Program in Graduate Schools of Social Work reiterated these expectations.

The 1982 Curriculum Policy for the Master's Degree and Baccalaureate Degree Programs In Social Work Education articulated the structure of social work education. Corresponding accreditation standards required that programs assess outcomes of the total educational program and that data be submitted related to the percentage of students completing the program, class and field performance records and graduate employment performance data. As part of the assessment process, programs were required to provide data, such as the results of licensure examinations, attitudinal studies of graduates, and alumni achievements in professional associations.

In 1992, separate Curriculum Policy Statements for baccalaureate and for master's social work degree programs were developed. These articulated twelve educational outcomes for baccalaureate graduates and fourteen educational outcomes for master's graduates. The 1994 Commission on Accreditation Evaluative Standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs were derived from and are consistent with the 1992 Curriculum Policy Statement. These set the stage for assessment activities in social work education today. Two significant expectations follow:

The program must specify the outcome measures and measurement procedures that are to be used systematically in evaluating the program, and that will enable it to determine its success in achieving its desired objectives.

The program must show evidence that it engages in ongoing, systematic self-study based on evaluation of its total program, and show evidence that the results of evaluation affect program planning and curriculum design.

The by-laws of the Council on Social Work Education requires the members of the Commission on Educational Policy to "prepare at periodic intervals not to exceed seven years, a statement of social work curriculum policy to encourage excellence in educational programs and to be used by the Commission on Accreditation in formulating and revising accreditation standards".

Representatives from the Commission on Accreditation and the Commission on Educational Policy worked together from 1998-2000 in the revision process. The new document, the Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), integrate the two presents a stronger focus on the outcomes-based approach and the program's continuous improvement. It states:

The program has an assessment plan and procedures for evaluating the achievement of each program objective. The plan specifies the measurement procedures and method(s) used to evaluate achievement of each program objective. The program reports an analysis of its assessment data for each program objective and links this analysis to program goals. The program shows evidence that the analysis of its assessment data is used continuously to improve the program.

Accreditation is a challenge and an opportunity for social work educators, deans, and directors, presidents, vice presidents, and provosts. Accreditation has been known to drive up costs, to interfere with institutional autonomy, to stifle innovation, and to be time consuming. The implementation of the new Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) will provide an opportunity for social work education to focus on assessment of program outcomes and student learning. The new EPAS has the potential to make the accreditation self-study process less time consuming and more fitted to the expectations of the regional accrediting agencies and the Commission on Higher Education Accreditation.

### **Responding to Demographics**

Another factor that influences the preparation of practitioners is demographics. The Administration on Aging of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicates that the number of adults older than 65 will top 70 million by 2030, and an unprecedented number of those will be 85 and older. Social workers already are encountering more older adults and their family members than in the past, particularly in settings not associated with so-called "old age," such as health, mental health, and even child welfare. For example, there are more than 4 million grandparents raising grandchildren today. We know, too, that older adults and their families present a wide range of unique practice needs and use a disproportionately high level of health, mental health, and social services. Yet, in the United States, not enough BSW and MSW students have been provided the basic competencies to meet the needs of a growing aging population. Social work as a profession must be ready with competent practitioners for the growing aging population.

Moreover, aging demographics also provide insights into social and political conditions. Gender and ethnicity differentially affect the aging experience. As a result of divorce and widow-

hood, women are more likely to live alone and to be poor. People of color are likely to have poorer health status, be socially isolated, and have fewer resources as they age. Such information is relevant not only for which areas we should prepare our students to practice in, but also it is useful throughout the many places in the curriculum where social justice is a focus.

One trend in social work education that aims to both influence and respond to this future practice scenario is the influx of foundation funds from the John A. Hartford Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundations. Funding for field practicum partnerships, faculty development institutes, faculty and doctoral student scholars, curriculum enrichment initiatives and endowed student scholarships are aimed to prepare future social work practitioners to respond to the needs of an aging population. The challenge to social work education is to magnify the opportunities provided by foundations. Social work education has access to the means for change.

A representative from the Rand Corporation recently noted that the maturing age distribution "enlarges national health care needs" and creates two-generation geriatric families. There is a rapid growth in the older population and the rapid shrinking of the younger generation.

### **Looking Across Borders to Combat Racism**

Cutting across the demographics of aging, and no less important, are the demographics of race and ethnicity that are affecting the United States and the world. People of Latino/Hispanic origin are now the largest ethnic group in the United States, and it is predicted that by 2050 people of color, including African Americans, will comprise approximately 50% of the population in the United States. The number of immigrants coming to the United States continues to increase, and the percentage of newly arrived populations especially from Latin American and Caribbean coun-

tries and from Asia has grown significantly in the last decade of the 20th century.

We find, too, in our country ambivalence about the culture and social status of many immigrant groups, and in some quarters, an overtly anti-immigrant sentiment goes unabated. The situation grows worse as the government's war on terror imposes stricter regulations on immigration and cross-border activities, particularly those with populations of color.

While there are recognizable trends that applaud the virtues of diversity and pluralism, and the contributions of immigrants individually and collectively, many public policies and practices point in the other direction. When the government cuts back or restricts resources to people in need because of ideology, economics, or place of origin, new arrivals in need of assistance and support are disproportionately hurt. Additionally, during this period of imposed scarce resources for human services, there is a tendency toward increased ethnocentrism and escalating inter-minority conflicts.

### **International Perspective**

We need to encourage growth to another dimension of our teaching and practice as a way to attend to the important issue of racism and diversity: increasing social work's international perspective. The connection between social work education in the United States and abroad has largely focused attention on the salience of international issues for a domestic social work agenda. But we now need to focus our students—and ourselves—to realize that international issues intersect domestically and do not happen in separate places. We can do this by continuing to demonstrate to our students the connection between social work practice and its larger political context. The past decade brought “the end of welfare as we know it,” and now we find that an increasingly aggressive U.S. foreign policy threatens to offset the delicate balance of peace

across nations. Without knowledge of history, of politics, without the ability to think critically and integrate information from multiple sources and multiple disciplines, our students will miss the bigger picture when they practice in their local communities. Integrating an international perspective becomes an essential way of broadening our students' knowledge and challenging them to be agents of change.

### **Licensing and the Labor Market**

Social work licensing standards vary from state to state. Each state regulatory board has different standards in regard to education, years of practice, and levels of licensing. Social work educators and practitioners appear to have different positions on each of these requirements and standards. This contributes to confusion and may suggest that the social work profession is unorganized. This perception provides an opportunity for Council on Social Work Education and the National Association of Social Workers to come together to identify common standards for the practice of social work. Doing this will strengthen the curriculum of the future.

A recent report, “The Labor Market for Social Workers: A First Look,” notes that the data which do exist do not reflect a consensus among social work experts and labor market experts, regarding who should be considered a “social worker.” The report recommended that a consensus be sought on the definition of social worker for government data collection purposes. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 845,000 individuals described themselves as “social workers” in the year 1999. The NASW membership data for 1995 indicated 155,000 individuals identified themselves as members of the profession. About 30% of social workers in the U.S. Census Bureau data had less than a bachelor's degree, and 10% did not receive any college-level instruction. The labor market for social workers report suggests that the non-degreed

social worker in the current population survey might be pulling down average wages over time -- wages for social workers.

### **Readiness for the Future**

In the United States, social work education has grown steadily. In fall 1995, there were 400 accredited baccalaureate programs and 117 accredited master's programs. At that time also, 38 baccalaureate programs and 12 master programs were in candidacy status. By 2002, there were 66 doctoral programs, 430 accredited baccalaureate programs and 146 accredited master's programs with an additional 22 baccalaureate and 25 master's programs in candidacy. The capacity to prepare practitioners for the future has increased. At the same time, there has been an overall decline in the total admissions applications to social work programs. Challenges remain related to the quality and distribution of social work programs at all levels, and the articulation among them. The question, "Is there a continuum in social work education?" is one that remains to be answered. Other questions include, "Is there a sufficient number of doctoral graduates to fill the projected vacancies in social work education?" and "What is the impact of declining admissions applications on the quality of students accepted into social work education programs?"

Several institutional and professional activities took place during the latter part of the 1990's that positioned social work educators to prepare future practitioners. These include the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR), the ANSWER coalition, Influencing State Policy, and CSWE's Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS).

The Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR) continued initiatives to connect policy, practice, and education through the advancement of social work research. IASWR played an important role in building the visibility of the profession in the national scien-

tific community. Social workers are underrepresented as federally funded researchers. It is a key substantive resource to the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER) on the legislative effort to create a National Center for Social Work Research. It has been a catalyst for creating and implementing strategies that promote evidence-based practices; and, a technical resources to social work educators providing guidance on funding proposals and on technical strategies to enhance the research infrastructure. There is a need for social workers to produce more useable practice-oriented research and to disseminate it rapidly for immediate use by practitioners and policy-makers.

The Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER) coalition was created in 1995 by CSWE, NASW, along with the National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD), the Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD), and Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education (GADE). The mission of ANSWER is to increase legislative and executive branch advocacy on behalf of social work education, training, and research. In addition to its focus on creating a National Center for Social Work Research, it has worked with the executive branch, in particular, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research (OBSSR). There, the goal is to increase visibility for social workers as researchers, and to influence the type of research protocols to include social work themes and perspective.

In 1997, with the advent of government devolution, NADD and CSWE provided seed funding for a national network of social work educators known as Influencing State Policy (ISP). ISP's mission is to assist faculty and students in learning to influence effectively the formation, implementation, and evaluation of state-level policy and legislation. As of 2002 there were 347 undergraduate programs and 135 graduate programs

that have ISP liaisons. Accomplishments include the creation of a website, the production of two videos, sponsorship of the Annual Influencing State Policy Contest, the publications of the Influence newsletter, and 3,596 student visits to state legislatures.

The major initiatives affecting the future of social work in the United States began with the Commission on Educational Policy review of the 1992 Curriculum Policy Statement. These set the tone for development of revised accreditation standards for the new millennium. This was supported by the CSWE 21st Century Strategic Planning Process, initiated in 1997, which called for streamlining and simplifying the accreditation process.

EPAS is a consensus document that had three drafts. It is the result and product of the review of hundreds of comments from individuals, program faculty, and constituent groups. The development of the EPAS was very controversial and reflective of the fragmentation in social work education, with differing expectations expressed by several constituencies: schools of social work who have a major research agenda, faith-based social work education programs, and baccalaureate and graduate educators. The credentials of a social work program's chief executive officer, the number of years of practice experience, the breadth and depth of research content, and the inclusion of content on sexual orientation in the curricula, are lingering controversies that challenge the solidarity of social work education in the future.

### **Social Work Education and the Future**

For social work education to survive and to succeed in the future, every BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. program must turn itself into a change agent. Tomorrow's society will be very different from that of today, and it will probably have little resemblance to the society predicted by today's best-selling futurists. The central feature of the

future, as it is our heritage, will be new institutions and new theories, new ideologies and new problems. The challenges social work educators face today focus on the need for more knowledge and more content in the curriculum. Social work educators saturate syllabi with readings, and students juggle and struggle to balance readings and assignments with demands of daily living. This will continue in the future. Knowledge changes; social work education's role is to prepare social work practitioners who will be prepared for today's practice realities and who will know how to respond to the unknown practice demands for tomorrow. Social work education for the future will prepare students as practitioners, scholars, and leaders with the essential tools and the disposition to be lifelong learners. Education will develop within students the disposition of critical thinking and the ability to resolve problems, particularly when there is no prior guide for solution. Students, as practitioners of the future, will then have the experience to shape the future of social work practice. Social work educators in the future have the opportunities to contribute to this learning.

To begin to craft the future of social work education, leaders will recognize that faculty members are the most valuable resources and that faculty development programs targeted to the multiple roles of faculty members is key to vitality of social work education. The future requires a focus on leadership development, knowledge about organizational structure in higher education, and knowledge and skills about the change process in higher education. The future also requires learning about the world and about the interrelationships of national, international, and global issues. This is indispensable for the knowledge and skill development of tomorrow's social work practitioners.

The issues that the U.S. social work educators are grappling with are not unique to America. Many social work professional and educational

organizations abroad are addressing similar issues. We are all trying to forecast the future and to be proactive in shaping social work education for changing times.

Social workers come together at meetings such as this to re-examine our common purpose and to find more inspiration to carry home to our students and our practice colleagues. This is how we make the future happen.

An earlier version of this presentation appears in: Mizrahi, T. & Baskind F. (2003). Social work education and the future. In R.A. English(Ed.-in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of social work*(19<sup>th</sup> ed., 2003 Supplement, pp.137-150). Washington, DC: NASW Press.